

Why This Christmas Angel Brings a Flood of Precious Memories

Every day of the Christmas season is magical when you're 8 years old. Bright lights, colorful decorations, dazzling trees, gaily-wrapped gifts and mouth-watering treats combine to create an enchanting time from Thanksgiving through New Year's Day.

During my childhood, the second most important day for me in December—next to Christmas Day itself, of course—was the day the lights of Christmas migrated from the streets and the stores into our living room. The day we put up the Christmas tree.

First, Dad assembled the tree branch by branch—longer boughs on the bottom, shorter limbs on top. Mom untangled the strings of multi-colored Christmas lights and wrapped them on the tree. Then it was time to bring the ornaments out of their boxes—12 compartments to a box, with a blown-glass ornament resting in a tissue paper nest in each compartment.

As much as I wanted to, I did not help with this process. The branches were too unwieldy, the old-fashioned light bulbs too fragile and the glass ornaments too delicate to be handled by 8-year-old fingers. Even so, I watched all of these preparations with a worshipful gaze. A decorated tree in our living room meant Christmas was only a few short weeks away.

But everything changed the day of my eighth Christmas. That Christmas, as our family celebrated the holiday at my aunt's home, I opened a small box. Nestled in a bed of tissue paper was an angel.

She was the most beautiful Christmas angel I had ever seen.

Less than four inches tall, she wore a fur-trimmed red gown and a tiny halo over her soft white hair. A Christmas gift from my godmother.

Aunt Ramona didn't have children of her own back then, and my sister and I were the blessed recipients of her bountiful love. She opened the way to a multitude of firsts in our lives: the first time we went ice-skating, horseback riding and camping. Even more important was the first time we attended Sunday school. It was my aunt who first taught me about Jesus.

Now Aunt Ramona had given me my first Christmas ornament, long before Hallmark became inextricably linked with the tradition of exchanging annual Christmas ornaments.

Christmas would never be the same.

Although I wasn't allowed to handle the fragile blown-glass ornaments Mom so carefully unwrapped and hung on the tree each year, this angel was different. She was my very own, and I eagerly awaited her emergence from the storage box of Christmas decorations.

You would have thought she was made of silk and china instead of polyester and plastic.

When I held this little angel in my hands, my dreams soared. I felt like I could do anything, be anyone, and go anywhere: the sky was the limit. Stretching to my full height, I would carefully grasp the metal hook and position her on the tree in a place of honor, my reach extending a bit higher with each passing year.

It's been more than 50 years since I first held that tiny red-and-white angel. She came with me when I married and stayed with us each time we moved. She even survived a relocation of a thousand miles from New York to Florida.

Where ever I am, this little angel never fails to release a flood of memories each time I lift her out of her packaging and lovingly position her in a prominent place on our Christmas tree.

I'm grateful for my Christmas angel. I'm also grateful for the related memories that grow more precious with each passing year. Memories of adventures with my own fairy godmother.

Now it's your turn. What's your favorite Christmas ornament?

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This article originally appeared at [.](#)

How to Move Beyond Your Fear to Embrace God-Ordained Change

Most of us have at least one area of our lives we wish would change. Maybe we want to have a certain degree, get a better job, drive a more reliable vehicle, get married or be healed of a disease. Maybe we think we are too shy, too talkative, too tall, too short, too skinny or too fat.

Now, what if, without any work on our part, somehow someone simply made the change we wanted to happen within minutes? What would our response be? What would be the response of those who need the same change and saw it happen miraculously?

Would it be welcomed or would we be afraid?

Luke 8:26-39 is a story we've heard often. It's about how Jesus changed an unchangeable man. This demon-possessed, buck-naked man was the first to meet Jesus when He stepped out of the boat in the country of the Gadarenes.

Jesus read the situation in moments. He knew the man had been kept under guard and bound with chains and shackles. When he got loose, like he was right that moment, he would roam the country and cities instilling fear in the hearts of the people.

What Is Your Name?

"Jesus asked him, 'What is your name?' He said, 'Legion,' because many demons had entered him" (Luke 8:30).

