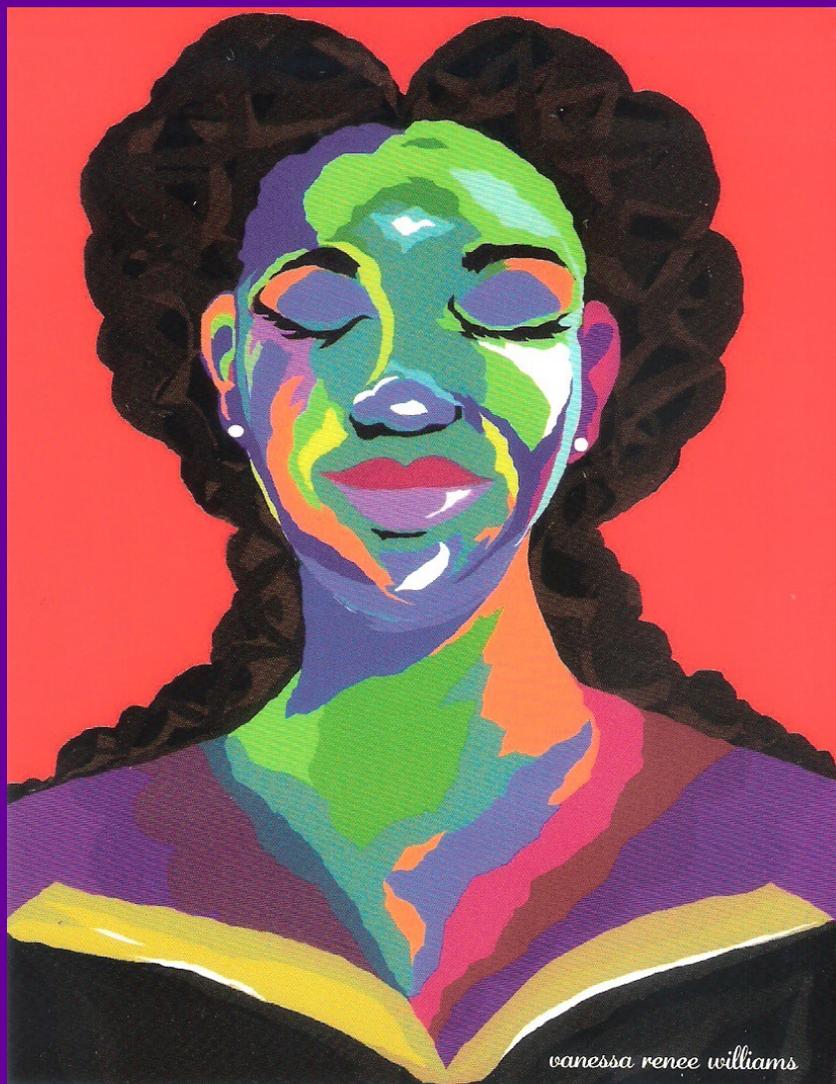


FAITH @ WORK

METROPOLITAN BAPTIST CHURCH

40 DAYS OF POWER

LENTEN DEVOTIONAL 2017



Dr. Maurice Watson, Senior Servant

An Overview of Lent

By Shirley Jackson, President Metropolitan PUSH Ministry

What is Lent?

Lent is a 40-day season of purposeful focus on prayer and fasting to draw us closer to God. A time to cleanse ourselves of unhealthy habits, relationships, and unforgiveness that block our blessings. A time to re-evaluate and redirect our use of time, talents, spiritual gifts, and service. A time to be more intentional.

When is Lent?

Lent is forty days before Easter, excluding Sundays. Sundays are excluded because every Sunday is like a little Easter and 40 days is like a tithe of one's time, or one-tenth of a year. Lent always begins on Ash Wednesday and ends on Holy Saturday, the day before Easter. ***Lent this year is March 1 - April 15, 2017.***

Why Should I Participate in Lent?

Are you satisfied with every aspect of your Christian life? Are you living a fulfilled life of purpose, passion, and direction? Are you satisfied with your relationships at work, at home, among friends, and family? Are you using your gifts and talents to build up the body of Christ? Are you sensing that God wants you to do more or something different? God has a plan for your life. Are you on God's plan? Do you fill the emptiness inside with mindless activities, TV, excessive eating, drinking, and unhealthy relationships? Our lives are filled with distractions and frustrations that take our focus away from God.

What Should I Do for Lent?

Repent and Re-Focus – Lent is a great time to seek earnest forgiveness from God and man. It is a 40-day trial run in changing your lifestyle and placing God on the forefront of your daily priorities. Each day should include a devotional of scripture, prayer, meditation and journaling. Set aside a designated place to do it. Rededicate yourself to God.

Fast -- Fasting represents a cleansing process and demonstrates our utter dependence on God. It gets rid of the clutter in your life that you might be open to clearly hear from God. This does not mean that you must completely go without food but it does mean that you cut out some unwholesome foods and cravings. Give up or reduce your dependence on alcoholic beverages, chocolates, cigarettes, fast food, clothes and shoe shopping, or TV shows that you think gives you pleasure and strength. Instead, go to bible study, read a biblical book, pray more than usual, or do something intentional to focus more on God.

Pray – Christians use Lent as a time of intentional heart-felt prayer beyond their usual daily devotionals. They seek God for something specific and pray throughout the day. Prayer draws you closer to God for answers and direction for your life. Listen intently as you pray, journal what you believe God is saying to you. Develop a prayer spirit.

Serve—Cultivate a charitable spirit of service by helping, giving, and speaking kind words of affirmation. Volunteer your time and talent to help others or an organization in some meaningful way. Give generously, above and beyond your tithes and offering to the work of the kingdom. Develop an attitude of gratitude that you are blessed to serve and to give. Then, give and serve cheerfully!

What Should I expect at the end of 40 Days?

Live in expectation of answered prayer! You will reap more than you sow! Expect more clarity about God's purpose for your life. Expect a more fulfilling lifestyle and more loving relationships. Expect to rid yourself of some unhealthy habits. You should have a new lease on life, a more meaningful prayer life, and a priceless dependent relationship on Jesus Christ that causes you to live life more abundantly!

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Display featuring a crown of thorns and cross with purple cloth heralds the beginning of Lent.
Photo Credit: Kathleen Barry. United Methodist Communications. The People of the UMC.

Dying for Judas

By Rev. Michael McDuffie

“Just as he was speaking, Judas, one of the Twelve, appeared. With him was a crowd armed with swords and clubs, sent from the chief priests, the teachers of the law, and the elders. Now the betrayer had arranged a signal with them: “The one I kiss is the man; arrest him and lead him away under guard.” Going at once to Jesus, Judas said, “Rabbi!” and kissed him. The men seized Jesus and arrested him.”
~ Mark 14:43-46 (NIV)

Deceiver. Betrayer. Fraud. These are the words that come to mind when we hear the name, "Judas." No parent rushes to name their newborn son, Judas.

A walk through the Gospels only reveals Judas as one of the twelve disciples of Jesus. There is no mention of any acts of faith, miracles performed, or even words spoken by Judas Iscariot. The gospel according to Matthew merely lists him as: "...and Judas Iscariot, the one who betrayed Him."

Throughout the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, Judas is first introduced; then he is later alluded to as the one who would betray our Lord (Mark 14:17-21). Prior to instituting Communion, Jesus stated that one of the Twelve would betray Him. According to Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Judas served as the initiator of the saga we know as The Passion of Christ. It was Judas who led the Roman soldiers to Jesus, and identified the Savior by marking Him with...a kiss.

Imagine walking with one whom you consider a friend, while sharing the answers to the mysteries of life, and exhibiting love, yet being betrayed by this "friend." You invest years of teaching, transparency, and sacrifice into this "friend," only to find yourself deceived by a kiss.

Yet, in the midst of this deceit, Jesus still went to the cross for Judas...and for us! The good news, is that despite the feelings of betrayal that Jesus felt, or the sin committed by Judas, He still died! As He hung on that rugged cross, Jesus sacrificed His life...dying for Judas...dying for you...and dying for me.

Praise God for sending His only Begotten Son to die for your sins and mine! If Jesus could exhibit this level of love, compassion and forgiveness, how much more should we do the same?

Faith @ Work

Make a sacrifice this week, that serves someone other than yourself...in spite of what they have done or said.



