

# Glorify God With Your Gift

I believe the present era holds great opportunity for the daughters of America. But in order to lay hold of this opportunity and obtain success in this wonderful battle of life, there is one thing you must do: Keep to your specialty, to the doing of the thing that you accomplish with the most satisfaction to yourself and the most benefit to those about you.

Keep to this, whether it be raising turnips or tunes; painting screens or battle-pieces; studying political economy or domestic receipts; for, as we read in a great author who has a genius for common sense: "There is not one thing that men ought to do, there is not one thing that ought to be done, which a women ought not to be encouraged to do, if she has the capacity for doing it. For wherever there is a gift, there is a prophecy pointing to its use, and a silent command of God to use it."

Such utterances as these are assertions of the "natural and inalienable rights" of the individual as such. They are deductions of the Christian philosophy that regards you and me, first and chiefly, as human beings, and makes the greatest possible account of personal identity.

In all the ages there have been minds that saw this truth. The intellects who towered like alpine peaks above the mass of men were the first to reflect its blessed light. Two thousand years ago, the Roman poet Juvenal made the heroine of a famous satire say to the hero: "I like our Latin word for man, which equally includes your sex and mine. For you should not forget that, in all things highest, best and most enduring in our natures, I am as much a man as you are."

The sun of truth looms high above the far horizon in our day, and even the plains of human thought and purpose are glowing

with the light of this new inspiration. Terms such as "personal value" and "personal development" will be the noontide watchwords "when the race out of childhood has grown." Only yesterday I heard a fashionable butterfly, in the surroundings of a luxurious home, say with sudden enthusiasm: "Of one thing I am sure; every woman who lives is bound to find out what is the very best thing she can do with her powers, and then she's bound to do it."

In creating each of us with some peculiar talent, God has given us each "a call" to some peculiar work. Indeed, the time is almost here when the only call that will be recognized as valid, in any field, must involve in him who thinks he hears it both adaptation and success.

Each one of us is a marvelous bundle of aptitudes and capacities. But just as I prefer the active to the passive voice, I prefer to put the aptitudes first in my present inventory.

Besides, the world has harangued us women on our capacities from the beginning, and it is really refreshing to take the dilemma of our destiny by the other horn at last! Civilization (by which I mean Christianity's effect on the brains and hands of humanity) wonderfully develops and differentiates our powers.

Among the Modocs Indians, there are only four specialties—two for the squaws and two for the braves. The last hunt and fight; the first do the drudgery and bring up the papooses.

Among the Parisians, on the contrary, the division of labor is almost infinite, so that the hand perfectly skilled in the most minute industry (such as molding the shoestrings of a porcelain statuette) needs no other resource to gain a comfortable livelihood.

Among the Modocs, skins are about the only article of commerce. Among the Parisians, evolution has gone so far in

the direction of separating employments formerly blended that you cannot buy cream and milk in the same shop.

By some unaccountable perversion of good sense, the specialties of human beings who are women have been strangely circumscribed. But they were there all the same, and now, under the genial sun of a more enlightened era, they are coming airily forth, like singing birds after a thunderstorm, and wonderfully they help some of us to solve the toughest of all problems: What is life for?

Let us see. Lift the cover of your sewing basket: There are thimble, scissors, spools of thread and other tools needed by a seamstress, but minus the needle they have no explanation and no efficiency. Unlock your writing desk: What are paper, ink and sealing wax without the pen? They are nothing but waste material and toys.

So it is with you and me. We have no explanation that is adequate; we have no place in the workbox and portfolio of today; no place in the great humming hive of the land we live in, save as some predominating aptitude in each of us explains why we are here, and in what way we are to swell the inspiring song of voluntary toil and beneficent success.

Suppose that here and now, you proceed to take an "inventory of stock," if you have not been thoughtful enough to do that already. Made up as you are, what is your forte, your "specialty," your "best hold," as men phrase it? Be sure of one thing at the outset: The great Artificer, in putting together your individual nature, did not forget His crowning gift, any more than He forgets to add its own peculiar fragrance to the rose or its own song to the lark.

It may not lie upon the surface, this choicest of your treasures; diamonds seldom do. Miners remove a great deal of mere dust before the sparkling jewel they are seeking gladdens the eye.

Genius has been often and variously defined. I would call it an intuition of one's own best gift. Rosa Bonheur, the French painter, knew hers; American actress Charlotte Cushman recognized hers; British writer George Eliot was not greatly at a loss concerning hers.

As for us of less emphatic individuality, sometimes we wait until a friend's hand leads us up before the mirror of our potential self. Sometimes we see it reflected in another's success (as the eaglet, among the flock of geese, first learned that he could fly, when he recognized a mate in the heaven-soaring eagle, whose shadow frightened all the geese away). Sometimes we come upon our heritage unwittingly, but always it is there, be sure of that, and "let no man take thy crown."