The demons begged Jesus not to command them to go into the bottomless pit, but to send them into the nearby pigs. So Jesus agreed, and the demons came out of the man and entered the pigs. Then the herd of pigs rushed down the steep bank into a lake and drowned. In doing so, the man was delivered of the demons (Luke 8:31-33).

Herdsman's Reactions

This story is about the demoniac, for sure, but it is also about the herdsman and the villagers. The reactions of all three are important.

The herdsman, who owned the pigs, were upset with Jesus not for healing the demoniac. I'm sure if they had stopped a moment instead of reacting emotionally to the situation, they would have been happy that this crazy man had been miraculously changed.

They were immediately angry because they saw their livelihood wiped out in seconds. Instead of being grateful for the change they were witnessed, they immediately went and spread rumors

about Jesus.

People's Reactions

That brought the people running to see what was going on. They found the demoniac sitting at Jesus feet, clothed and in his right mind, mentally healthy.

If I lived in an area where a demon-possessed mad man roamed around naked, breaking chains, moaning and hollering, I would be rejoicing that he was looking even halfway normal.

However, Scripture says these people asked Jesus to leave because they were "overwhelmed with fear" (Luke 8:37, AMP). The herdsmen's predicament is perhaps understandable, but why are the people afraid, especially now that a huge source of fear for the area had been removed? It doesn't make sense.

Levels of Fear

There can only be suppositions here. Scripture only says they asked Jesus to leave because they were afraid. So what were they afraid of, if not the man who was healed and made whole? On a couple of levels, they were afraid of change that might happen to them.

First, they were afraid of losing their income and provision. if the swine were a source of income and provision for the area, they may have been trying to figure out how to change their revenue source. When a plant or business where we have worked all of our lives closes, we scramble internally to figure out how we are going to survive. This physical concern would have been a huge fear for these individuals

Being "overwhelmed with fear," though, denotes an even deeper level of fear, both an emotional and spiritual fear. They realized they were in the presence of great spiritual power that Jesus possessed. This triggered conviction in their hearts because they began to think of all the wrong things

they had done.

They didn't want those wrong choices to be revealed to everyone present. If they were like I was when I was eating whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted, they probably wanted to just keep doing what they had been doing.

Even though they may have wanted change in some areas, they quickly realized Jesus was a man of power who could change things they might not want to change. Jesus wiped out their source of income. What else might He do if He began to search their hearts as well?

Because of their understanding of their own shortcomings, they saw the devastation of their livelihood as judgment upon their city and country. They wanted Jesus to leave so He wouldn't change something else, something they didn't want changed.

Jesus Left Insurance

Jesus left, but not before He did something to ensure that the people eventually would understand who the power He offered them. He told the former demoniac, who was now healed, sane and wanted to go with Him, to stay and tell his story to everyone he met.

Jesus knew the demoniac's biggest mess would be his greatest message. What better person to share who Jesus was than the one who had been completely changed, healed and delivered by a power greater than himself? He was night and day different from the man he had been.

The people were afraid of change, but the one they thought they feared the most had embraced his change. Now God would use him to help change the people he had tormented for so many years.

Jesus knew His time on earth was short. By changing one man, He planted a testimony of His power right in the midst of the

people.

Embracing Change

Eventually, the people would see that they need not have feared change. They needed only to embrace it, no matter what it cost them.

This fear of embracing change is not something isolated to biblical times. I hear it all the time from those I coach to those I'm having casual conversations with. "What if I try to change and it doesn't work?" "What if someone finds out I have hidden and not-so-hidden sins?"

We think if we don't talk about these things, they won't matter to God. If they matter to us, if we can't go forward for stumbling over the past, they matter to God.

When we are able, with God's help, to work through the hang-ups and fears we have, we are better able to face today and what we know God has for us in this day.

What change are you afraid of? What might it cost you? Will you hand that fear to Jesus right now? {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at .

Your Isaiah 9:2 Promise of Hope in Hard Times

You know what I was doing at 4:45 last evening? Setting the flameless candles. At 2:30 p.m., I rushed home from school, changed into work clothes and started pulling Christmas boxes out of the crawl space. (By the way, I took two ibuprofen before going to bed, because it's not smart to go from watching hours of Hallmark movies for a week to doing squats for an hour under the house.)