The Power

By Rev. Dr. Vanessa Watson

“For God hath not given us a spirit of cowardice; but rather a spirit of power, and of love, and of self-discipline.”
~ 2 Timothy 1:7 (NRSV)

Do the daily stresses of life cause you to fear what will happen next? Sometimes we find ourselves surrounded by the doubt and fear that the enemy has placed in our lives. The spirit of fear creeps in and we begin to doubt. We doubt that we will meet our financial obligations, we doubt if our relationships will last, and we doubt if we can just make it another day. In this text Paul instructs Timothy to display a new spirit- a spirit of godliness, a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

God gives us a spirit of Power: Timothy would have to take on a more authoritative role and rely completely on the power of God to sustain him through this time. We are to remember that we are empowered by God’s power that will sustain us during our difficult times. We are plugged into God’s power and with God’s power we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. We are plugged into the power source and during those weak moments we plug into the power source by praying, by studying the Word of God, by loving and by serving others.

God gives us a Spirit of Love: The Bible declares that God is indeed love. God has given every believer His spirit of love. God’s love for man is so great that God gave His only Begotten Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins. God held back nothing for the His sheep. We must take on that same spirit of love as we fulfill our ministries assigned by God. That means love the sister that will not speak; love the brother that does not like you; love the sister or brother who would spitefully use you. Let the flame of love empowered by God always burn brightly from within you. Love is a gift of the Holy Spirit and we should love unconditionally.

God gives us a Spirit of Self-Discipline: In order to fully use his gift of ministry, Paul shares with Timothy that he will have to show self-discipline as he applies himself to use his God given gifts. God is instructing us through the Holy Spirit to use the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us. Use the gift of self-discipline. As a disciple of Christ we must be disciplined by God’s instruction in all that we do.

We must take on the Spirit of Godliness: “For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice or fear, but God has given us a spirit of power, a spirit of love, and a spirit of self-discipline.” Are you plugged into the power source of God, the love of God, and with the self-discipline that comes from God? Plug into the real source of power... God, and be empowered!



The Small Stuff

By Sis. Nona Florence

“His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!’”
~ Matthew 25:21

You’ve most likely heard the expression “Don’t sweat the small stuff!” Productive advice, if you’re trying to manage high levels of stress or anxiety. But it can be highly counter-productive. As you think about the concept of “faith at work,” have you ever stopped to think why relatively so few people engage in ministry? Maybe, just maybe, it is simply because they feel it is too large, too daunting a task, and their “little bit” won’t be missed or won’t be appreciated.

Have you ever thought about what is the costliest part of the human body to insure? Chances are you haven’t. And if be some strange reason you have, what have you thought? The heart? The lungs? The brain? None of the above actually. When I was in college, I was a part of Baptist Student Ministries. A classmate of mine, Brandon, was always wiping down tables or carrying bags or turning out lights. Our college chaplain, Minister Blair, called him “the big toe” of the group. At first it didn’t seem to be a very complimentary thing to say. But, as it turns out, the big toe is the costliest body part to insure, and for good reason. When the big toe is injured, the body’s entire alignment is off. Fundamental tasks, like standing or walking—while doable—are far more painful, difficult, and time consuming.

The same is true in the body of Christ. Larger, fundamental tasks are made easier and more productive by the “big toe” of the group. Imagine the time and productivity lost at your next ministry meeting without the person who comes in early to set up the chairs or turn on the heat (or the air). If you don’t think the person who donates snacks or arts and crafts supplies to Children’s Church is vitally important, then apparently you have never been around hungry, bored 4-11 year-olds!

When my brother and I were children, my parents planned a family trip to Disney World. Every day for several months, my brother and I put small amounts of change into a piggy bank. Days before the trip, we cashed in the change for about \$200 worth of spending money. It wasn’t just a lesson in saving money; it was a lesson in the fact that “little” does add up to “much”. What can your little be-one Lenten Devotional entry, a bag or two of groceries, a few hours of your time wrapping gifts. Your “little” added to the “little” of others makes a “BIG” difference.

Faith @ Work

Put your faith into action by using your gifts and serving the body of Christ in whatever way you can. Be faithful to any opportunity to serve, even when it seems “small.”



The Importance of Love

By Rev. Richard Smallwood

"If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."

~ 1 Corinthians 13:2 (NIV)

As I finished New Year's dinner with some of my closest and dearest friends on the planet...as well as two of my godsons...we went around the table and gave individual testimonies of what we had gone through in 2016. Despite the difficulties, God brought us through. Not only did I see and feel gratefulness from around the table, but I saw and felt love... unconditional love, some that goes back over thirty years. It made me remember just how important love is and without it, we are nothing.



Photo Credit—Metropolitan Photography Ministry

As I see hate from "leaders" (and I use that term loosely) of this country, from factions, groups, and fellow Americans... as I see it spewed from platforms from the top of the government to even some of our churches, and unfortunately some of it's leaders and those in the limelight, to this thing we call Facebook; I resolve that I'm going to strive to love more. To show it, to demonstrate it, to try to embody everything it stands for, and also in what I speak. We know that life and death is in the power of the tongue. In other words, I want to be more Christ-like.

After all, that's what He preached; that's what He taught regardless of who He was talking to, regardless of where He went, or what platform He used. That's my resolve for 2017 and continuing on as long as I'm here. "If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing." 1 Corinthians 13:2 (NIV)

Faith @ Work

Show the love of Christ to someone you do not know today.



Hot for God

By Rev. Adriane Blair Wise

Minister of Christian Spiritual Formation

“So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot,
I will vomit you out of My mouth.”
~ Revelation 3:16

On a cold winters day, while walking in a shopping center in Annapolis, I came across a Starbucks. Through the window I could see the flames from the fireplace beckoning me to enter, so I popped in with the hopes of finding some warmth from the frigid air. As I sat enjoying the fire, sipping on my hot tea (I know I'm in a coffee shop) and enjoying my oatmeal raisin cookie, these words caught my eye at the bottom of my cup: “Careful, the beverage you're about to enjoy is extremely hot.” Wow! I have a new found appreciation for Starbucks and here is why:

For starters, Starbucks doesn't apologize or make excuses for selling hot coffee. They simply tell you up front that their coffee is HOT.

Secondly, they warn you in advance before you ever put your lips to the cup. You may have to blow on it to cool it off a bit, wait a while before taking the first sip, or even sip it with great caution.

And lastly, they NEVER offer you a cup of lukewarm coffee. They refuse to water down what they are serving to make you more comfortable; they do not change their standard for they are in the business of selling HOT COFFEE.

This got me to thinking about the Church of Laodicea and God's strong indictment concerning their conduct. The invitation to follow Jesus is not given to participate in a lukewarm (mediocre) faith, to do so would be our misfortune. The imagery found in Revelation 3:16, denotes deep disgust... to think my indifference would be cause for God to vomit, to make Him sick. Lord have mercy on my soul!

Instead, there's risk involved in following Jesus and the expectation is great. And make no mistake about it, the experience is oftentimes uncomfortable and inconvenient but it's so worthwhile. Perhaps we need to post signs around the perimeters of our church building that read:

WARNING, THIS CHURCH IS HOT FOR GOD... ENTER AT YOUR OWN RISK.

BUT TO DO SO WILL LEAD TO A TRANSFORMED LIFE.

I'm not sure about your motivation, but I certainly want to be found HOT for God.



The Threshold

By Sis. S. Yvette Williams

“Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.”
~ Hebrews 11:1 (NIV)

Standing there at the threshold of my childhood bedroom door I felt paralyzed. Unable to take a step to leave, but knowing that my staying would not change the inevitable. Yes, it was a time of extreme mixed emotions. The day after Thanksgiving 2016, would be the last time I would hear my Nana's voice. We spent Thanksgiving reminiscing about her blessed life of 94 years. She spoke about her favorite scriptures, her Poppa, and coming to New York with my mother, a cardboard suitcase and not a dime in her pocket, traveling to her sister's house who she and my mother lived with for many years, in 1942. We laughed and I cried. It was inevitable, she was transitioning to where she wanted to be for so many years- “With the Good Lord.” Different because before her cries at night had been heart wrenching words in response to her pain, but now it was real. This time, I could feel it in my heart and spirit.