As iron filings fall into line around a magnet, so make your opportunities cluster close about your special gift. In a land as generous as ours, this can be done by every woman who reads these lines. A sharpened perception of their own possibilities is far more needed by our girls than better means for education.

But how was it in the past? If there is one reflection that grieves me as no other can, it is this thought of God's endowment bestowed upon each one of us, so that we might in some special manner gladden and bless the world by bestowing upon it our best; the thought of His patience all through the years as He has gone on hewing out the myriad souls of a wayward race, that they might be lively stones in the temple of use and of achievement; and side by side with this the thought of our individual blindness, our failure to discern the riches of brain, heart and hand with which we were endowed.

But most of all, I think about the gentle women who have lived and died and made no sign of their best gifts, but whose achievements of voice and pen, of brush and chisel, of noble

statesmanship and great-hearted philanthropy might have blessed and soothed our race through these 6,000 years.

There is a stern old gentleman of my acquaintance who, if he had heard what I have just said, would have stated his objection in this fashion: "That's all folderol, my friend; a mere rhetorical flourish. If women could have done all this, why didn't they, pray tell?"

"If it's in it's in, and will come out, but what's wanting can't be numbered."

He would then proceed to ask me, with some asperity, if I thought any of my "gifted" women could have invented a steam engine. Whereupon I would say to him what I now say to you, "Most assuredly I think so; why not?"

And I would ask, in turn, if my old friend had studied history with reference to the principle that, as a rule, human beings do not rise above the standard implied in society's general estimate of the class to which they belong. Take the nations of Eastern Europe and Western Asia—"civilized" nations, too, be it remembered; study the mechanic of Jerusalem, the merchant of Damascus and Ispahan; in what particular are the tools of the one or the facilities of commerce familiar to the others superior to those of a thousand years ago?

Surely, as far as Oriental inventions are concerned, they have changed as little as the methods of the bee or the wing-stroke of the swallow. We hear no more of man's inventiveness in those countries than of woman's.

Why should we, indeed, when we remember that both are alike untaught in the arts and sciences, which form the basis of mechanical invention? They are inspired by no intellectual movement, no demand, no "modern spirit."

It is not "in the air" that men shall be fertile of brain and skilled of hand as inventors there, any more than it is here

that women shall be, and where both knowledge and incentive are not present, achievement is evermore a minus quantity. None but a heaven-sent genius, stimulated by a love of science, prepared by special education and inspired by the prestige of belonging to the dominant sex, ever yet carved types, tamed lightning or imprisoned steam.

Besides, in ages past, if some brave soul, man or woman, conscious of splendid powers, strove to bless the world by his or her free exercise, what dangers were involved! Was it Joan of Arc? The fagot soon became her portion. Galileo? On came the rack.

Christopher Columbus? The long disdain of courtiers and jealousy of ambitious coadjutors followed him. Robert Fulton? He faced the sarcasm of the learned and the merriment of the boors.

Even for the most adventurous inventor of today (as the aeronaut experimenters), what have we but bad puns and insipid conundrums—until he wins—and then ready caps tossed high in air and fame's loud trumpet at his ear—when death's cold finger has closed it up forever.

Times are changing, though. The world grows slowly better and more brotherly. The day is near when women will lack no high incentive to the best results in every branch of intellectual endeavor and skilled workmanship.

Not a week passes without some favorable verdict as to woman's inventive power coming from the Patent Office; I believe we shall receive similar validation from other high offices as godly women uncover their gifts and step out to use them for God's glory.

Read a companion devotional.

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**Frances Willard** (1839-1898) was a well-known lecturer, writer and educator. She became president of the National Woman's Christian Temperance Union in 1879.

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## When God's Love Seems Impossible

For a long time, I struggled to win God's **approval** through human **determination** and **achievement**. But the yoke of **religion** never permitted me the unattainable luxury of **acceptance**.

From the time I was a little girl, I wanted to **love** God, but I just didn't think I could love Him enough. Imagine my relief when I began to understand that God put the desire in me to love Him and that He would make it **possible** for me to fulfill it.

In commenting on the greatest commandment—to love God with every part of our beings (Matt. 22:37)—Matthew Henry wrote, "All obedience begins in the affections, and nothing in religion is done right, that is not done there first. ... Man is a creature cut out for love."

It's possible to work for God and not love Him. But it is foolish to settle for demanding religious observances that are void of passion and eternal value.

Loving God fulfills our primary need for intimacy. If we don't devote ourselves to Him, we are apt to go astray.

I've had more than one married person tell me that although having a devoted spouse is a blessing, it is not a substitute

for the intimacy we are designed to enjoy in God's presence alone. Most of us know this already, but either out of habit or in response to what we perceive as a desperate need, we try to fill this God-given desire for intimacy through unhealthy means that eventually will imprison us.