After pulling down all of the decorations on the hutch and above the row of upper cabinets in the kitchen, I carefully arranged lanterns, miniature sparkly trees, an old pair of black ice skates and the nativity scene. Then it came time to turn on the battery-operated candles Mom had given me in October.

Mom is the master of lighting. In the evening at her house, ambient lighting and candles magically come on by timer and warm every possible space in the house.

But do you know why I set my new candles to come on at 4:45 every night at our house? Because that's when it gets dark.

Kalispell, Montana –one hour south of the Canadian border. We have short days. My Texas friends might truly enjoy their Christmas decorations, with all of the candles and Christmas tree lights, but we *need* the lights. Because at 5:00, for a few months of the year, we kind of feel like we should be putting on our pajamas –except we still have hours of evening left to live and haven't even eaten dinner yet. The tree lights and candles mean more to us in the north, because it's so dark for so long. The dark pulls down your energy to live.

Let's talk about long darkness and dead of winter, then. Because as I was thinking about how precious the Christmas

lighting is for us northerners, I was also thinking about the real darkness pulling down on people I love.

The friend I talked to who is at anniversary No. 1 of burying her husband last year.

The cousin who shopped for housing on Black Friday because she lost everything but her life in the Paradise, California, fire.

My own family, who is figuring out how to do Christmas around the hole left when my aunt went to be with Jesus.

Matt and I and my mother-in-law and her sister sat down with mugs of hot chocolate at about 8:30 last night, with all of the house lights off, so we could enjoy the Christmas tree lights and candles for the first time. During our short days of winter, we'll have all of these warm lights filling the great, long darkness of evening.

This is for our souls, too:

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwell in the lands of the shadow of death, upon them the light has shined" (Isa. 9:2).

Life is Montana in winter.

It's dark here, and it's dark for a long time. We can feel the shadow of death at every turn, but we've seen a great light. I think, though, that we have to choose to "set" the light of Christ, the way I set my flameless candles. When we're grieving or going through a really hard time (or both), we purposefully have to open our Bibles and reach out for the light. We worship, and the great light warms every possible space in our minds and hearts.

So if you feel like all is dark in your life, do something about it. Maybe work hard enough in your spiritual life to

need ibuprofen. Worship the Lord and give Him an open door to bring you hope and peace and help. {eoa}

This article originally appeared at .

10 Scriptural Keys to Help You Step Into Success

When we seek the counsel of God, He gives us inside information and the edge on every situation we may encounter or find ourselves in. However, how much we inquire or whether we inquire at all is our choice to make. But to inquire of Him is the best way to go if we want to be spiritually successful. It is possible to live a life of victory, satisfaction and divine favor—a life of miracle—when we inquire of the Lord and follow Him in all we do.

When we look deeply into David's life and writings, we find an example (a road map, if you will) on how David postured himself before God and how we also are invited to live our lives. We were created and fashioned to succeed in all we do, having been made in the likeness and image of God—who has never and will never fail, because *successful* is who He is.

Most people are aware of King David's shortcomings, sins and failures, but fewer are aware that David was known as a man after the very heart of God. In Acts 13:22, it is said of David,

[God] raised up David to be their king, of whom He testified, saying, "I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after My own heart, who will fulfill My entire will."

God certainly knew that David would fail, but He also knew David would try again. He saw David's sinning and was aware of every shortcoming (as He is for each one of us). But He also saw into David's spirit and knew that David would run back into His arms—the arms of a loving Father—willing to do and obey all that He would command. God knew David was a man of absolute faith and resolve in Him.

King David longed for many things, but he understood the truth of where true success and value would be found. He demonstrated it when he wrote and possibly even sang these following words as his own personal anthem.

One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek, inquire for, and [insistently] require: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord [in His presence] all the days of my life, to behold and gaze upon the beauty ... of the Lord, and to meditate, consider, and inquire in His temple (Ps. 27:4 AMPC).