So, there I stood with tears streaming down my face. How could I cross the threshold of my childhood bedroom, knowing that this would be the most precious day of my life? As I sat I asked her, “How did you come to a new city without any money, without a job, and a baby to care for and protect?” With a strong voice she said, “I stepped out on faith. God had taken care of me and I knew that He'd never leave me.” Faith! Faith? Still crying she said, “Baby, I wish you'd let me kiss away your tears, because this might be the last time you see your Nana.” In faith I told her, “No it's not, I'll see you in Heaven after you've kissed Jesus' face.” With her trademark brilliant smile she said, “Yes, you will.” She often said in our family gathering prayer, that she could rest in peace knowing that her daughter, granddaughters, and all of her great-grandchildren had received salvation through Jesus Christ.

She was a great example of Christian womanhood, a prayer warrior, devoted Bible study was her passion, and serving others was her calling. So, standing at the threshold of my childhood bedroom door I had to trust and believe all the Christian tenets that my family had instilled in me. As, I stood there I had to step out on faith, step out on a firm faith, step out on a working faith. I did step out on faith with a heavy heart and a rejoicing spirit. Nana wouldn't want it any other way.

Faith @ Work

When faced with life's difficulties,
pause and remember God's faithful
presence.

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Trusting Him to the Very End

My Mother's Testimony

By **Bro. Charwin Nah**

“And the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will Himself restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast.”
~1 Peter 5:10

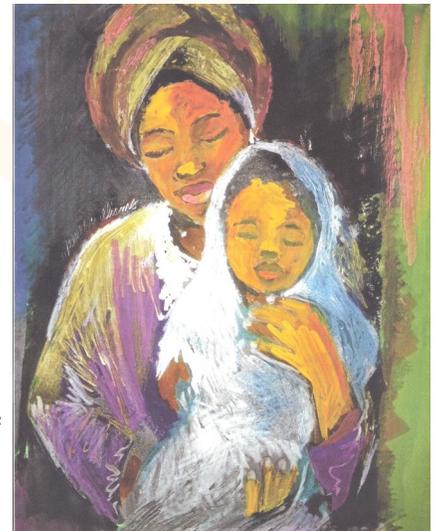
I knew something was wrong, based on what she asked me to purchase on my next trip to the store. Why, at her age, would she need a certain product? But, being the lady she was, the generation from which she came, she was not going to discuss this particular matter with me. I enlisted the help of my sister on the next appointment with her doctor. She was then referred to a specialist, an oncologist. My Mother, at 89, was diagnosed with Uterine cancer.

Not the ‘Big C’! Not MY Mother! Not the lady who had practically sacrificed her life for others – her family, her church, and her country. Not the lady who had, indeed, become my world (my father died when I was 13 and it was just us). Why? What had she done to anyone? Had her life not been difficult enough? I had questions. The more I thought about it, I was more angry than hurt. I was getting angrier...with God mainly.

She took it in stride, though. She told me to leave it alone. She underwent major surgery and, for the next nine months, thrived. Then began the slow decline. The Wednesday after Thanksgiving, we were called into an early-morning meeting at the doctor's office. There, we were told we had 8 weeks left with her. Looking back, I guess saying 8 weeks seemed longer than 2 months. We did not tell her what the doctor had told us but, somehow, she knew. In all of her pain, not once did I hear her doubt God, nor complain. In fact, she said to me, “Son, the Bible promises three-score and ten, right? Well, if the Lord blessed me with an additional 20 years, who am I to complain? I don't want you mad at Him. I've lived well.” Then she told me what every child should want to hear from his/her parents' lips: “You have done well by your mother.”

But even then, we did not actually have 8 weeks; 26 days after our conversation with her doctor, the Lord took her home, and she went peacefully.

I share this to encourage someone who is dealing or has dealt with hard times to hold fast to your faith. The road, while never always easy, does not lead to despair, but pure joy.



Original Artwork by Vanessa Renee Williams



Freedom

By Rev. Dr. Vanessa Watson

“Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”
~ 2 Corinthians 3:17

How many times have we allowed thoughts from the past to consume our minds and to hold us back from doing what we need to do? Every day we make our spirits prisoners of our bodies, especially when we want to dwell on our past pains and hurts. The past can hold us back. It can keep us from experiencing the peace that comes from realizing our freedom of spirit. An awareness of our freedom empowers us in all circumstances.

Freedom is being out in the open, having boldness, having nothing to hide. Those who are free are those who do not have any reputation to defend, no image to hide behind, nothing to preserve about themselves. They can be themselves. Everywhere today, people are longing for this type of freedom. People want to be themselves. I've got to be me, we hear, and there is nothing wrong with that, because God wants you to be you, too. The only thing wrong is the way we do it. We are being taught in the world that the way to be me is to think about my advantage, my efforts, and to defend and demand them.

The Word of God teaches us it is quite another process. It is a process of growth. His acceptance and approval are gifts to you. The faith He gives continually accepts anew the gift of righteousness of already being pleasing to God, and, on that basis, you serve Him out of a heart of gratitude for what you already have. When you start looking at the one who is doing this in your life, the Lord Jesus, and beholding Him with all your veils taken away so you are not afraid to look at your own evil capacity, then a wonderful thing happens. Without even knowing that you are doing it, just by rejoicing in what you have and serving the Lord who gave it to you, you suddenly discover--and other people will discover--that you are becoming a loving person.

It does not happen in one great transformation when you are suddenly sanctified, filled with the Spirit, or baptized. It happens as you keep your eyes on the glory of the Lord. When you do, you suddenly discover the Spirit of God has been at work making gradual changes. You are becoming a loving person, easier to live with, more attractive, more compelling. Your life is deepening as it is losing its shallowness; you are more understanding of things.

Spiritual freedom comes forth as faith that can move the mountains of challenge in our lives. The faith that allows us to rise above every limiting thought, habit, or action with joy and enthusiasm. Today, we can choose to break from the power past hurts have over us and move forward with faith, strength, and serenity. Our freedom is a gift that can neither be given nor taken away by others, a gift that only God can give. Thank you Heavenly Father for blessing us and giving us freedom through Jesus Christ.



Faith Goals

By Dr. Sophoria Westmoreland

“And now abide in faith, hope, love, these three...”

~ 1 Corinthians 13:13 (NKJV)

“For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith; as it is written, ‘The just shall live by faith.’” ~ Romans 1:17 (NKJV)

Faith is a primary muscle and in order for muscles to be strong you have to exercise them. This year plan to exercise your faith muscles with purpose by setting attainable faith goals. Write them down. Share them with a friend. Present them before the Lord in prayer. Think about what it is that you are believing God for in 2017? What dreams do you want to achieve? What goals do you have for your family? What financial strides would you like to make this year?

Start with at least five (5) and for each Faith Goal write down 1-2 specific actions you will take to work that faith goal. For example, a close friend told me the story of when she was in high school her father challenged her to believe that God would wake her up on time each morning rather than relying on an alarm clock. She was up for the challenge and the strengthening of her faith. Now, some 20 years later she still relies on God to wake her up each morning on time without the assistance of an alarm clock. I have to admit I tried this in graduate school and I prayed to God for faith to rely on God and not my iPhone or alarm clock and guess what? He came through. I have sense reverted back to my alarm clock but not because of a lack in faith, or maybe so? This devotional is also for me.

Try and make Faith Goals that are not SMART (Straight Forward, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time Specific). God is not any of these things, He is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all we could ask, think or imagine!! He is a BIG GOD! Our Faith Goals should be BIG! When times are lean or we are pressed with hard times, having strong faith muscles will come in handy. When we are pressed inward our strong faith will shine outward. We need to exercise our

faith in season and out of season so that we can be a shining example for the world of what faith can do.

Faith is not what you say, but what you do.

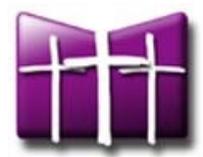
Faith is not measured by your mouth, but by your feet.

Faith without works is dead.

Faith @ Work

Write down 5 Faith Goals.
Then write 1-2 specific actions, steps that you will take to work towards each goal.

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Grateful

By Bro. Antoine Lee

“Give thanks with a grateful heart.
Pray Diligently. Stay Alert, with your eyes wide open in Gratitude.”
~ Colossians 4:2

“I am grateful for the things that You have done,
Yes I am grateful for the victories we've won.
I could go on and on and on about Your works,
Because I'm grateful, grateful so grateful just to praise you, Lord.
Flowing from my heart,
Are the issues of my heart.
Is gratefulness.”
(Hezekiah Walker)

I am so grateful for God's everlasting love. As I begin to look over my life, but one word comes to mind, over and over again. Yes grateful, yes I am grateful for the things God has done. God didn't have to bless me the way He did, but He saw fit to bless me anyhow.