Why do we shy away from intimately knowing our heavenly Bridegroom? In *The Pursuit of God*, A.W. Tozer says that one major hindrance in our face-to-face experience with Jesus is the veil that continues to cover our hearts.

This veil is comprised of what he terms the "self sins": "self-righteousness, self-pity, self-confidence, self-sufficiency, self-admiration [and] self-love," among others. They are hard to unseat due to the fact that they are so tightly interwoven into our nature and upheld by our culture.

Rather than a burdensome obligation, the command to love God is, in essence, the pronouncement of a liberating privilege, for Scriptural commands can only be obeyed by the Spirit of God in us. Anna Rountree says, "Only God can love God."

How freeing that knowledge is. Henry put it this way: "If [love] be the fulfilling of the law, surely the yoke of the command is very easy. Love is the rest and satisfaction of the soul; if we walk in this good old way, we shall find rest."

If we've placed other things in the space God formed within us for Himself, these will obstruct our view of Him and leave us empty and enslaved. But giving first place to our First Love and offering to Him what He desires most will bring liberty and the fulfillment of our deepest needs for this life and the one to come.

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# What Am I Doing Wrong?

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## Improve Your Health With Laughter

*Negative emotions can affect your physical well-being. But keeping a smile on your face contributes to emotional and physical health.*

Two of the greatest healing forces in the world are available to you at this very moment. They are the healing power of laughter and the restorative strength of joy. A merry heart is your greatest weapon against deadly emotions.

The Bible affirms the healing power of joy when it says, “A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a broken spirit saps a person’s strength” (Prov. 17:22, NLT). This scriptural truth suggests that laughter holds as much healing power as medicine. Is it any wonder that those who laugh easily often live longer than those who do not?

When you laugh, powerful endorphins, which act much the same way as morphine, are released in the brain. Endorphins trigger a feeling of well-being throughout your entire body. So you see, a merry heart really does work like medicine!

An enormous amount of research supports this fact. If a person is happy and at peace with himself and his surroundings, he will have significantly fewer serious illnesses than the

unhappy person.

In the Department of Behavioral Medicine of the UCLA Medical School, Norman Cousins conducted extensive research into the physical benefits of happiness. He established the Humor Research Task Force that coordinated worldwide clinical research on humor. Cousin's body of research proved conclusively that laughter, happiness and joy are perfect antidotes for stress.

Long ago Isaiah wrote, "You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in You, whose thoughts are fixed on You" (Is. 26:3).

A noted doctor once said that the diaphragm, thorax, abdomen, heart, lungs—and even the liver—are given a massage during a hearty laugh. That's a good internal workout!

Instead of watching films or television dramas that drain and depress your spirit, choose something that can put a smile on your face and feed your healthy emotions.

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**Don Colbert, M.D.**, *is a family physician and nutrition expert. His latest book is I Can Do This Diet (Siloam Press).*

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## **How to Bear the Fruit of the Spirit**

Jesus taught His disciples that fruitfulness was His purpose for them. He told them, "'You did not choose Me, but I chose you, and appointed you, that you should go and bear fruit, and that your fruit should remain'" (John 15:16, NASB). He also taught them that they could be fruitful only by learning to

abide in Him.

The principle of abiding must be clearly understood so we avoid trying to bear fruit in our own strength. The Scriptures teach that these true Christian virtues are the fruit of the Spirit, not the fruit of human effort.

Many people today are attempting to produce the fruit of the Spirit through natural efforts and character-building. They exercise their wills to produce character through philosophy, education, ethics, anthropology, mental sciences or controlled environment. The results achieved from this human effort, though they may involve temporal good, are not the eternal fruitfulness that is produced by the work of the Holy Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit is the character of Christ produced by the Spirit of Christ in the believer's life. The more completely one is filled with the Holy Spirit, the greater will be the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit in his life and work.

Only when a believer is full of the Holy Spirit, continually yielding to Him, can he exhibit the full fruition of Christian virtues. When Christ is formed in the believer through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, true Christlike character will be as natural a result as pears growing on a pear tree. It follows then that if one who professes to be a Christian is devoid of fruit, he obviously does not have the Spirit of Christ. The fruit of the Spirit is produced automatically when we are yielded to the Holy Spirit and are walking in obedience to Him.

When Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit in writing to the Galatians, he is restating the Sermon on the Mount. This description is the ideal Christian life presented in concentrated expression.

Paul's love chapter to the Corinthians (1 Corinthians 13) is the summary of his list of the fruit of the Spirit. He is

teaching the very same principle of Christian life when he writes to the Philippians: "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things" (Phil. 4:8). Any concept of Christianity that does not have as its basis the character of the fruit of the Spirit is a false teaching of Christianity.