Yet as beautiful and descriptive as these words are, there is no instruction as to how David went about obtaining the answer—or is there? How do we obtain the spiritual guidance we seek? Is it just to simply pray those same words? Or is there some hidden mystery, some undisclosed truth that made David desire the presence of God all the days of his life? Exactly how did David run after the heart of God and obtain His favor? How did David gain this glorious *success* of beholding and gazing upon the beauty of God?

David's example on how he went about obtaining his "one thing," his "one request of the Lord" can be found hidden within the lines of his many Psalms. There we find a great road map, one that demonstrates David's heart of prayer and pursuit of God in all things, sometimes despite his every emotion.

The following steps are just a few of the many golden nuggets

David wrote that can be used to aid us in approaching the Lord to obtain answers and cause us to inherit a successful life in Christ.

1. We begin with assurance, knowing that when we, like David, call upon the Lord, He answers.

"In my distress I called on the Lord, and cried for help to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry for help came before Him to His ears" (Ps. 18:6).

2. We live with a repentant heart.

"For Your name's sake, O Lord, pardon my iniquity, for it is great" (Ps. 25:11).

3. We embrace humility. Inviting us to step into agreement with who God says we are, humility enables us to harmoniously follow our Shepherd's leading and to grow in wisdom as we receive His guidance.

" He leads the humble in what is right, and teaches the humble His way" (Ps. 25:9, ESV).

4. We must choose to trust. Trust is a valued character trait the world lacks, and because of this, many find it difficult to trust an invisible God. However, when we choose to lean into God by learning of His heart and His ways, we begin to rely on Him in every circumstance and in every area of our lives. And as we lean on Him, we are able to remember His faithfulness, which increases our capacity to trust Him.

"Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God" (Ps. 20:7).

5. We choose to love Him. David understood that the choice to love God comes from recognizing and agreeing with the truth

that God is the one who gives us the strength to do so—and God’s strength never fails and never gives up.

“I will love you, O Lord, my strength” (Ps. 18:1).

6. We practice devotion. Being devoted to something means being focused on that particular thing almost exclusively.

“I have set the Lord always before me; because He is at my right hand, I will not be moved” (Ps. 16:8).

7. We give God the recognition that belongs to Him. Praising God and giving Him the recognition due His name is best done when we wholeheartedly profess our faith and proclaim His marvelous deeds.

“I will give thanks to You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will declare all Your marvelous works” (Ps. 9:1).

8. We know that He is faithful.

“Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life” (Ps. 23:6a).

9. We live obediently before Him.

“Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law and observe it with my whole heart” (Ps. 119:34).

10. We are intentional in our pursuit of Him. In Psalm 63, David pens the purpose for his existence—to pursue God earnestly as his one desire, his one delight, his one defense.

“O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You, my flesh faints for You” (Ps. 63:1a).

“When I remember You on my bed, and meditate on You in the

night watches, because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. My soul clings hard to You; Your right hand upholds me (Ps. 63:6–8).

We can achieve success despite life's obstacles and challenges when we keep our eyes on the Savior and make Him, as David did, our *one thing*. He is the one who holds our course steady. And He will complete His work in our lives. First Thessalonians 5:24 reminds us of this truth, saying of the Lord, "Faithful is He who calls you, who also will do it."

When David wrote verse four of Psalm 27, he was responding to a lifelong call and invitation from God Himself to draw near and ask of Him. God is drawing us also. When Jesus is the primary focus of our desires and our lives, we ultimately experience victory instead of defeat and spiritual growth instead of stagnation.

How can you seek the Lord as David did? {eoa}

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This article originally appeared at .

How You Can Know God Lives in You With Holy Spirit Power

Do you not know that you are My temple? My Spirit resides within you, but now I want to truly live in you.

Therefore, cleanse your temple, and start from the inside and work your way to the outside.

I've said to you, "Man looks on the outward appearance, that which is temporal, and is fading away."

But I, the Lord your God, look at the heart of the person. It is here where the truth of the matter resides.

Within the heart of the individual, I find My light or the enemy's darkness. It is here that I see the spiritual condition, and from here I promote or I demote the physical status in My kingdom.

