

Faith, Hope and Love: Three Gifts That Keep Giving

“Let’s wrap up boxes and books and put them under the tree,” my mom said one night. I was six-years-old and didn’t think anything was odd about wrapping up books and empty boxes. I was excited about the idea of spending time with mom who was busy working from early in the morning as a farm laborer. Most of the time she was asleep when I got home from school.

My little brother and sister were excited about the brightly wrapped presents with shiny bows under the sparkling tinsel tree. I realized that the reason we wrapped those gifts is because she had no money to buy presents. I kept that secret until mom told us we would open our gifts after we came back from grandma and grandpa’s house.

Thinking back on that **Christmas**, she was trying to feed three kids on a farm laborer’s wage. I remember we had to stand in line with food stamps to buy groceries, which was really embarrassing. We had no presents that year from mom but in later years I gained three gifts that have proven priceless over and over again.

“Three things will last forever—faith, hope, and love—and the greatest of these is love.” 1 Corinthians 13:13

The gift of faith. My grandpa picked us up that day. On the way to his house, a police car pulled up behind him with flashing lights. He didn’t understand why he was getting pulled over since he always drove under the speed limit. The policeman asked him how many children were in the car. He went back to his car and returned with an arm full of presents.

We weren’t Christians but I believed that my mom had faith that something good was going to happen that day despite the despair of trying to feed her children on farm laborer’s wages

and the shame of receiving welfare checks and food stamps. My mom became a Christian many years later but she always had this incredible optimism and faith in her.

The unexpected presents from an unexpected source are like the gifts that God brings everyday. We take these gifts for granted – the gift of a relationship, the gift of a job in a bad economy or the gift of a child's love. "Faith is the confidence that what we hope for will actually happen; it gives us assurance about things we cannot see." Hebrews 11:1 We can carry God's faith into our holiday gatherings.

My mom taught me to live by faith and that lesson brought me unexpected scholarships that I didn't apply for to get into college.

The gift of hope. Fast forward many years and I'm college student paying my own way in Hawaii. I have no money to buy presents and my family lives in California. I pray and ask God for creative ideas for presents for my friends and family. I pray for each person that I want to give a gift to and suddenly I get an idea for writing a story about how that person reminds me of a character in the Bible.

Each person receives a story with pictures in a little booklet. Every person I gave that booklet to say that was the best gift they had ever received. Through those stories, I gave them the gift of hope. I gave the gift that they are becoming someone who Jesus intended to them to be. I stirred up the flame of destiny in them through the words on that page. The cost for that present was my time seeking the Lord on their behalf. We can give the gift of hope in this holiday season by being a vessel for Him to speak His words of life and hope to others.

The gift of love. My friend Faith calls me right before Christmas in 1998. I'm fighting depression after my mom died. I'm hopeless and this dark cloud sits over me. I have a

wonderful Christian husband, two beautiful little boys, a gorgeous home, and great job but can't enjoy any of it because of the depression. Faith says she wants to fly me from Columbia, MO. to West Palm Beach to go with her to some revival services.

Right after New Year's, I fly to West Palm Beach. Faith takes me to revival services at her church and I receive an incredible touch from God. That time prepares me for my visit to the Smithton Outpouring in February where I'm set free from depression. Hope and faith come back with the love of my friend. Faith gave me the gift of love that set me in the right direction at that time.

Demonstrate God's love during this holiday season. Love is the engine of faith and hope in action carrying His presence into the room. Call that person who needs His love. Or take them to lunch or dinner. Above all, take action. Don't let another Christmas pass by without reaching out to that person who has been on your heart.

"Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. It does not demand its own way. It is not irritable, and it keeps no record of being wronged. It does not rejoice about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance." 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

Give the gifts that keep giving after Christmas – the gift of faith, hope and love.

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Single Moms: How God Walks With You

As a single mom, you may feel the odds are against you. But with the the help of God, you can raise up the next generation for Christ

I've been a **single mother** for 15 years. I used to think I was alone in my endeavor to raise my daughter without a husband, but I've learned there are many other women who are trusting God to be a "father to the fatherless" (Ps. 68:5). In fact, the U. S. Census Bureau says that in the year 2000 there were 10 million **single moms** in America, many of whom were born-again believers.

There are a myriad of reasons why a growing number of women find themselves the head of a one-parent home. Some have endured the pain of **divorce**, the **death of a spouse** or a pregnancy outside of wedlock. Others are still **married** but separated from their mates. Whatever the reason, one thing is certain: God's faithfulness to single moms can be seen in Scripture and is evident in the lives of mothers and their children today.