The Scriptures clearly teach that natural man cannot hope to develop godly character without the work of the Holy Spirit in his life. Paul describes the striking contrast between the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit:

"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you just as I have forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God" (Gal. 5:19-21).

Spirit-filled men and women can be distinguished by their fruit in the same way that a carnal person can be identified by fleshly works. If we are abiding in Christ, the fruit of the Spirit will be manifest in our lives; it cannot be hidden. So, also, are the works of the flesh manifest in one who is not abiding in Christ.

A carnal person is one who is not governed by the indwelling Spirit of God. This egocentric, self-centered life manifests the works of the flesh, while a Christ-centered life manifests the fruit of the Spirit.

The great struggle within each believer is the struggle between self and Christ. If self wins, it becomes the central force of life, causing a person to be completely self-centered. Every descriptive characteristic of a self-centered

person starts with the word “self”: selfish, self-pitying, self-glorying, perhaps even self-hating. The list of “self” words seems unending.

If Christ wins this battle against our self-life, He becomes the center of our personalities, and we become Christ-centered. The happy consequence of a Christ-centered life is the manifestation of the fruit of the Spirit.

The principle of fruit-bearing is a “life-principle.” Life develops from a life-source; it cannot be manufactured. Fruit is not made; it grows as the requirements of the life-principle are met. In contrast, the works of the flesh are described in the Scriptures as a negative result of human effort without the Holy Spirit.

The Scriptures clearly teach the life-principle involved in bearing fruit. The flesh can produce nothing but evil works, while the Holy Spirit produces Christ-life fruit. The former requires self-effort and results in death; the latter requires obedience to the Holy Spirit and produces life and peace.

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## **T.D. Jakes: God's Call on a Woman in a Man's World**

It is said that this is a man's world. It is not a man's

world. Men may be occupying many seats of authority, but God is in control.

If God blesses you, do not fear. A blessed woman can survive—even in a man's world. The challenge is to receive what is yours without becoming bitter about the times it was withheld from you.

In Numbers 27 a story is told concerning the daughters of Zelophehad who went to Moses to challenge the fairness of the "good ol' boys" policy that would deny them the right to inherit their father's wealth. Their actions suggested, "We are women, but we are blessed women."

They challenged the system at a time when women were considered second-class citizens. In spite of public opinion, they chose to speak up for their rights, and they got what they fought to attain (see vv. 5-8).

The daughters of Zelophehad were not disrespectful or rude. They went through proper channels, but bless God, they went through.

God is a good Father. It is His will to bless you. Don't worry about who is against you; just keep thinking about who is for you.

The story of the daughters of Zelophehad outlines the first case of gender discrimination mentioned in the Scriptures. And the court of heaven ruled in favor of these women who knew how to go after what their father had in his estate.

Perhaps there are some things your Father has for you. Do not be intimidated. In spite of what you don't have, look at what you do have and keep on walking. By God's grace and power you can receive your inheritance.

As a father, I need to know that I have prepared for my children's today and their tomorrow. I would be angry to think

that although I had left an inheritance for my daughters, they were living in poverty.

God is a better father than I am. Why don't you as a woman of God go after what the Father has willed to you?

If you have been walking around with a drab spirit and a broken heart, I am talking to you.

Don't spend another day wasted in regret, sleeping away your mercy and losing your chance to achieve. Get up and get busy.

You may have to work it out. You may have to push and shove. But life is worth the struggle. Your Father has blessed you with good things!

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## **Find God's Gift for Dealing With Conflict**

*Before Jesus died, He willed us His peace. But we forfeit His gift through strife.*

The Bible tells us that everything the Father has is ours through Jesus (see John 16:15). What does the Father have? He certainly does not have strife. On the contrary, everything He has ministers life to us. His kingdom is one of righteousness, peace and joy. So supernatural peace and joy belong to the believer.

Before He died, Jesus said, "Peace I leave with you; My [own] peace I now give and bequeath to you" (John 14:27, The Amplified Bible). In essence, He was saying, "I am willing you My peace."

God's desire for us is that we live in peace with Him, with ourselves and with our fellowman. He wants us to have peace in the midst of our current circumstances—peace in the morning, at night and all times in between. Peace is our inheritance! And it is a wonderful possession.

But strife is the thief of peace. Even a minor degree of strife will steal some of the peace that is allotted for us. Satan comes to kill, steal and destroy, and he accomplishes his goal, at least in large measure, through strife.

One type of strife he brings is confusion, a form of strife in your mind. A person who is confused argues with himself. His thoughts fly back and forth in conflict with one another. A doubleminded man is not at peace.