I am not perfect and I never do everything right, even when I truly know better, and yet He still sees fit to bless me. That's why I'm eternally grateful. Better than blessed and excited to say my pit falls are not the end, but just pit stops on my journey to completion. Therefore, I must keep moving forward and up. Grateful for the Refreshing, the Restart, my Refueling, and my Renewing of my Life and Spirit.

Be Grateful knowing that in life a little rain shall fall and surely pain will follow; nevertheless, truly believe that God has not promised us only sunshine. But understand that the rain and pain that comes our way, mixed with God's sunshine, will surely help you appreciate the good times. Better yet, God's longing to heal our pain is amazing, believing that every pain I feel He feels it just like me. It's truly not the end...keep pressing higher.

Grateful that my steps have been ordered, I thank God for the gifts He has given to me. Because through my gifts I shall surely praise and glorify God. Thank God for being amazing and so real in my life. I'm forever grateful God has already worked things out. It was just up to me to believe and wait on Him. I am Grateful that God has kept me alive to know just that.

In all things give thanks. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

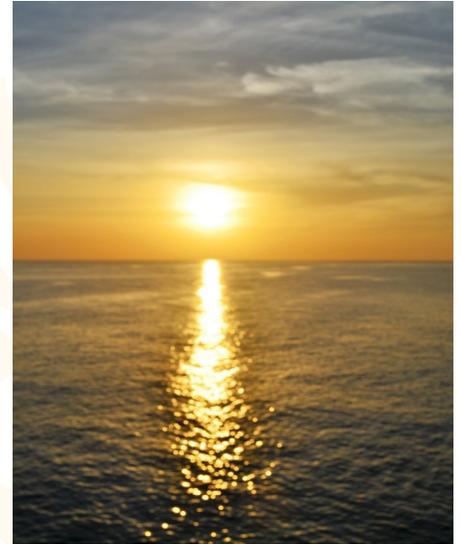


Photo Credit: Susan Clark-Taylor



The Work of the Cross

By Rev. Adriane Blair Wise

Minister of Christian Spiritual Formation

“I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.”
~1 Corinthians 2:2

The Cross of Jesus Christ is the cornerstone of our faith. Sadly, many believers struggle to lead a victorious life because the Cross isn't their focus. Sure, they know Christ's death paid the penalty for their sins, but they do not apply its power to their present circumstances, situations, or problems. For the Christian, what Jesus did on the Cross is the very foundation for everything God has done, is doing, and will do through and for us in this life. Sadly, too many Christians want a Cross-less religion. The image of the Cross is offensive, it makes people uncomfortable because it's bloody. The Cross also speaks to suffering, and no one likes to suffer. However, if you leave the Cross out of the equation, you are left with an empty religion at best, that calls for no real faith nor any demonstration of works. You see,

Without the Cross, His birth doesn't carry the same merit... He's just another baby born in Bethlehem.

Without the work of the Cross, there is no hope of forgiveness of our sins.

Without the work of the Cross, there is no source of healing for our sickness and disease.

Without the work of the Cross, there is no Helper to guide us through the rough terrain of life.

Without the work of the Cross, there is no motivation for sacrifice and service.

Without the work of the Cross, there is no strength to endure the trials we will face.

Without the work of the Cross, there is no intersection of God's grace and His justice.

Without the work of the Cross, there is no provision of power to overcome temptation.

Without the work of the Cross, there is no victory over sin and death.

Without the work of the Cross, we would operate from the belief that our salvation is dependent on our works alone!

Without the work of the Cross, there would be

No reconciliation!

No restoration!

No adoption!

And no demonstration of unconditional love!

Before there could be a Resurrection, Jesus had to first go to the Cross! As believers, when we keep the Cross of Christ central in our lives, we will operate from a redemptive place... a saving place... a delivering place. My victory and your victory is dependent upon our connection to Jesus Christ and what He did at the Cross! By faith we accept that the shed blood of Jesus Christ was adequate for our sin. Period. That settles it. We need add nothing to it. Simply rest in the assurance (confidence) that your eternity is secure. Thank God for the Cross!



Such Waste

By Rev. Dorothy Davis

“And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. 4 But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, ‘Why was this fragrant oil wasted?’”

~Mark 14:3-4 (NKJV)

Two days before His ultimate betrayal by Judas Iscariot, and in gratitude, Mary goes to considerable length to show her love for the Lord Jesus Christ. The Gospels of Matthew, Mark and John record similar versions of Mary’s demonstration of love for Christ, and the disciples’ indignation of her actions.

Her act of gratitude and reverence is in stark contrast to the other disciples; those whom Jesus had rescued from the Sea of Galilee during a squall, those who recently witnessed the blind man receiving his sight, and Jesus forgiving a woman caught in adultery. With the resurrected corpse of Lazarus on the right, and Simon, a man healed from leprosy, on the left, the disciples decried Mary’s outpouring of ointment on Christ as a waste!

However, her act of gratitude is so monumental that Jesus himself says, “She has done a good deed to Me” (14:6).

Indeed, Mary’s outpouring of the ointment on Christ’s living form is evidence that she had listened to Christ’s spoken Word; that she had faith in Him as the Son of God, and she acted on that faith. The disciples’ response failed to recognize the significance of the anointment following Jesus’ announcement of his upcoming suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection. One, Judas Iscariot, even betrayed Jesus for a sum far less than the expense of the nard! Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus brought their costly spices to a cold corpse, and the women who bore spices found His tomb empty. Indeed, Mary, whom Jesus delivered of her sins, is the only one to anoint Jesus in preparation for all He would endure for us!

“Christ has loved us and given Himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweet smelling aroma” (Eph. 5:2.) Indeed, for some, God’s plan of salvation is a waste of grace, and a waste of mercy. Few of us appreciate all that Christ is to us. If we did, we would freely express our love, in numerous ways. Nothing would be thought too costly to give for Christ; no self-denial, or self-sacrifice would be too great for us to endure for His sake.

Faith @ Work

What “good deed” are you doing to express your love, or gratitude, to Christ?



Faith is for the Living

By Sis. Willa-Jo Greene

"I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world."

~John 9:4-5 (KJV)

Jesus said, "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh, when no man can work. As long as I am in the world, I am the light of the world" (KJV). When Jesus made this statement he was referring to his own life, his ministry, and his death. His work was surely to manifest and fulfill the promise of salvation to every believer and to build the Kingdom of God here on earth. Like Jesus, we have a duty to exercise our faith and work towards the upbuilding of His kingdom.

Recently, I attended the funeral of a dear cousin, and I had a moment of clarity about that word—Faith. In that moment of clarity, faith was not an abstract intangible concept. Sitting in front of her flower laden casket, I understood that Faith is the distinct privilege of the living! My cousin's faith had served the Lord well. At the end of her life, when we read about the work she had done to shine the light of Jesus in this world, God was indeed glorified. Faith is for the living, but without works our faith is dead. It is through faith that we do the work of the Lord while we yet live and serve as the torchbearers of the light that is in Christ Jesus.



The children of God walk in various stages and levels of spiritual maturity. At some point in our Christian walk we must ask ourselves, "What work will I do to build up of the Kingdom of God? How will I step out on faith, out of my comfort zone of what I can touch and see, and do the work that God has called me to do?"

Faith @ Work

Do one thing TODAY to step out on faith!

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Dreams of Music

By Sis. Willa-Jo Greene

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart,
And lean not on your own understanding; In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He shall direct your paths.”
~Proverbs 3:5-6

In 2008, God revealed to me that I had a gift and a passion for writing music. He made it clear that I needed to share this music with the people of God. I knew I could not do this work on my own. I had no experience with songwriting, few contacts in the music industry, and no knowledge of what I needed to make this dream come true. I promised God that if he continued to bless me with inspiration and guidance, I would faithfully see the work through to the end and actually publish the music.

God raised up friends and mentors at every step of the way. My steps were ordered in faith, and I was introduced to people who were essential to making this dream a reality. Musicians, directors, composers, vocalists all came to aid me in this effort because of something they also believed.

It wasn't easy, but help was there when I needed it. I had many life struggles to overcome while trying to finish several songs I had written for the project. Five years ago I lost and gained three jobs in a two year period. I lived in two cities simultaneously, and I went through a divorce.

There were financial difficulties also. At one point I lost hope because I could not pay my producer to finish the album and make it suitable for publishing. God spoke to my heart and said, "Have faith. If you do not give up, I will provide the increase. These songs will live." He reminded me I had a loving, supportive circle of friends who would be willing to contribute money to help me reach my goal. I raised the amount I needed to pay my producer in a month! All the while, God was in control and would not let me turn that dream loose. For eight tumultuous years, I never gave up on my music project, I fully believed, even as the years passed me by, that God was going to manifest this dream.