In the temple that you create for Me, I desire to find first and foremost a regenerated and everlasting spirit that is born from up above.

A spiritual temple that is bought and paid for by the redemptive blood of My Son, Jesus.

I look for a place where My Spirit, Holy Spirit, is welcomed and can freely flow out from.

And where I, your Father, am honored and respected.

I search for the one who is humble in spirit, where love for Me is true and unstained by the world.

It is in this temple that I am free to be Me—full of all power and grace.

You cry out, "Create within me a clean heart." And yes, this is the place to start, but you will have to do your part.

You are the one required to take up your cross daily, die to self and its selfish desires and sinful ways.

And as you take these initial steps, you will find Me right at your side. I will never leave you, I will never forsake you.

It's this temple that I will inhabit, one that is filled with praise. And you can't praise Me in spirit and in truth if you don't truly love Me. And when you truly love Me, the love of the world will vacate the premises, and I will be able to live, not just inhabit, but really live within you, and reveal Myself strong through you. {eoa}

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4 Reassuring Ways to Find God's Purpose When You Feel Hurt and Abandoned

Throughout the Christian walk, people often experience great earthly loneliness. The enemy uses rejection, unrealistic expectations and abandonment from others to convince God's children that they have been forgotten and that God caused the pain to somehow punish them. As believers, we are living in the last days and in critical times. Satan is deceiving Christians to doubt God during times of suffering.

During the great falling-away of the church, people are turning away from God and trying to fill their loneliness with the temporary pleasures of this world. Christians young and old try to find love and acceptance through pornography,

partnering in unequally yoked relationships and filling their voids with addiction and self-harm. Some have left the church because they suffered unexpected losses of relationships or deaths of loved ones and have blamed God. Some have isolated themselves from God and others and have taken roots of bitterness, hatred and revenge out on others who have hurt or abused them. Some have become angry with God because they did not yet receive their healing, get married, get the job they wanted or have children the way they thought they would.

After suffering the pain of being raped, going through two painful divorces, losing my home, suffering financially as a single mom and experiencing great pain, rejection in friendships, ministry and working relationships, I understand earthly loneliness. I often thought my solitude was a punishment from God. There were times I questioned the purpose for the pain. If I loved others with the love of Christ, why did they reject and abuse me? If I was faithful in my relationships, why were they unfaithful back? If I tithed and gave to God, why did I struggle to make ends meet? If I was loyal at work, why was I isolated and falsely accused? At the end of all of the questions and the tears, I had decisions to make: Was I going to believe in the goodness of God? Was God's Word true? Did Jesus exchange my earthly loneliness and pain at the cross for eternal joy and peace?

After isolating myself, trying things in my own strength, experiencing rejection and loneliness from others and buying into the lies of the enemy, I needed to wake, up, repent, take my stand and trust that I was connected to God no matter how lonely I felt. Because Jesus took my pain on the cross, my temporary earthly pain would be exchanged for eternal joy. "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed to us" (Rom. 8:18). God has turned my life around and is continuing to redeem all the pain I experienced. From those seasons of pain, my ministry and calling were birthed to those

around the world needing hope of His restoration.

The very gifts of freedom, peace and joy that Jesus died to give are willfully being exchanged for doubt, fear and resentment. It's time to wake up to the enemy's scheme!

Here are four ways to transform that earthly pain and loneliness into kingdom purpose:

1. **Remember that Jesus understands all of our pain and suffering.** He experienced every pain we have and will face. "He was despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from him; he was despised, and we did not esteem him" (Isa. 53:3). If we think we are alone in our pain and loneliness, we are reminded that Jesus experienced great earthly loneliness and rejection from his family, His followers and those for whom He suffered and died then and now.
2. **It's time to stand up and get rude with the devil.** Jesus gave us the gift of salvation. We need to stop exchanging our gift with a thief! Satan is the one who robs us and brings destruction. It's time to stop fighting God and others and put the enemy in his place, which is under our feet: "Finally, my brothers, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For our fight is not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, and against spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6:10-13).
3. **Thank God for replacing the pain with His purpose.** As we remember God's goodness, trust that He is doing a great

work inside of each of us during these lonely times. God did not cause your pain, but He will use it. He can use it to strengthen our faith, build character, protect us from world influences and refine us when sin is exposed. He brings healing to our hearts when we connect with Him, and sometimes everything else falls apart or withers away until we are face-to-face with our heavenly Father who is the only one who can fill the void. The pain we feel now will be turned around for His good. We were never promised a life without pain but that God will walk us through it. He will take that pain, help us overcome and then use it as a testimony to others who are experiencing the same suffering and loneliness. "Blessed be God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble by the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God" (2 Cor. 1:3-4).