Yet the Bible clearly teaches us that peace of mind is our heritage. The devil attempts to steal it by attacking us with worry, anxiety and confusion. The Word shows us the way to maintain it:

"Do not fret or have any anxiety about anything, but in every circumstance and in everything, by prayer and petition (definite requests), with thanksgiving, continue to make your wants known to God. And God's peace [shall be yours, that tranquil state of a soul assured of its salvation through Christ, and so fearing nothing from God and being content with its earthly lot of whatever sort that is, that peace] which transcends all understanding shall garrison and mount guard over your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:6-7).

"You will guard him and keep him in perfect and constant peace whose mind [both its inclination and its character] is stayed on You, because he commits himself to You, leans on You, and

hopes confidently in You" (Is. 26:3).

It is important to realize that peace is your inherited right. Otherwise, the devil may convince you that worry is your obligation when you have problems. Many mothers think they are not good mothers if they don't worry about their children. These Christian women love the Lord, but they haven't received a revelation on the dangers of strife.

Their minds are not peaceful; they are filled with worry, anxiety and turmoil. Upset emotions result. Worry leads to emotional upset. In John 14:27, Jesus advises, "Stop allowing yourselves to be agitated and disturbed."

Strife is not just a problem between people; it's often a problem within a person. What is going on inside you? Is the atmosphere inside peaceful or strifeful?

"But no weapon that is formed against you shall prosper, and every tongue that shall rise against you in judgment you shall show to be in the wrong. This [peace, righteousness, security, triumph over opposition] is the heritage of the servants of the Lord" (Is. 54:17).

Peace is our heritage. It is ours through the "blood line." The blood of Jesus brings it to me. It is mine! I am determined that the devil is not going to steal my inheritance through strife. Learn to recognize strife. Refuse to allow it in your life.

Allow God to reveal the root of your problem. Satan does not want you to know the real problem. He wants you to run around in circles, so to speak, always looking for something and never discovering anything. We do not war with flesh and blood. Many times our problems are not what we think but have their roots in subtle, hidden strife.

In this way Satan deceives people. They spend their lives attempting to deal with the wrong issues. Start confronting

the spirit of strife, and you will see many things begin to fall into place.

Keep strife out of your life; out of your thoughts, words and attitudes; out of your relationships. Be at peace with God, with yourself and with your fellowman. Peace belongs to you. Jesus has already given it to you. Begin to live in peace. Make a decision today: "I am finished with upset and turmoil; peace is mine, and I am going to enjoy it now."

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## 6 Ways That Women Answer God's Call

Prophetic voices around the world are confirming that now is the time to release **women** into **ministry**. We are experiencing a new **move of God** on the earth, and God is raising up women to play a key role. In fact, He is calling and anointing women today as never before. They are part of **His plan** to crush the enemy's head.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God told Satan, who had appeared to Eve in the form of a serpent and deceived her, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will crush your head, and you will strike His heel" (Gen. 3:15, NIV). This is an incredible redemptive promise, foreshadowing the final victory of Jesus (the offspring of the woman) over the devil and his evil cohorts.

But many women lose sight of the fact that **Christ** in them will crush the enemy's head. They shrink back in fear that Satan will bruise their heels. They need to remember: A promise is different from a prophecy. A promise is a sure thing; it will be done. They can rest assured that God's redemptive promise

will be fulfilled.

Women have nothing to fear from Satan, but he has reason to fear them! Why? Because in this “now” season, God is calling them to rise up as “now” women and help usher in the new thing He is doing.

### **“Now” Women Initiate the New Thing**

What does a “now” woman look like? Studying the account of Jesus’ first public miracle gives us a clue. John 2:1-3 says, “On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding. And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to Him, ‘They have no wine’” (NKJV).

Notice Jesus’ response to his mother: “Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come” (v. 4).

Basically, He was saying, “Why are you telling me about the wine? It’s not time for Me to display My glory.” But look at Mary’s reaction: She didn’t pay any attention to Jesus’ comment! Like all “now” women, she knew when it was time for something to happen, and she was prepared to initiate the new thing.

Mary told the attendants, “Whatever He says to you, do it” (v. 5). Here is an example of a woman initiating the new thing. In response to her initiation, Jesus gave instructions to the servants to fill the stone waterpots with water so He could create the needed wine. Many times, women initiate the next move of God on the earth, just as Mary initiated Jesus’ ministry of miracles.

### **“Now” Women Conceive the New Thing**

In Hebrews 11:11, Sarah is recognized as the first woman of faith: “By faith Sarah herself also received strength to

conceive seed, and she bore a child when she was past the age, because she judged Him faithful who had promised." Though she was old, she conceived the new thing God wanted to birth—Isaac, the child of promise. Like Sarah, "now" women conceive the new thing.

Such women are desperately needed in the church! If there is one thing wrong with us right now, it is that we've lost the passion to be able to conceive the new thing God wants to do on the earth.