Eight years after writing my first songs, I finally finished my first music project. In November 2016, I released an EP of songs for worship entitled Sunday Morning. This album has four tracks which represent the types of musical selections someone might hear in a certain church on a Sunday Morning. My faith is still at work because inspiration continues to flow through me. Faith at work keeps my music dreams alive.

To me, faith at work looks like God's divine power unleashed in your life to fulfill His will and to fulfill promises He has made. He gives us all assignments, whether it is writing music, pursuing career and ministry goals, raising strong families, etc. Whatever the assignment, it is not until you exercise your faith and do something new that the power of God is unleashed in your circumstances. When you work your faith and take real action toward accomplishing a task that God has given to you, He will show up in marvelous ways. By His power you will be able to accomplish things you never knew you could. Tap into the power of faith at work. Like Jesus, while you are in the world, exercise your privilege to shine His light. Eyes have not seen what God is able to do through you!



It is Already Done

By **Sis. Charlotte Brookins-Hudson**

“Therefore I say to you, whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.”
~Mark 11:24

My brother-in-law Leroy suffered from Hepatitis C which affected his liver. After years of treatment and participation in medical trials, the functioning of his liver declined to the point that it impaired his ability to drive. Because Leroy worked as a FedEx driver, he had to stop working. In August 2015, Leroy went on Family and Medical Leave (“FMLA”). Soon his only option was a liver transplant. His name went on the transplant list and it also went on prayer lists around the country. As we were praying for his liver, it was rapidly deteriorating. Leroy was retaining fluids causing his stomach and legs to swell; making walking and standing extremely painful; and making sleep, breathing, and other life activities practically impossible. He was a mess. We kept praying and believing God for a miracle.

By early December his Meld score had risen from 6 to 23 (the higher the score, the higher you rise up the transplant recipient list) and he was moved to the top of the transplant list for Type B blood at Emory Hospital in Atlanta. On December 23, 2015, God answered our prayers for a new liver. The barely functioning old liver was taken out and a new liver (from a young donor) was put in. We praised God for the miraculous Christmas gift of a new liver and the new beginning for Leroy. As his body adjusted to the new liver, other than the lengthy recovery period, his future looked bright.

In August 2016 Leroy eagerly returned to work (initially part-time and then full-time) at his old job as a FedEx driver. One month after returning to work, Leroy was laid off because FedEx no longer had a full-time position for him and his year of FMLA had lapsed. He was told he would have to apply for other positions in the company. At 60 years old he was home without pay, facing dim hiring prospects, paying the unsubsidized medical coverage cost, with a mortgage, and with a lifetime need for expensive organ anti-rejection medicine (prograf and cellcept). While things looked hopeless, God was behind the scenes working things out for Leroy’s good just like Romans 8:28 said that He would. Leroy updated his resume, applied for other full-time positions with FedEx and he received two job offers; both paid more than his old job. One month after his layoff, Leroy returned to a new job at FedEx with an increase in pay and a shorter commute (one-fourth of the distance).

Because God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him, Leroy has a new liver and a new job. Whatever you need, know that it is already done in the spirit and if you ask you will receive. God is waiting to hear and answer the prayers of the righteous.



Developing Your Spiritual Ear

By Sis. Tanya Radford

“So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”
~Romans 10:17 (KJV)

How do you know you are hearing the voice of God? I’ve been asked this several times. A common question with no easy answer. And is further complicated by what we proclaim we heard God saying. But, maybe our actions do not line up with what we know about God. How do you know the voice of God?

I heard one preacher say oftentimes God’s voice will be the one telling you what you don’t want to do or don’t want to hear. We often want to take the easy way, the non-confrontational way, the cop-out way, the way of least resistance, the most convenient, on our own time way. However, that is often not God’s way. How do we know this? Well if we look at the life of Christ, our example, He often showed God’s love in ways that don’t appear very easy. See, His conversation with the woman at the well. He spoke to this woman, someone He supposedly shouldn’t have spoken to at all. But, He did so in the open, right there at the well. He didn’t ask her for a meeting in secret, He didn’t take her away to some private place, He didn’t schedule an appointment when it was more convenient. He took the opportunity right then and there in the open to minister to this woman. And, He handled the consequences. He stood up to the ridicule. He spoke when God the Father told Him to speak.

To hear God’s voice, you must first listen. The scripture says faith comes by hearing. So, what are you listening for? The word of God. The preached word, the written word in our reading of the word of God. But, to listen, really listen we must learn to be quiet. Yes, to stop talking, to stop moving, to stop knowing so much and be quiet.

Faith @ Work

Meditation, a simple few minutes a day maybe added to your prayer time is a good way to begin listening for God’s voice. Every day, at some appointed time of your choosing take some time to pray and then a few minutes, five minutes to be silent after praying. Five minutes to listen intently on our prayer to God. Try to be still and gently concentrate. This is a discipline so if the mind begins to wander, gently pull it back to stillness. This beginning practice will help you to develop your ear for God’s voice.

The being quiet part is a challenge. We, in our humanness, like to show how much we know, impress God with our words. However, in any conversation to hear what the other participant is saying someone has to stop talking. I submit that we often pray to God, ask of God, beseech God, but we don’t often enough, stop talking to listen for God’s response. I want to hear God’s voice, hear what God has to say, listen for His instruction, correction and comfort. This year, I want to stop talking so much and listen more. By listening we can develop our ear to know, really know God’s voice. Just as we know our children’s voice, and the voice of our father and mother. We must learn to listen.

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What Happens When God Doesn't Heal

By Sis. Tiffany Gilliard

“Then young women will dance and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow.”
~Jeremiah 31:13

His breath shallow, heart beat slow, and his warm skin had become clammy, yet there was still life and we clung to it. We sang, we prayed, we talked to him and we cried. I even held his hand and regulated my breathing hoping he would somehow feel my presence and he too would start to breathe normally again. Weeks later he would sing "We are climbing Jacob's Ladder" and sweetly hum other hymns as he led his personal devotion and prepared for his eternal journey. On July 22, 2002 after four months of battling a vicious cancer my daddy took flight. What happens when God doesn't heal our loved ones?

My mother, now an unexpected widow had retired from a 36-year career and was looking forward to her golden years with her mate; my sister had just received her college degree that May, and anticipated our daddy to be there to help her navigate her first year of real adulthood. I was recently divorced and a newly minted MBA; I needed his shoulder to lean on and his guidance to help me trust and love again. As a group, we were not prepared for this. We didn't ask for it, we didn't plan it, and we certainly didn't believe this was real. What happens when God doesn't heal our loved ones?

In the months of his illness and the weeks following his transition we were about the business of life, halted at once when the reality of death took hold. As a group we didn't grieve, rather we had individual moments of sadness, anger, and fear. We had personal moments to laugh, remember and be grateful. We had a collective relationship and each of us had a personal love affair with my beloved father.

To this day there are relatives, friends, associates, even the UPS delivery guy and the dry cleaner, who laugh heartily at a story my dad told them or a kind word he shared. He was no perfect man; he had flaws but at his core he loved the Lord. His life of 62 years was purposeful and ordained. His steps unquestionably ordered. We were privileged to love and be loved by him. But what happens when your prayers aren't answered in the way your heart desires? What happens when you don't have enough hope to heal? Faith. Our faith had to surpass human understanding, we had to trust God's wisdom. (1 Corinthians 2:5).

It's been almost 17 years since we said good-bye and not a day goes by without a flash in mind of what daddy would say or do. My faith has sustained me, lifted me, and carried me through the darkest of days. I stand strong by grace. When you face the profound sadness of losing a loved one, be encouraged. Read Jeremiah 31:13 and tuck it away in your heart. God will turn your mourning into gladness. God will give you comfort and joy instead of sorrow. What happens when God doesn't heal your loved one? Your faith in God will heal your broken heart. Faith at work, even in the darkness of death.



CULTIVATE AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

By Rev. Adriane Blair Wise

Minister of Christian Spiritual Formation

“In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.”
~1 Thessalonians 5:18

Off and on for nearly 35 years I have maintained recording my dreams, hopes, aspirations, goals, and even prayers in various forms. A random piece of paper, a notebook, an old envelope, index card, a post-it note, even a napkin... whatever I could get my hands on to capture my thoughts before they disappeared into the abyss of forgetfulness! As time passed, I learned the benefit of writing down my thoughts, and I began to keep them in beautiful journals.