A Biblical Example

Genesis 21:9-14 tells the story of a tumultuous family problem involving Isaac, the son God promised to Abraham in his old age, and Ishmael, his son born to Hagar. Though Abraham's wife, Sarah, was the one who originally suggested that her husband sleep with her maid, she later insisted that the son produced by that union and his mother be "cast out" of their home. As a result, Hagar became the first single mother mentioned in the Bible.

Early in the morning, Hagar left the place she and her son had called home for many years. It was a difficult departure. Nevertheless, she gathered up her belongings, took the boy and headed for the door.

Abraham was devastated by the thought of never seeing his son again, but Sarah insisted that the woman and the boy leave. With God's consent, the two were sent away—for good.

In biblical times, it was customary for a woman who was barren, as Sarah was, to offer her maid as a substitute to conceive children. This practice was important because the birth of a son insured the perpetuation of the family, and it also provided an heir to the inheritance left by the father.

Under normal circumstances, Sarah's actions would have been acceptable. But a desire to 'help' God keep His promises and a lack of trust in Him to perform His word—that Abraham would be the father of many nations and that through his seed all nations would be blessed—caused Sarah and Abraham to take matters into their own hands.

Genesis 21:14 says Abraham placed the strap of the water bottle on Hagar's shoulders. The Greek word for shoulder is *shek-em'*, which means "place of burden." Hagar was left with the overwhelming responsibility of raising a child alone without the provision and protection of a father.

Imagine Hagar (the Hebrew translation of her name means "flight") wandering in the wilderness of Beersheba. The comfort of the morning air was no doubt snuffed out by the sweltering heat.

With no water to drink and no well to draw from, death seemed imminent for the boy and his mother—until God intervened.

"Arise, lift up the lad, and hold him with your hand, for I will make him a great nation," God said to her (Gen. 21:18). Today, God is still reaching out to single mothers. He's

offering to be a never-ending source of love, strength and provision as we face the challenge of raising God-fearing world-changers for Him.

After interviewing several mothers for this article, I discovered that the challenges single moms grapple with are universal. We face the tasks of providing housing, buying a car, pulling double shifts at work, feeding our families and paying for health care, all while trying to lead an emotionally healthy life. Many perform these functions without the help of family or friends.

But I believe **single parents** who are Christians have an advantage over those who don't know God. Why? Because He hears us! Ishmael's name meant "God hears."

The Father demonstrated His commitment to Abraham when He responded to Ishmael's cries and spoke to Hagar through the angel of the Lord. "And God heard the voice of the lad. Then the angel of God called to Hagar out of heaven, and said to her, 'What ails you, Hagar?'" (Gen. 21:17).

We Are Not Alone

God desires to have a relationship with us. It was never His intention for single moms to go through life alone. Oftentimes, it is during wilderness experiences such as Hagar had that we are able to hear Him clearly.

I can remember my trip to the doctor for what I thought was a follow-up visit for a terrible bout with strep throat. During my examination, I told the nurse I had been experiencing dizziness and feeling somewhat queasy. She asked if I would take a pregnancy test just as a matter of routine. I agreed, but when she returned with the results, I was speechless.

"Miss Lowe, your pregnancy test is positive." The first thought that ran through my mind was, I'm not married! What I

felt that day ran the gamut of emotions. What will I say to my mother? How will I provide for my child? What will the pastor think of me?

My concerns were not unfounded. There was a time in many Holiness and Pentecostal churches when unwed mothers were told they had to stand before the church, confess their behavior to the congregation and ask for forgiveness.

If a woman was a single mom because of divorce, she was not permitted to serve in ministry and was told to remain silent in the church. However, congregants who had other challenges in their lives were never made to come forward.

The home and church situations weren't my only concerns. I was just two months away from college graduation.

Nevertheless, when I prayed, God spoke to me just as He did to Hagar. Valerie, you will have a little girl, you are to name her "Faith," and that's what you will live by. The word from God that day settled the issue in my mind and gave me peace in my heart.

Though God permitted Abraham to send his firstborn child away, He never abandoned the outcasts. If you are a single mother, you can trust God to walk alongside you and, when necessary, to carry you.

Faith, Not Fear

Noted author and Christian child psychologist James Dobson wrote a book titled *Parenting Isn't for Cowards*. When I first read the title, I thought it was a bit strong. But Dobson is right. Parenting, including single parenting, isn't for people who shun their responsibilities or are afraid to meet the challenges of raising children.

The Bible says Hagar wandered in the wilderness of Beersheba. Located in the southernmost part of Judah, Beersheba was a

desert that still exists today. Its name means “well of oath” and “seventh well,” indicating that its function is to be a constant source.