### **"Now" Women Announce the New Thing**

"Now" women not only initiate and conceive the new thing, they also announce it, as Mary Magdalene announced the resurrection of the Lord to the disciples. The Bible tells us that Jesus chose her—a woman—to appear to first (Mark 16:9).

Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that Jesus was alive. Jesus knew the others were too filled with fear and unbelief to announce His resurrection. In fact, they didn't believe Mary when she made the announcement, but she knew she had seen the Lord. Like Mary, women are about to become the next trumpeters of faith throughout this land.

### **"Now" Women Intervene**

The life of Abigail exemplifies another attribute of "now" women—their ability to circumvent trouble by intervening at the right moment. In 1 Samuel 25 we learn that Abigail was married to Nabal, a businessman in Carmel who was very wealthy. He had a ruling authority in that area, and David, who had been out warring in Nabal's territory, hoped to receive refreshment from his household. Although David approached Nabal with a right spirit, Nabal replied foolishly, refusing to be hospitable to David and his men.

David was upset by Nabal's response because he had been

protecting Nabal's property. He decided to retaliate.

Notice what happened next: Nabal's wife, Abigail, intervened. She "made haste and took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five sheep already dressed, five seahs of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys" (v. 18). In other words, she by-passed her foolish husband. She sent her servants ahead of her but did not say anything to Nabal about her plan (v. 19).

When Abigail saw David she dismounted, bowed her face to the ground and said, "On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be! And please let your maidservant speak in your ears, and hear the words of your maidservant" (v. 24). Then she proceeded to apologize to David and beg him not to take offense.

Abigail positioned herself correctly; she humbled herself correctly; she interceded correctly. And notice the results: David received her intercession. When she told her husband the next morning what she'd done, "his heart died within him, and he became like a stone. Then it happened, after about ten days, that the Lord struck Nabal, and he died" (vv. 37-38). When David heard this news, he proposed to Abigail and took her as his wife (v. 39).

God has placed many "now" women in difficult situations in which they have the opportunity to intervene. When they do, God intervenes on their behalf.

### **"Now" Women Know the Time of Change**

Naomi is another example of a "now" woman—a woman who knew when it was time for change. She had moved to Moab from Bethlehem with her husband. But then she lost him as well as both her sons. Realizing that Bethlehem held the key to her future, she decided to return.

One of her daughters-in-law, Ruth, chose to leave her native

land and go with Naomi. Together they began to rebuild their lives. Ruth went to work gleaning in the fields of a man named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi's husband.

When the harvest ended, Naomi realized that it was again time for change. She felt that Ruth needed a more stable situation. She told Ruth she wanted to secure a future for her and sent her to Boaz, hoping that he would take care of her because she was a relative (Ruth 3:1-2). Naomi seized the opportunity to activate a cultural law of redemption in order to protect her daughter-in-law.

She then gave Ruth several instructions: to wash and anoint herself, to put on her best garment in place of the widow's garb she had been wearing, to wait for the right timing and to lay down at Boaz' feet. These actions required Ruth to fully submit to what God was trying to do.

The result of Naomi's taking action at the right moment and Ruth's obedience was that Boaz got up and blessed Ruth. He also promised he would abide by the law of redemption and care for her if a closer relative would not do his duty.

Do you know what this means for women today? When they do that which God is asking them to do when He is asking them to do it, they will receive a blessing. If they know the time of change and go through the process of cleansing themselves, receiving a new anointing, removing their old garments, moving in at the right moment and submitting themselves to the full purpose of God, they will be blessed.

"Now" women know when it's time for change. If they move to initiate the change at the right moment, they will secure their future. Why is this important? Because if women can discern by the Spirit what God is doing and rise up to pray, His plans will be fulfilled.

**"Now" Women Awake**

Deborah was a woman who woke up to God's purposes. The *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery* states that the general concept of "awakening" captures the notion of either rousing oneself or being aroused in order to take action, as in the call for Deborah to "wake up" (Judg. 5:12, NIV) or "awake" (NKJV). Such a call is usually accompanied by urgency and intensity, as indicated by emphatic repetition: "Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song!" (v. 12; cf. Is. 52:1).

Deborah had been judging Israel for several years before she planned the war against Jabin. But before she could arouse the tribes to go to war, she herself had to rise up with a renewed spirit.

Deborah had characteristics that I see God awakening at this time in women all over the world. She was a prophetess. She was a ruler. She was a warrior. She was a psalmist. And she was a mother of Israel. My encouragement to women is, awake and arise now, and demonstrate the change that God is longing to bring in our day.