Well about 12 years ago, a new practice developed; I started keeping a Gratitude Journal. Yes, I intentionally document the reasons why I am grateful. Sometimes they are hand-written but most times they are typed out. My electronic gadgets (laptop, iPad, or mobile phone) provide ease and accessibility. The NOTES App on my mobile phone makes it very convenient to jot down gratitude nuggets throughout the day that I later transpose into my journal... a kind gesture from a stranger... reconnecting with an old friend via Facebook... an unexpected note of appreciation... a sunny day... a delicious meal shared with a friend... a life partner to journey with... a warm embrace... the laughter of a child... a place of employment... safe travels to my destination... a roof over my head... clean drinking water... the scent of a flower... an opportunity to serve... the ability to read... good health... a prayer answered... a healed body... a disaster avoided... a sermon preached that gave me hope... a burden lifted... a Risen Savior... the gift of life.

There are some days I focus my gratitude on the happenings of the day, while other times I may write about the people I'm grateful to have in my life. And then other occasions I find myself writing a note of thanks to someone for their kindness towards me. I've even expressed gratitude to people that I have admired from afar; I recently wrote a Thank You note to President Barack Obama; I did so as I watched him give his farewell speech as the 44th President of the United States.

And over the years, something else has occurred; no longer am I just jotting things down that I'm thankful for. Before I know it, I've penned a love note to God, an expression of appreciation to my Heavenly Father. Reading back over some of my entries literally makes my eyeballs sweat... reminiscing about the goodness of the Lord in my life and how He has abundantly blessed me. It seems like the more I convey gratitude to the Lord, the more He blesses me with new things to be grateful for. Gratitude begets gratitude.

If you would just take a few moments out of your busy schedule each day to cultivate an attitude of gratitude... I believe a shift would occur in your life. As you think about your own life, get a sheet of paper and list all the things you are grateful for today.



It's Time to Represent!

By Rev. Kimberley A. Turner, Ph.D., M.Div.

"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple."
~1 Corinthians 3:16-17 NIV

Every now and then something cataclysmic, earth shattering or devastating occurs in our lives which wakes us up and causes us to drop to our knees. Today as we find ourselves reeling from such an event we are being called to regain our focus! We, who claim Jesus Christ as our personal Lord and Savior, are being asked to individually and collectively remember who we are and Whose we are! Paul uses temple as a metaphor to remind us that all saints who believe in Jesus Christ form the spiritual temple joined by Jesus Christ! So we need to make sure we don't defile or defame the temple. I am not talking about what we eat or drink! No, it's more powerful than that. I'm talking about those fatal distractions we are obsessed with that occupy most of our time and have taken up residency in our hearts and minds and dictate our thoughts and actions.

Since we know that life and death is in the power of the tongue, instead of robotically tuning in to CNN, MSNBC, Fox, ABC, NBC, CBS we need to tune in to G O D and binge on the Bible to hear what thus saith the Lord! We need to fall prostrate before God and renew our baptism of faith. We need to have those one-on-ones with God 24/7! When we confessed JESUS Christ as our personal Lord and Savior we became new creatures in Christ! So, we need to remember who we are and Whose we are for "God's temple is sacred and we together are that temple." It's time to represent!



Photo Credit: Metropolitan Photography Ministry

Faith @ Work

I will read a scripture daily and pray at least five times a day aside from meals.



Give Your Love Away

By Sis. Shirley Jackson

“Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.”
~1 John 4:7 (NKJV)

One evening before the great Broadway musical star, Mary Martin, was to go on stage in the romantic musical, *South Pacific*, she was handed a note. The note was from Oscar Hammerstein, II who had written the music for the play. The note was written to her from his deathbed: *"Dear Mary, a bell's not a bell 'til you ring it. A song's not a song until you sing it. Love in your heart is not put there to stay. Love isn't love 'til you give it away."* After her performance that night, people rushed backstage, exclaiming, "Mary, what happened to you out there tonight? We have never heard anything like that performance! You sang with more power than you've ever sung!" Blinking back tears, Mary read them the note from Hammerstein and added, "Tonight, I gave my love away!" The poorest person in the world has something to give others if he or she has love in their heart. Love is a gift that takes on many forms--a smile, a hug, a purchased or handmade gift, a note of thanks, a high-five, a word of encouragement, a pat on the back, a word of comfort or praise, a listening ear, and just being there in tough times. Love is the one gift that always fits, is always appropriate, and always in season. Jesus said, "By this, all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35 NKJV). Paul wrote, "May the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all" (1Th 3:12 NKJV). John writes, "Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God."

Faith @ Work

Write down at least three (3) ways that you can better express your love to someone special in your life, someone you don't know, and to your brothers and sisters at church.

Prayer: Lord, help me know how to demonstrate my love to others in every appropriate situation that they may see the love of Jesus in me and glorify You. In Jesus' name and for Your sake, Amen.



The Waiting Place

By Rev. J. Frederika Eaddy

“I would have lost heart, unless I had believed
That I would see the goodness of the Lord
In the land of the living.
Wait on the Lord;
Be of good courage,
And He shall strengthen your heart;
Wait, I say, on the Lord!” ~ Psalm 27:13-14 (NKJV)

At any given point in time, you’ll find yourself waiting on “something.” You might be waiting on something very small, or you could be waiting on something that will change the course of your life. Either way, the “waiting place” is the hardest place.

Although we might find ourselves consumed with worry or despair when in our waiting places, I have found the waiting place to be where I am stretched and strengthened in ways that might not have been possible under any other circumstances.

It has been said that it is always darkest before the dawn...or something like that. As it relates to waiting, I take that to mean that the most difficult part of the wait is when I am just about to receive what I have been waiting for. And trusting that God will not allow me to remain in the “waiting place” one moment longer than necessary gives me great hope.

If you find yourself in a “waiting place”, be confident that God will not keep you there any longer than needed. Don’t let the enemy cause you to believe that God has forgotten you or that God will not be true to God’s word.

Faith @ Work

Review and take to heart Numbers 29:13 and Psalm 27:13-14. Recite them daily. Take some time each day to write out the promises God has fulfilled in your life.

Prayer:

Dear God,
Thank You for being a promise keeper, Although waiting is not easy, I trust You. As I read Your word, guard my mind so that there is no room for doubt. And strengthen my heart, while I wait on You.
In Jesus’ name. Amen.



Powerful Prayer

By **Min. Derek Jackson**

“While I was speaking and praying, confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel and making my request to the LORD my God for his holy hill—while I was still in prayer, Gabriel, the man I had seen in the earlier vision, came to me in swift flight about the time of the evening sacrifice. He instructed me and said to me, “Daniel, I have now come to give you insight and understanding. As soon as you began to pray, a word went out, which I have come to tell you, for you are highly esteemed.”

~Daniel 9:20-23a (NIV)

In this powerful prayer, Daniel pours his heart out to the Lord and receives an answer before he can even finish the prayer! Wow, That’s Impressive! So, what about Daniel’s prayer was so pleasing that it led God to answer so immediately?

I believe the first reason is because Daniel lived a life of prayer and prayed earnestly. According to Daniel Chapter 6, Daniel was a praying man. Daniel 6:10 tells us that Daniel got on his knees and prayed three times a day – even when it cost him a trip to the lion’s den! Daniel 9:3 also says that Daniel “pleaded” with God in this prayer. This means Daniel prayed with his whole heart, not with just a shallow, repetitive prayer. Daniel pleaded from his soul! Secondly, Daniel also fasted. Jesus lets us know that fasting is an important tool to use in times of need. Jesus says in Matthew 6 that “when you fast” you shouldn’t fast to impress people but to show God your devotion. Jesus also says in Mark 9:29 that some things can only be moved through prayer and fasting. You have to decide when and how you need to fast, but Daniel showed here how important his petition was by fasting in addition to praying.

The third powerful element to Daniel’s prayer was its focus on confession. The bulk of Daniel’s prayer focused on confessing the Israelites’ sins and seeking God’s forgiveness. How often do we make that the center of our prayer? Daniel shows we should always take the time to confess our sins and commit to changing our sinful ways before we ask God to do anything for us. Finally, Daniel’s prayer focused on Israel. Daniel didn’t just go to God for himself. Daniel pleaded on behalf of his people. While it is certainly important to pray for ourselves, we should also have hearts to pray for our family, our community, and those who are hurting and in need.