Hagar was frightened at the prospect of losing her son to the wilderness, just as single moms are fearful of losing their children to this world. Scripture says she placed Ishmael “a good way off” and said, “Let me not see the death of the child” (Gen. 21:16, KJV). She then turned her back to him and cried.

Can you identify with Hagar as I do? The pressures of this world are enough to leave even the most committed single mom distraught! But take heart. God has given us a command to “fear not.”

Today, single moms are fearful for a number of reasons. Divorced women are afraid they will lose custody of their children. Some moms are afraid their children will not have the opportunity to go to college. Others are concerned that their children will take a wrong turn in life.

Oftentimes, our problems and situations are overwhelming; the odds seem stacked against us. For instance, the Census Bureau reports that children from single-parent homes are twice as likely to drop out of high school before they turn 18 as children from two-parent homes and 2.5 times as likely to have children out of wedlock. Such statistics indicate that single moms are currently one of the fastest-growing demographic groups in the church.

Single parenting takes faith, trust in God and action. When Hagar cried out to God, He “opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink” (v. 19). God provided a well of water for her and Ishmael. That well represented His never-ending commitment to single mothers and their children.

Raising a Great Nation

God has given all parents the unique opportunity and special privilege of raising children who will love and serve Him. It is our responsibility to fulfill our duties as parents so that God can make of them a great nation (see Gen. 21:18).

The angel of the Lord told Hagar to “lift up” the child. It takes commitment and hard work to help our children reach their purpose and destiny in life.

When I was in the sixth grade, I talked a lot. I would lock myself in the bathroom and render what I thought were award-winning speeches to a make-believe audience. My mother would sometimes get tired of my jabbering and insist that I stop talking so much.

Later she would come back and tell me how God was going to use me to spread His Word. As a journalist with Charisma magazine, I’m fulfilling my mother’s words partly because she “lifted” me up and spoke into my life.

If our children are to rise up and be effective, we must take strategic steps to nurture them.

I believe the most powerful tool in impacting our children for Christ is prayer. During my years as a high school teacher, I learned that single parenting was a key factor in a child’s being at risk to drop out of school.

After discovering the odds were against me, I started praying Scriptures that contradicted the data. When Faith went to sleep at night, I knelt in her bedroom and prayed: Your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, and you will remain sexually pure.

Sometimes I laid my hands on her feet and said: His Word is a lamp unto your feet and a light unto your path; you will take the straight and narrow pathway in life. And I spent many years at her bedside praying against turbulent teen years.

Today, Faith is a born-again, pageant type who loves youth ministry and cheerleading. We can always trust God to perform His Word.

Another important tool is training our children “in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4). If we spend quality time instilling godly character through Bible study, loving discipline, church attendance and setting the right example, our children will beat the odds against growing up holy in a one-parent home.

Perhaps the most effective tool in reaching families headed by single moms is a single-parent ministry. Today, many churches are finding ways to help lighten the load with everything from Mom’s Day Out programs, free child care and food giveaways to free car repairs, support groups and job placement services. Such congregations are intentionally reaching the next generation by helping to equip, support and disciple single moms in faith and family life.

I know from experience that it’s not easy raising a child alone. But I also know that single moms can trust God to provide, through the church and other means, a well of spiritual water—like the natural well He showed Hagar in the wilderness—that will bring us hope as we seek to raise a chosen generation for Christ.

Read a companion devotional.

Valerie G. Lowe *hosts the Harvest TV show. She served 14 years as an associate editor for Charisma magazine. She is also the founder of a ministry for single moms called Keep the Faith.*

Restoring a Woman's Honor and Dignity in the Wake of Rape

Juda Myers discovered she was conceived by gang rape when she met her birth mother, Ann. Adopted at three-months-old, Juda didn't know the violent circumstances surrounding her birth until she sought her birth mother. Ann inspired her to start Choices4Life, an organization devoted to supporting the needs of victims of rape and their children.

"I started the organization because there was no other organization attending to the specific needs of those with rape conception stories," Myers told Spirit-Led Women eMagazine. "Many are not believed and even shunned and insulted for being pregnant by rape."

She added, "Their babies are targeted for death. When they want to give birth they are told they must have 'wanted it' because who would want a rapist's baby. What society doesn't realize is that baby is the mother's baby. The rapist stole from her what was not his and he will not steal her child too. Society needs to know the truth and stop the prejudice against mothers and children of rape conception."