- 4. Remember that the pain and loss we experience in this life is temporary.** Those in Christ who stand with Him and His Word until the end are promised that one day all pain and loneliness will be gone, and limitless joy, peace and belonging abounds for eternity! But after you have suffered a little while, the God of all grace, who has called us to His eternal glory through Christ Jesus, will restore, support, strengthen, and establish you" 1 Peter 5:10 (MEV).

Our earthly pain and solitude are only for a season. Take heart, take a stand and connect to the One who will bring you victory, restoration and hope. Jesus understands our pain, but he died and rose again to exchange it for our beautiful testimonies and eternities of everlasting joy and acceptance!

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God as a result of the great revelation, redirection and restoration she experienced through Jesus.

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This article originally appeared at .

How You Can 'Abound in Hope' Through Holy Spirit's Power

I love this prayer prayed by the apostle Paul on our behalf found in Romans 15:13, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing [through the experience of your faith] so that you may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Spirit." It's uplifting to know that our Lord Jesus is the God of hope. Hope is the precursor to faith, and we can't have faith unless we first have hope, and we certainly can't have real hope without God. And our God of hope fills us with all joy and peace.

Again, my heart takes flight as I take the time to meditate upon this thought that He fills us with all joy, in other words He fills us with His supernatural strength. Nehemiah 8:10 tells us not to grieve, for the joy of the Lord is our strength. Joy and strength go hand-in-hand, you can't have one without the other. And He doesn't want to give us a little bit

of joy, but all joy. He wills that we are happy and strong in Him. Now this doesn't necessarily mean we are laughing all the time, but isn't it amazing how revitalized we are after a hearty laugh? I deal with the real hurts of people every day of my life, and I love how the Lord makes me laugh. He knows that I have to have a dose of His medicine—laughter—every day of my life. See Proverbs 17:22.

I guess this joy comes from knowing that whatever difficulties I experience, I have the peace of God that truly surpasses all human understanding and human intellect. This peace isn't based upon feelings, and it's not an emotion but an intimate place in our relationship with God. The closer you are to Jesus, the stronger this peace is.

This joy and peace are spiritual benefits from believing in the Holy Spirit's power. For me, it is reassuring that God doesn't expect us to do His work in our own strength, but in His. Zechariah 4:6 reassures us that it is not by our might, nor by our power, but by His Spirit. The power of His Spirit empowers us daily, if we accept His might.

And it is by the power of His Spirit that we will abound in hope. Other ways to say "abound with hope" would be to be "full of hope," "overflow with hope," "teem with hope" or be "or be packed with hope" When I allow myself the time to ponder the message of the Word, my spiritual understanding deepens. I like the visual of my spirit being teemed with His hope by the power of Holy Spirit.

I can overflow with confidence in His promises to me. This is not about being confident in myself, but being totally confident in Him, and in His faithfulness to keep His promises to me. Therefore, I can do as Hebrews 4:16 encourages to do, "Let us therefore *come* boldly to *the throne of grace*, that we may obtain mercy and find *grace* to help in time of need." {eoa}

Becky Dvorak is a prophetic healing evangelist and the author of DARE to Believe, Greater Than Magic, The Healing Creed and her new book, The Prophetic and Healing Power of Your Words. Visit her at . You are welcome to click and have a free preview of Chapter 1, or you can click to purchase your copy now.

This article originally appeared at .

After Hair Loss From Chemo, Anne Graham Lotz 'Thankful God Looks on the Heart'

"Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7).