Because God was pleased with Daniel’s prayer life, his desire to be cleansed by God, and his heart for others, God blessed Daniel with an immediate answer to his prayer. God’s responsiveness didn’t mean that God would change His judgment of Israel, but it was important to God to assure Daniel that God would be with the Israelites through their judgment period, then rebuild their land after the judgment. That is awesome news because when hard times come, all we need is a word from the Lord confirming that He will bring us through this and rebuild the things we’ve lost once the storm is over!



It's Time for a One on One

By Rev. Kimberley A. Turner, Ph.D., M.Div.

“ ‘Even now,’ declares the LORD, ‘return to Me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning.’ Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for He is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity.”
~Joel 2:12-13 (NIV)

Charles Dickens' novel, "A Tale of Two Cities," opens with this immortal line: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity..." While Dickens was writing about the political tension between London and France during the French Revolution, some may argue these words ring true today.

For many, the next President of the United States' promise to "make America great again" has raised their hope of prosperity. At the same time, it has

caused many "undeserving minorities" to be fearful that they will be unemployed, deported, uninsured, lose their reproductive rights, deprived of religious freedom, systematically discriminated against and Black lives won't matter. In either case, God is not mentioned at all. It's as if money has trumped God!

We know that God always sends a prophet to guide and warn the people when they have turned away from Him. Today, the Lord speaks to us through the Prophet Joel, and calls us out. He tells us to lay our hearts bare, get ugly before God, and repent with a contrite heart! The prophet Joel reminds us that when we wholeheartedly put God first in our lives, God extends to us His grace, compassion and unending love!

Faith @ Work

Today I will intentionally press "pause" on all electronic devices, social media and any other distraction that has caused me to Edge God Out of my life and spend that time pouring my heart out to God in prayer.



Photo Credit: Metropolitan Photography Ministry

It is time for us to have a one on one with God.



When God is Silent

By **Sis. Bernadette White**

Superintendent of Sunday School

“Pay attention, O Job, listen to Me; keep silent, and let Me speak. Then if you have anything to say, answer Me; Speak, for I desire to justify you. If not, listen to me; keep silent, and I will teach you wisdom.”

~Job 33:31-33

Recently I saw the movie *Silence*. It’s a movie about two Portuguese Jesuit Priests in 16th Century Japan. Their mission was to find a missing Padre—who was their spiritual mentor. It was rumored that the Padre had committed apostasy; he had renounced God so that the inhumane treatment and torture of Christians would stop. As they searched for their spiritual mentor, they encountered many who believed in Jesus the Christ. The people lived in the mountains and underground; hiding from the authorities pretending they did not believe. Even in the face of death, they would not “step on Jesus” which was a carved image of Christ. The act symbolized the rejection of their faith.

In the movie, the inquisitor traveled from village to village demanding that the people demonstrate through this act that they were not followers of Jesus but worshipped Buddha instead. One of the Priest was killed trying to save a member of the faithful; the other one was jailed. As he sat in prison, he continued to witness the many atrocities that the people faced. After many months he was united with his spiritual leader only to discover that it was true—he had in fact renounced his faith. The Priest prayed and prayed for God to respond to the violence and persecution that the people faced at every turn. Yet, God was silent.

The movie made me think about when God has been silent in my own life. There have been times when I have prayed and prayed. Nothing. I have sent my petitions up each night and in the morning, I say the same prayer over again. Still nothing. Where is God? Does He hear me? Is He listening? Silence.

How do I redirect my prayers? What am I expecting to hear from God? Perhaps, He has already answered me. As I watched the movie, I found myself asking, where are You God? The people need You. I need You. Why must there be suffering? The answer came to the Priest at the end of the movie when God responded, “I have been here with you all along.” Even when we do not hear from God, He is moving. He is redirecting our circumstances. Protecting us from persecution. Covering us with His blood. He is near and He is engaged.

Faith @ Work

Like the Jesuit Priests in the movie *Silence*, we have a responsibility to seek the truth even when God does not speak. Our job is to remain faithful and know that God is listening. What do you do when God is silent in your life?

God doesn’t always respond the way we want hHm to. We don’t always get what we pray for. I believe that He rewards the faithful in the midst of our circumstances. So keep praying. Continue to send your petitions before the Lord. God hears and knows what you are in need of.



Ministry isn't Seasonal!

By Sis. Nona Florence

“Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season...”
~2 Timothy 4:2(a) (NIV)

Timothy was a young man about to embark on a career in ministry. Paul, his mentor and spiritual father, is giving him a critical piece of advice. Paul could have just said “all the time,” but by saying “in season and out of season,” Paul is making a crucial point about putting faith to work.

One thing that people of Paul’s and Timothy’s time would have clearly understood was agriculture. Specific crops grew at specific times of the year, and therefore they were “in season.” “In season” crops were plentiful and less costly. Paul’s point was this: there were going to be times when ministry was going to be easy, and times when it simply wasn’t. Timothy’s job was to stay true to the call regardless.

One of my first introductions to work in the “real world” was interning at the State Department the summer between my Junior and Senior years in college. For the most part, I loved it. The work was interesting, my bosses were nice, and the pay was good. But there were still things I complained about—the office secretary got on my nerves, I loathed the subway ride to work, and I wasn’t a fan of suits five days a week. With each new complaint, my mom had the same response. “It’s called ‘work’ for a reason. If it were meant to be all fun, it would be called ‘a hobby’.”

The same is true on this Christian journey. Every day we wake up is about making a decision about who we are going to be and how we are going to “show up” to this thing called ministry. Are we going to follow Ephesians 6 and daily put on the “whole armor of God?” Are we going to walk in the newness of Christ or are we going to revert to old habits or old ways of thinking? Are we going to get up for that 6 am call time or hit the snooze button yet again? Are we going to leave work after a long day and make it out to that rehearsal or recertification class or are we going to go straight home and hit the bed?

No doubt, there are benefits to working in the Kingdom. There are lifelong friendships and tremendous personal growth. We get to see the positive impact of our service on the lives of others.

And yet, there are times when ministry work is tiring, tedious, and stressful. Sometimes in the midst of the war, there are just some battles we are going to lose. We still have to heed Paul’s advice and continue “in season” and “out of season.”

Faith @ Work

Some work in ministry is just that—**WORK!** Stay true to the call and do it regardless!



Photo Credit: Metropolitan Photography Ministry



Living by God's Grace

By Sis. Marilyn Sonya Williams

"But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you,
for my power is made perfect in weakness."
~2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV)

My disease is not MY DESTINY! Christmas 2015, my life changed drastically when I was admitted to the hospital and diagnosed with Pulmonary Fibrosis, a disease where the lung tissue becomes thick, stiff, scarred, and causes difficulty breathing. I was told that I was in the final stage of the disease and there is no known cure or treatment. My prognosis is two years unless I get pneumonia. I was DEVASTATED! I was a vibrant independent working woman for over 30 years but over the last 4 years developed a chronic cough and difficulty breathing. Well, there was no time for sadness, anger, denial, depression or bitterness. I needed to chart a course for living life to its fullest without being able to work and support myself, without older living relatives and without health insurance. For months, I had no reliable source of income but I was never homeless, hungry or without medical attention. New Year's Eve as I was discharged from the hospital, I declared that 2016 would be an AMAZING year, and indeed it was!

I moved from DC to NC into my own home, connected with Duke Medical Center, one of the best and only centers in the world that perform lung transplants. God has raised up the BEST friends in the world for me and even caused strangers to be MIRACULOUSLY nice to me. My living and medical expenses are taken care of and I have not a worry in the world. I feel divinely favored and I know what it means to be wholly dependent on God. I had to learn to take care of myself and enjoy the best quality of life possible. I designed a blue print for coping with my doctor's report with renewed hope, joy, praise and trust in God because I am determined to walk in my NEW PURPOSE. My favorite scripture is Philippians 4:13, *I Can Do all things through Christ which strengthens me.*

I enjoyed the most amazing birthday on December 5th, 2016 in Naples, FL on the beach. I celebrate life every day and I didn't want 2016 to end. Here in NC, God reigns in my life! I am not yet on the lung transplant list, but God has me in the best place possible if I were to qualify. Although my lungs are like leather baseball gloves trying to fill with air and there are many things I can't do with less than 15% lung functioning, I choose to live in the present, remain hopeful, think positive,

and celebrate each day! I drive, exercise daily, cook my own food, attend church and I continue to be the architect of my life so I choose to be joyful, to keep trusting God, and to have expectations that exceed my highest thoughts. Hebrews 11:1 says, *Faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not yet seen.* God is great, God is good, and his grace is sufficient for my every need!