Myers met Ann in 2005. She shared her story of being raped by eight men when she was walking home one night. Her grandmother wanted Ann to abort Myers but Ann found a safe place to give birth with the help of clergy. "She prayed for 48 years that she would meet me," says Myers. "Her prayers came true Dec. 7, 2005."

Interestingly enough, Myers explains that most people she has talked with who are children conceived in rape are Christians. "It was interesting to me that some people heard from the Lord exactly what I heard," she says. "After asking the Lord in prayer if He really did create me I heard 'I have placed you

in the camp of the enemy to glorify my name!’ What a privilege that is!”

Choices4Life was founded February 2011 to promote and restore honor and dignity to women and children of rape conception. The goal of the organization is to educate the world about the value of every human life conceived and to raise awareness of the multitudes living in shame from sexual abuse that isn’t their own. She has also formed a panel of speakers who were conceived by rape to help dispel that myth.

Myers, a public speaker, tells her story of her journey to forgiveness in “Hostile Conception: Living With Purpose.”

Fashion Blogger Thanks God for Accident

Lauren “Lolo” Scruggs, the 24-year-old Texan accidentally struck by a moving airplane propeller last December, is sharing her emotional story of the day that forever changed her life on [Lolo’s Story](#), a website featuring authentic film testimonies of everyday people and celebrities with stories of personal struggle, transformation and hope.

Following the tragic incident, Lauren, who is the founder and editor-in-chief of the online fashion magazine LOL0, found herself learning to cope with the loss of her left hand and eye. Lauren and her mom Cheryl recount the many obstacles and blessings they have encountered since the accident on the video.

“As a mom you never dream your child is going to go through something like this,” Cheryl said. “I couldn’t give her hand back to her. I couldn’t save her eye. There was nothing I

could do to change it. But I did know she had a deep faith and I knew God would be our rock.”

No strangers to the idea of living second, Lauren’s parents Jeff and Cheryl were among the first individuals to release a video story on I am Second in 2008, upon the launch of the website on Dec. 2. Lauren’s I am Second video begins with excerpts from her parents’ own story of divorce, reconciliation and remarriage, which was filmed nearly two years to the day before her accident.

Following audio of the frantic 9-1-1 call, Cheryl describes the evening’s innocent activities, which included an airplane ride with friends, but ended with the unbelievable news of the accident involving Lauren. What trailed was a series of long surgeries and a painful road to recovery.

Lauren’s memories of the December evening are fuzzy. As she came home from the hospital and began weaning herself off pain medication, she started going through waves of anger and depression.

“I thought I was ugly and no guy would ever love me, and I just thought that my life was ruined,” Lauren says in her I am Second video as she breaks into uncontrollable tears.

Doctors originally were not sure Lauren would ever regain her personality or even form full sentences. The experience, though not one she would have ever imagined, proved to be a miraculous recovery and has given Lauren a new mission in life.

“I’m seeing this life is way bigger than me,” said Lauren. “Things I held important earlier in my career seem quite shallow now. I want to use what I’ve been through to talk to young girls and let them know our appearance is not what defines us.”

For more information about I am Second, visit .

African Christian Politicians Say Men Must Protect Women

A politically Christian conservative group in South Africa has called on men to protect women. "Violence against women is largely perpetrated because men regard women as possessions and sexual objects," said African Christian Democratic Party leader Steve Swart in a statement Sunday. "It is this attitude which we must change."

Swart said, "Good men need to speak up every time they hear a woman being disrespected, objectified and violated even by words." The statement was given at as part of the ACDP's campaign to raise awareness of of abuse of women and children. The ACDP's Vikiela (isiZulu for protect) campaign highlighted 16 issues relating to violence against women, said Swart.

These issues include: trafficking, sexual harassment, child abuse, abuse by teachers, substance abuse and VAW, HIV/Aids as a result of violence against women, prostitution, domestic violence, rape by male nurses, ukhuthwala (abduction and forced marriage of girls who are frequently under-aged), rape and prison rape.

"We can no longer enshrine a patriarchal culture nor condone violence with attitudes at the expense of our women," said Swart.

Daughter of Azusa Street Revival Sparks Fresh Move in Los Angeles

Dr. Verna (Hall) Linzey, author of *The Baptism of the Holy Spirit*, led a revival meeting at the Azusa Street Revival Commemoration last weekend at Union Church in Los Angeles. The church is adjacent to Azusa Street, according to Rev. Fred Berry, coordinator of the meeting. Dr. Linzey is speaking again Friday, Dec. 14 at 7pm at the historic Bonnie Brae Street House.

