

This Single Mom's Surprising Power Source

Around nine years ago, I became a single parent to my five beautiful children. About the same time, I started writing. Although I've always been a writer in my own way—journaling, making notes, jotting down thoughts here and there. As a teenager, I even wrote a few poems, although those might never see the light of day or the internet.

A few weeks ago, as I was praying about writing another book. I decided to do something I'd never done before and read over all my blogs. I wanted to see common themes and also how God had answered my prayers and shown His love to me.

Boy oh boy, was I surprised at my common themes! Surprised—and a little dismayed. For although by the end of each blog I always saw a decided upswing in my thinking—my “But God” or “And yet God” moments, as I like to call them. I also saw that I often refer to myself as a mess or a failure.

Friends have mentioned this to me, and I've always replied, “Well, I feel like one. And, isn't that something most women struggle with at least a little bit?”

But as I read through my blogs, all I could think was “Oh dear. That is not the mother I want to be. That is not the woman I want to be.” Not that life should always be cupcakes and Twizzlers, but shouldn't it be more than always feeling like things should be better or different?

No doubt there will always be times when we feel like we can't do things well. Times when we feel more defeated than victorious. Times when we don't do things as well as we had hoped—when the easy thing to do isn't always the right thing to do. Times when we should be the one in time-out, the one getting our mouth washed out with soap, the one having to hand

over the cell phone or the one being grounded

But being a single parent, there is no one to step in and say, "Hey sweetie, ummmm, how about you just take some time alone for a second? You know, so everyone survives tonight." It is often just me saying to myself, "Woman, what in the world? Settle yourself down!" Unfortunately, that is usually after I've already poured my frustration all over my children.

But God ... but God doesn't say to me, "Susan, how dare you be so sinful?" In fact, today I read this:

"Yet the Lord longs to be gracious to you; therefore he will rise up to show you compassion" (Isa. 30:18, NIV).

That floored me: The idea that God longs to be gracious to me! Wow.

And I realized that maybe the thing He is waiting for is me. The thing in the way of the fulfillment of His longing is me. Because when you go back to verse 15, God says, "For thus says the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel, "In returning and rest you shall be saved; in quietness and in trust shall be your strength."

My strength is found in quietness and trust. The big billboard I'm seeing in my head is this: Girlfriend, your strength is not found in you. Your strength is not something you get by doing everything perfectly. Your strength is found in Christ alone.

My expectations for myself are ridiculous. I know that, and most of my friends have told me that. I'm not sure how to lower them, but maybe that isn't the first step.

I think the first step is changing how I look at myself (again). Seriously, this seems to be a constant theme in my life as well. Not viewing myself through the eyes of Jesus. How do I see myself? As a daughter of the King or as a slave

girl in the kitchen of the King? Do I believe that I'm loved, or do I believe that I still need to earn it? Do I trust that He will take care of us, or do I believe it is up to me?

I'm afraid I don't really want to answer those questions, at least not honestly. Because I know my answers will most likely be the wrong ones. I know what I struggle with.

And I don't want to struggle anymore. I truly want to live in Christ's strength, not my own. Very clearly, doing things in my own strength only makes me feel messy and a bit like a failure—sometimes, a lot like a failure.

So what is God calling me to do at this point? 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 (MEV) popped into my head: "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you."

I've been at this verse before, but God has changed my perspective a bit on these commands as well. He's grown me up.

Rejoice. Pray. Thank.

In the past, I have thought of rejoicing as more about praising or having a positive attitude. Philippians 4:4 says "Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice." I'm no Bible scholar, but I believe that means in some way, rejoicing is about preaching the gospel to myself. Reminding myself of the blessedness of my salvation. It's not about joy in my circumstances or hope that things will get better. I have a blessed assurance that not only will my future be better, but as I walk the path to that future, I have Christ with me. That is worthy of rejoicing! Christ makes rejoicing always possible.

Praying—something so powerful, but I seem to always forget to do it. I guess if I was praying continually, it would just be happening, and I wouldn't have to question why I don't pray about things more diligently. Prayer would become my habit, my

way of life. I like that idea.

Give thanks in all circumstances. I've thought about thankfulness a lot, because it seems like it is the key to joyful living. I keep thinking I need to find things in my life to add to my thankful list. That isn't a bad idea at all, but giving thanks for things is still that: Giving thanks for things. For circumstances I consider good. I think giving thanks in all circumstances is more about the beauty of my salvation and my life lived with Christ. Being grateful is all about Jesus. All. About. Jesus. Giving thanks for Christ in all circumstances.

So how in the world does this all relate to my feeling like a mess and a failure? Because God is showing me that the key is taking my eyes off me. Fixing my eyes on Him. Because He is the author and perfecter of my faith—not me. He is my life—not me. He is my hope—not me. Because rejoicing and praying and thanking are all about Him. He is my strength—not me.

It is not about me. Not about me succeeding or failing, having it all together or being a complete mess. It is all about Jesus.

Rejoice because Jesus has given me hope. Pray because God holds my life and me. Be thankful for Jesus and my life in Him.

I'm not a mess or a failure, because I'm not defined by what I do or don't do. I'm His, and I'm defined by what Jesus did. And that is something to rejoice about!

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