It was the summer of 1986 when we were robbed. Our house was broken into, and everything of value was taken about six weeks before I spoke at the International Congress for Itinerant Evangelists in Amsterdam, the Netherlands. I was stripped of furniture, cameras, silver, the things my grandmother had left me and all of my jewelry. When the time came for me to stand in the lectern to address the 10,000 evangelists from all over the globe who were seated in front of me, I was acutely aware that what I had to offer them had nothing to do with items that had been taken from me. If there was to be any blessing, any encouragement, any word from the Lord to this gathering of men and women, it would come from the hours I had spent in prayer and in studying His Word. I knew that my real treasure was on the inside.

This truth is underscored by the description of the tabernacle

in the Old Testament. The outside was covered in badger skins (Ex. 36:19, NKJV) which would give it a very ordinary appearance. No one would ever guess such a rough-looking exterior could contain glory on the inside. But it did! Wood overlaid with gold, embroidered silks, golden vessels and the magnificent ark of the covenant filled the tabernacle with a dazzling, awe-inspiring beauty.

The apostle Paul reiterated this principle when he told the Corinthian believers that their lives were like jars of clay into which God poured the glory of His life and character (2 Cor. 4:7). In other words, on the outside we may look ordinary, but on the inside God sees a reflection of Himself.

I have been reminded of this in a very fresh, personal way as a result of hair loss due to chemotherapy. When my hair began to fall out in large amounts, I went to my beloved Christian brother and hairstylist extraordinaire, Doug David, owner of The Douglas Carroll Salon. Looking on were his wife, my daughters and two of my granddaughters, who helped to turn a dreaded event into something that was actually fun. Under their watchful eyes and with their affirming comments, he shaved my head. For those of you who have been through this, you know that it is also a humiliating trauma. I was almost shocked to hear the familiar sound of my own voice coming from the face under the shorn head I saw reflected in the salon mirror! My immediate reaction was to quote God's words: that God looks on the heart, not the outward appearance. I am so thankful!

But of course, because we do look on the outward appearance, Doug cut and styled a wig that a new friend, Melinda Alba of New Beginnings in Sugarland, Texas, had found for me. She had searched and searched for a wig that was the right length and color to match my own. See what you think.



(photo credit, AnGeL Ministries)

What about you? If your outward appearance has been scarred, altered, deformed—or if your outward appearance is flawlessly spectacular—remember. God looks on the heart. The real treasure is on the inside. {eoa}

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Are You Keeping Your Thankfulness Up-to-Date?

Thankfulness is good for the soul. And it's especially fashionable to be thankful during the month of November.

But how far back do you have to go to find something to thank God for?

Do you find yourself casting back on old memories? Searching experiences from your childhood? From years ago? Or months or even weeks ago?

I love the practice some families have of filling a thanksgiving jar throughout the year. Family members add slips to the jar and then take turns reading the slips on Thanksgiving Day. It's a wonderful way to rehearse God's faithfulness and nurture thankfulness in both children and

adults.

Although family members read slips written up to a year earlier, each recollection was current when it was written.

But what if we go days, weeks or even months without recognizing something to be thankful for? What does this say about us?

It proclaims that we can't see beyond our immediate physical circumstances. Negative events limit and shape our perspective. For example, a flat tire can be a disaster ... or it can be the impetus for thankfulness I wasn't injured, I had a spare tire in the trunk or even thankfulness I have a car at all!

Additionally, in the absence of a current spirit of gratitude, I will become a bitter, resentful person who cultivates an overarching sense of entitlement. I'll focus on *my* rights, *my* benefits, *my* priorities. I'll fall into the trap of thinking anything good that happens to me is dependent solely on my own efforts. And if my rights, benefits and priorities are shortchanged in any way, I'll make sure the world hears about it.

Finally, the absence of a current spirit of thankfulness proclaims I am unaware of God's active presence in my life moment by moment and day by day. Nurturing an awareness of God's presence helps me be alert to the ways He is working in each day, providing me multiple reasons to be grateful.

If I have to think back weeks or months for something to thank God for, something is terribly wrong. I want to be diligent to practice His presence now for a heightened awareness of His hand at work every day.