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## **A Simpler Christmas**

My children aren't supposed to know there is an oversized American Girl Place shopping bag stuffed with presents stashed away in my bedroom closet. I have a mountain of bargain finds, admired goodies and toys to die for tucked away on a shelf. I found that shopping ahead spreads the financial burden throughout the year and helps me avoid the last-minute holiday

rush.

Sounds like a plan, doesn't it? I thought so, too, until four years ago. Something happened that made me rethink my supposedly brilliant strategy.

It was the night before Christmas, and all through the house, not a creature was stirring, but I felt like a louse! The tree looked bulimic—only I was the one who had binged. Brilliantly wrapped packages were bulging from every available nook and cranny.

I slumped to the floor and thought: *We have only two children. There's enough here for 10!*

My husband and I stared at each other. We realized things had gotten out of hand. We had to ask ourselves: What message are we giving our children?

One by one, we started dismantling the swollen pile. This present can wait for a birthday, this one for next Christmas, this one for a special reward for hard work.

Finally the stack looked sensible.

Right then and there, we made a decision. In the future, Christmas gifts would be limited to three types: 1) a gift really desired, 2) a needed item or 3) something educational. Of course, our children hated the idea and hoped we would eventually come to our senses.

We haven't.

And we've seen a change. No longer is Christmas an endless list of "wants." There is a new emphasis on cherished gifts. This represents a stark contrast to the disturbing trend among kids today to feel entitled to get whatever they want, whenever they want it.

As I listen to children move through the hallways of our

house, I hear the chatter of “more.” “We have more videos than you.” “I have a CD player in my room.” “You don’t have your own phone line?” “I’m asking for a laptop.” “You need a cellphone to look important.”

They get it from their parents. My favorite is the mother who proudly boasts that her daughter will outdo everyone in the neighborhood. She will have the best of everything—before everyone else. The daughter knows this strategy and is horrified if anyone beats her to the material punch.

Not understanding her conscious intention to overload her daughter with “stuff,” I naively asked, “Aren’t you worried you’re spoiling her?” The blank stare she gave me was enough to answer my question.

One summer the hot ticket was a scooter. Everyone on our block ran to the stores to buy one. My kids asked, but they knew what was coming: “Tell me again why I should run to the store to buy you a \$100 item?”

Materialism not only distorts the meaning of Christmas but also creates ungrateful kids. It’s time to stop the madness. Instead of a new scooter, take your kids to a soup kitchen and let them serve. Visit a homeless shelter or a hospital children’s ward and put things in perspective.

I know what I am saying isn’t new, but we need to hear it regularly. It’s so easy to indulge our kids this time of year. We need to examine our motives.

Is our overindulgence related to guilt from being absent or unavailable? Is it an attempt to communicate love, compete with others, create an identity or look successful? Is it the result of idol worship, a lack of self-restraint or misguided thinking?

When I see kids quickly open presents and throw them off to the side without even a thank you, I know something is wrong.

When little Suzie tells me Christmas was no fun because she didn't get what she wanted, I am concerned. The Grinch hasn't stolen Christmas; our ungratefulness has.

Christmas is about God giving His Son as a glorious gift to mankind. Don't clutter that gift with so many others that He gets lost in the fray. This season, teach your children to cherish the gift they already have—Jesus.

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## Easing the Pain of Blended Families

Blending families when divorced or widowed parents remarry can be a challenge. Here are some steps to take to help the process go smoothly.

**Stepmom.** What word pictures come to mind when you hear that word? Perhaps you are like my young **daughter**, whose first encounter with stepmom went like this: "Mommy, Mommy, Alison has a stepmom! Will she be mean and wicked like the stepmother in Cinderella? We've got to help Alison!"

Or maybe you know a boy like Billy—quiet, shy and frightened that his "new" mom will take off like his first. One year ago Billy's real mother abandoned the family, and now the stepmother is trying to love him. Billy is resisting. From his point of view, one **rejection** is hard enough.

Shari, an unhappy teen-ager, refuses to talk to her stepmom, who became part of the family after an affair with her **dad** that led to divorce and remarriage. Dad has repented of his sin, but Shari has no intention of accepting the "other woman" as her stepmother. She can't stop thinking about how Mom

suffered as a result of her dad's **infidelity**. The stepmom is a living reminder of the family **pain**.

Such are the stories of **stepchildren** trying to adjust. Hurt and wounded, these kids can be a handful. Often their pain evidences in opposition, **anger** and flat-out rejection of the stepmom. And no one knows how difficult it all can be better than the stepmoms themselves. **Stepparenting** can be summed up by the Spanish phrase about social revolution, La lucha continua: The struggle continues.

The government estimates that by the year 2007, **stepfamilies**, or blended **families** as we sometimes call them, will outnumber traditional nuclear families. Stepfamilies are an outgrowth of our **divorce** culture, the result of the growing number of failed marriages.