“The Holy Spirit is working mightily in Los Angeles and we have begun to see greater manifestations of revival in the Los Angeles basin,” says Linzey. “We are honoring the Holy Spirit for the past and seeking God for the future. What we are seeking is now happening. So let us pray that the flames of revival that have been ignited in the Los Angeles basin recently sweep across Los Angeles and the world once again.”

The service with a large crowd from Japan, began with dancing before the Lord, shouting and singing followed by testimonies. About 30 of them received prayer at the conclusion of the service says Berry. Many were filled with the Holy Spirit including a 7-year-old girl as Linzey and her son; Rev. Jim Linzey laid hands on them.

“Verna and her son who assisted her gave prophetic words, exhortations and discerning prayers over many people with the laying on of hands.” Her son, Rev. Linzey, is asking Pentecostals throughout the world to host revival prayer meetings in their homes night during the week and invite others to meet with them and cry out to God.

Ernest S. Williams who received the baptism of the Holy Spirit at Azusa Street and became the General Superintendent of the

General Council of the Assemblies of God for 20 years influenced Linzey. During that time, Linzey planted churches and pastored for the Assemblies of God. Her book received the Best Non-Fiction of the Year Award at the Centennial Celebration of the Azusa Street Revival.

Forever Reign

Hillsong Chapel

With most resources and trends targeting large churches, leave it to Hillsong Music to once again demonstrate its innovation with a new series catering to smaller congregations. Hillsong Chapel is aimed at providing new and familiar worship music stripped down to essential instruments for easier replication in worship services with limited musicians.

Forever Reign, recorded live at St. Stephen's Anglican Church, features a collection of familiar tunes done in a light acoustic style. Songs such as "Cornerstone," "Desert Song" and "A Beautiful Exchange" will be familiar to listeners, even while rendered in a more "unplugged" style.

Forever Reign is a valuable resource for worship leaders, congregations and listeners who enjoy piano and acoustic guitar-driven praise for their personal times of worship.

Real Life, Real Miracles

James L .Garlow & Keith Wall (Bethany House)

Real Life, Real Miracles offers story after compelling story of God's supernatural intervention in the lives of believers. San Diego pastor Jim Garlow and writer Keith Wall unite to echo awe-inspiring, modern-day displays of God's omnipotence.

No one but God can take credit for the seemingly unexplainable outcomes in each of these vignettes, which attest to the fact that when all hope seems lost, God can step in to do the unexpected.

Garlow and Wall showcase God's identity as a life-giving healer, provider and sustainer. And when He intervenes, things undeniably change. *Real Life, Real Miracles* not only showcases people's miraculous healings and divine appointments, but also their encounters with the truth of who God is. The result is a book that increases the reader's faith and sparks hope in a God whose right hand is mighty to save—and is still active today.

70 Reasons for Speaking in Tongues

Bill Hamon (Parsons Publishing House)

Bill Hamon's latest book, *70 Reasons for Speaking in Tongues*, offers Christendom an enlightened, comprehensive and dynamic understanding of the varied spiritual benefits of believing, receiving, activating and using the gift of speaking in

tongues as evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

Hamon's solid biblical teaching unveils not only deeper layers of understanding the gift of speaking in tongues, but also the Holy Spirit as a God's gift to us—as well as both the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. Hamon also establishes faith and love as vital elements of a Spirit-filled lifestyle, rather than these being mere principles for living.

The bishop likens the Holy Spirit to a power-producing plant from which Christians are supernaturally enabled to bear the fruit of the Spirit and operate in the gifts of the Spirit. Using this analogy, he correlates embracing our personal spirit language with unlocking a never-ending reservoir of God's Holy Spirit and power.

This transcendent read is for every believer seeking to comprehend how an active spirit language will fill him or her with the power of the Holy Spirit.

Through his thorough understanding of tongues, Hamon establishes a clear bottom line: that only through being filled with the Holy Spirit and operating in all of His manifestations can the body of Christ be empowered to carry out the works of Christ and be truly unified.

Fresh Air

Chris Hodges (Tyndale House)

With his debut book, Hodges eloquently lifts readers out of the spiritual doldrums with a reminder of how the breath of God can put the wind in our sails no matter what our circumstance. Senior pastor of Church of the Highlands, one of

the fastest-growing churches in the United States, Hodges possesses insight into overcoming spiritual lethargy and walking in the always-fresh power of the Holy Spirit.

Fresh Air's three parts reveal how we can find the winds of the Spirit, and each chapter concludes with a "breathing lesson," which includes nuggets of wisdom as well as questions for self-reflection.

The author reminds us that Christianity is a relationship, not a religion. Readers are encouraged to experience renewal and embrace change by encountering—and keep in step with—the Holy Spirit.