As the pages of our calendars and planners turn, the thankful themes of November will give way to the excitement and animation of December Christmas celebrations. Will you and I

purpose to bring a current spirit of thanksgiving with us into the new month, the new year and each new day of our life?

Do you have to cast back on old memories for reminders of how God has worked in your life?

How will you develop a current spirit of thanksgiving that will last far beyond the month of November? {eoa}

Ava Pennington is a writer, speaker and Bible teacher. She writes for nationally circulated magazines and is published in 32 anthologies, including 25 *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books. She also authored *Daily Reflections on the Names of God: A Devotional*, endorsed by Kay Arthur. Learn more at [.](#)

This article originally appeared at [.](#)

Moving Forward in Your Calling When You Don't Hear From God

In Part 1 of this series, *Fulfilling Your Calling When God Is Silent*, I explained *what* we can do when God is silent about our next steps. In this second part I want to tell you *why* He is silent at times.

In Matthew 25:14-30, Jesus tells us that the kingdom is like a master who entrusts his servants with his possessions and talents according to their current ability (which can change). Then it says that “immediately he took his journey” (v. 15b). Without instruction or advice, the master entrusts his servants with his kingdom and then leaves.

If you have ever felt like God has given you something and then has been silent about it, know this is a normal part of God's leadership. So the question is *why*. Why does He give us things and then remains silent on what to do with them? Understanding this is key to how you approach these situations. So let's make this as simple as possible.

Part of your calling is to reign and rule with Christ (Dan. 7, Rev. 20:4-6). God is not looking for slaves that only do what they are told. He is looking for friends to whom He can entrust more.

At the end of the day, there's more to your relationship with God than simply doing what He tells you to do. Otherwise, that would make you a slave or keep you acting like a small child. His objective is to mature you from being a child to a friend, and then to someone He can entrust with leadership. Leadership and having more are part of your calling, but you cannot do that as a little child. You cannot become a leader until you're ready. You must first mature to a place where you know God's ways and can manifest His heart in any situation.

When God's not speaking is often because you're in a time of testing and maturing, which is the preparation for your transition into another season. A student does not move forward into the next set of classes until they pass the previous ones. The same is true for us.

In Matthew 25, after the master comes back to see what the servants have done, there is a time of promotion or demotion. The ones who invested what they were given got more—or in our analogy, went to the next grade. The one who did not invest and chose to forget about what was entrusted to him, was demoted a grade.

Moving Forward

The time of silence is a time that will determine your next steps. God's providing a context for you to use what you've

learned so far and mature into a greater place of leadership with Him. He wants to entrust you with His kingdom, increase your responsibility, and allow you to be His representation to the world around you.

You cannot enter into your next step of leadership with Him if you've not first been faithful with what He's already entrusted to you, regardless of how big or small (Luke 19:11–27).

To move forward into the next step of your journey, you must mature into it, which includes passing a test first.

Our Primary Test

So what's the primary test that we see in Matthew 25? Well, there are two main points that stand out.

The first one is to just start investing what you have. The two servants who went and just invested their talents were called faithful. The master did *not* measure them on what they earned back, just on being faithful. You cannot measure your return, because only the good God who distributes talents can measure that correctly. Your job is to just be faithful in finding places to invest yourself for the growth of God's kingdom.

The second point is that you must have faith in God's ability to bring forth a return in your life. This is about the revelation of God's ability in your life. The master in Matthew 25 rebukes the servant who buried his talent because he had more fear than faith. The servant knew the master was really good at being a successful businessman, and yet he chose to allow that to grip him with fear instead of motivate him in faith.

So, have faith in God's amazing power and ability in your life. Don't allow fear to hold you back. Move forward in life as part of the royal family of God, knowing He will meet you along the way and help you mature into His fullness.

What fear do you most need to conquer to move forward? {eoa}

C.J. Reynolds is a professional speaker and trainer in the personal development arena. If you would like to know more on this subject, see his class on “The 3 Keys To Unlocking Your Calling” and “Discover Your Destiny.” Both are designed to help people discover and live into the fullness that they were created for. Both can be found at

This article originally appeared at .