**What Kids Face** When families blend, everyone experiences change, but from the children's perspective, the world has turned upside down. Suddenly there is a stranger sharing the bathroom, giving directions and checking their homework. Dad is no longer exclusively theirs. Mom's daily presence is lost. Holidays become complicated. And what do they call this new person who shows up at the breakfast table with habits that annoy them?

Their former family has been torn apart and replaced with another. This loss and new arrangement are not by choice. Feelings of anger linger long after the parents' divorce is final. If the child hasn't openly worked through anger and forgiveness toward the original parents, these feelings carry over to the blended family as well.

Even in the best of situations, stepchildren struggle to find ways to honor stepparents without dishonoring biological parents. They experience a constant division of loyalties that evidences in the smallest of issues. It is this division of loyalties that resurfaces throughout the new marriage and

serves as an unpleasant reminder of the price children pay for divorce.

And consider this: According to an article in the *American Sociological Review* titled "The Quality and Stability of Remarriages: the Role of Stepchildren," couples with stepchildren are more than twice as likely to divorce again (White and Booth, 1985), and children who live as stepchildren are more likely to move out of the household at an earlier age. Research indicates that families with stepchildren have more rivalry and aggression and less empathy and involvement.

**How Stepkids Can Help** But what about the stepmoms, the unforgotten women who need help overcoming the stigma of their new roles and adjusting to children who may resent their presence? Their challenge is to become accepted as part of the reconstituted family. Doing so takes time and effort. And their husbands, the ones who are supposed to support them through the adjustment, are often in precarious roles dealing with the guilt of divorce and loyalty to the children whom they have hurt.

Stepmoms don't always know what to do. The main problem for reconstituted families is that the original intact family is gone. That first model, no matter how good or how poor, no longer applies to the current situation. Consequently all members struggle with ambivalence, attachment, emotional reactions, reorganization, unresolved issues and spiritual redevelopment.

The stepmom typically has the added frustration of juggling the family's needs—her husband's, her own and their children's. Most times contact regarding visitation and extended family goes through her. And all too often, ex-wives are not eager to cooperate with stepmom's needs and wishes, particularly if stepmom is the woman who broke up the intact family.

When the new couple has a child together (ours), the **parenting** work goes easier because of parental cohesion that develops. Yet the interplay of relationships with “yours” and “mine” can remain stressful.

Keep in mind that remarriage is a complex process, not a one-time event. Remarriage is easier when:

- There is a reasonable interval between marriages, and losses are grieved.
- There is no shift in custody at the time of remarriage.
- Both families approve of the remarriage.
- Children have contact with both their biological parents.
- Acrimony over the children is not present between ex-spouses.
- The stepdaughter is not adolescent. Daughters ages 9 to 15 have more problems adjusting to stepparents.
- Time is taken to adjust (usually between two to five years).
- The problems of stepmoms are recognized and validated.
- Mutual courtesy between stepmom and children, rather than mutual love, is the immediate goal.
- The biological parent handles serious discipline issues well.

Of course, many of you don't have these things going for you. But don't despair! There is still much that can be done to ease the blending of families. If you are a stepmom undergoing family adjustment, consider these strategies:

Continue to resolve all divorce issues. When issues of loss surface (and they will), freely discuss them. Loss is an ongoing process due to celebrations and life transitions such as graduations, weddings, births and so on that will require you to interface with the biological parents.

Give up the idea that you won't have difficulty. The **biblical promise** is that you will overcome problems, not avoid them.

Talk about feelings—guilt, anger, loyalties and so on. Validating feelings and not being afraid to allow others to express them is very important and goes a long way in helping family members feel supported.

Find a way to work with the biological mom. This will require prayer and humility—and may be a test of your Christlike character.

Be aware that problems with ex-spouses usually involve money, jealousy, competition and unresolved divorce issues. Clarify and resolve these issues.

Negotiate your relationship with the children. Successful discipline occurs after stepfamily integration. When possible, support the biological parent.

Understand that you married your husband because you love him. You may not love the children at first—and may have to work on this. Ask God to put a love in your heart for them.

You have more to cope with than intact families. You should understand this before you remarry. In most cases, children are forever tied to the biological couple.

Keep your relationship with God strong, intimate and growing. You need His strength, love and wisdom.

Pray for the newly constituted family and the biological mother.

Stepmoms often ask in therapy why no one appreciates the load they bear. The answer has to do with the preoccupation of other family members with their own adjustments. In addition, women typically take responsibility for family relationships. Consequently, others expect them to carry the burden and be strong.

You may not always feel strong, and that's OK. Know that you aren't alone in your time of adjustment. God sees your difficulty and has the wisdom necessary to handle family matters.

Approach your loving heavenly Father. Ask for discernment and godly character in order to respond to each situation in a Christlike manner. He will give you what you need to be victorious.

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