Faith @ Work

If you have a reasonable portion of health and strength and can breathe at all, stop now and give God a prayer of thanks for his grace over your life.

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Purged

By Sis. Amanda Randolph

“Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened....”
~I Corinthians 5: 6-7 (NKJV)

We interact with people daily. Some we know well while others we know situationally. Based on our repeated interactions we've formed opinions of their character and have come to expect certain behaviors from them; good, bad or nondescript.

Have you ever unexpectedly observed someone you were familiar with behaving in a very unfamiliar and negative way? Did you wonder what might have occurred that would cause the individual to behave so contrary to their character?

I'm sure we've all had a similar experience at some point. We might have witnessed a friend “go off” on an underserving sales clerk after believing they've been insulted or condescended to; or a manager berate a subordinate for an imagined offense. Typically, the person lashing out appears to be in a foul mood, troubled by something more than the current event; in need of a purging from whatever is afflicting them within.

The best way we can fortify ourselves against such afflictions is to practice meditating on the Word of God.

The Word of God can speak to any situation in life we experience. The Bible tells us that we are new creatures in Christ (II Cor. 5:17). As such, we must learn new lessons, new ways to live that strengthen the Spirit of God living within in us and not rely upon our old ways of living. We must commit to practicing the new lessons.

Though our lives are busy, demanding and full of distractions, let's choose not to relegate bible study and prayer to a later time that may never arrive. Let's choose to schedule time for the Word of God, daily.

In Mark 7:14-23, Jesus uses a parable to teach his disciples of the evil that can proceed from man. Understanding this, we know that spiritually, we too can be caught off guard by an unexpected event and react unkindly and in a way that does not glorify God. We too can allow something foul to escape from us. The framework for beginning the new lessons mentioned above is found in II Peter 1:2-10. As we read the scriptures we are assured of growth and strength obtained from practicing the behaviors.

Let's pray that the Lord will bless us to be full of Him and His glory, and that he will let no foul thing escape from us!



Change of Plan

By Sis. Juanita Fulmore, MA

“Is there anyone here who, planning to build a new house, doesn’t first sit down and figure the cost so you’ll know if you can complete it? If you only get the foundation laid and then run out of money, you’re going to look pretty foolish. Everyone passing by will poke fun at you: ‘He started something he couldn’t finish.’”
~Luke 14:28-30 (MSG)

What happens when your plan A, B and C does not manifest the outcome that you desired? In this circumstance, as a believer we are challenged just like others to avoid any self-acknowledgement partly or solely for the adverse outcome.

The process of self-acknowledgment can be painful but it is necessary. In the recent election cycle, a number of individuals in different parts of our country expressed frustration due to a change in the need for jobs in the mining and manufacture sectors. I too, in the past three years have walk through the forced change of organizational and industry restructuring but in the healthcare service sector.

Through the process of self-acknowledgment, I was forced to admit that the Holy Spirit was guiding me long before both downsizings to stretch and learn completely different skills sets. These new skills sets would have afforded me opportunities outside of the healthcare service sector. This is why, “faith without works is dead”. I have repented for my lack of immediate follow through of the Holy Spirit’s guidance.

Now, I have made a plan and counted the cost to follow through on God’s providential career counseling. I believe that the Lord has a plan for myself and others who are in

need of a “change of plan”.

Faith @ Work

In your prayer and meditation time ask the Lord to show you the new plan and assist you daily with the **3 P’s – Preparation** (self-assessment/targeted improvement), **Productivity** (small steps daily towards the plan), and **Publishing** (note in your journal progress and outcomes).



Photo Credit: Metropolitan Photography Ministry



Standing

By Rev. J. Frederika Eaddy

“No weapon that is fashioned against you shall prosper.” ~Isaiah 54:17a (NRSV)

The other day, I found a book on my shelf by T.D. Jakes. I knew that I did not purchase the book. And when I opened it, I found the words, *“The One who called you is faithful and He will do it. May God give you peace, comfort, hope and encouragement all the days of your life.”*

I didn’t even start reading the book. I just sat with the note for a few minutes. I was reminded of the night I watched the Stellar Awards. Anthony Brown won ten awards and during one of his thank you speeches, he recited Hebrews 6:10, “For God is not unjust; he will not overlook your work and the love that you showed for his sake in serving the saints, as you still do.” God certainly has a way of reminding us that our work for God is not in vain. I needed to hear that scripture, that night.

You see, there were significant life changes for me between 2014 and 2016. I learned to live more authentically, entered seminary, left my corporate career, returned to Zimbabwe to spend time with loved ones, published a book, completed seminary (with honors), and was ordained. During that time, I have also exhausted all of my financial resources, ended a few friendships, lost a few loved ones and friends, lost many (if not, all) of the luxuries I had come to enjoy, and had to move in with a friend.

When I set out on this journey, I asked God to strip me of whatever was holding me back from doing what God called me to do and being who God called me to be. While my heart’s desire was to be completely aligned with God’s will for my life, I was not expecting some of what I have had to face. And, it certainly hasn’t worked out the way I thought it would. But I was reminded, when I read the lines from the poem by Lucille Clifton, that I am still standing.

come celebrate
with me that everyday
something has tried to kill me
and has failed. ~ Lucille Clifton

When I think about the sickness, the challenges, the obstacles, the pain, the tears, the loss and the disappointments that I have faced, and the fact that I am still standing, I cannot help but shout! I don’t know what you are going through, but if you are reading this, I know that YOU are still standing too.



I AM

By **Min. Derek Jackson**

“But Moses said to God, ‘Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?’ And God said, ‘I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.’ Moses said to God, ‘Suppose I go to the Israelites and say to them, ‘The God of your fathers has sent me to you,’ and they ask me, ‘What is his name?’ Then what shall I tell them?’ God said to Moses, ‘I AM WHO I AM. This is what you are to say to the Israelites: ‘I AM has sent me to you.’” ~Exodus 3:11-14

Here in Exodus 3, Moses has been asked to go to Pharaoh, the powerful and harsh ruler of Egypt, and demand that Pharaoh release the Israelites from slavery where they had been for 430 years. When Moses asks God how he will have the power to make Pharaoh release the Israelites, God assures Moses that God will be with him. Then, when Moses asks God who he should tell the Israelites he was sent by, God says to Moses “I AM WHO I AM” and tells Moses to tell the Israelites "I AM" has sent him!! WOW!!!

In this incredible declaration, God is telling Moses that the One who is sending him is the One who is “self-existent” and was not created by another person or being. God is saying: I exist of myself and I am the one who created all things, who set all things into motion, and who sustains all things. As Moses was preparing to confront the most powerful ruler of that day, and lead a weak and quarrelsome group of Israelites, God assured Moses WHO was on his side. This is exactly what we have to remember when we face great challenges in life – that the Great I AM is on our side. The Maker of Heaven and Earth. The One who said “Let There Be Light” and there was light. The One who parted the Red Sea. The One who defeated every enemy the Israelites had in the Promised Land. And the One, who according to Revelation 4:8, is the One “who was, and is, and is to come.”

So Trust the One who is everything we need no matter what we're going through. God is saying to us: I AM the One who can heal any disease, dry every tear, pay every mortgage, protect any family, save any child, repair any strained relationship, mend any broken heart, calm any fear, and fill every need. During this season, take your prayers to The Great I AM, Call Him By Name, and seek Him earnestly in worship, and the God of eternity, the God of Peace, the God of Love, and the God of Light will give you direction, protection, provision, peace and favor for your life!

Faith @ Work

Make a list of how God has been “I AM” in your life. Pray a prayer of thanksgiving for each item on your list.



Faith, Fear, Unbelief, and Trusting God

By Dr. Tonya L. Jones, D.D.S.

“But when you ask, you must believe and not doubt, because the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.”
~James 1:6

In November of 2015, my mom stood up to make a few remarks to our church congregation. As she spoke with such inspiration in every inclination of her voice, it was difficult to discern that she was talking about her recent diagnoses of metastatic breast cancer. Whatever she told us that day, I can only remember her passionately saying, “The doctors can’t tell me when to die!” Behind that enthusiasm came an exegesis on faith, conquering fear, overcoming unbelief and putting your trust in God.

I cannot tell you the number of times I have referenced these words when my or someone else’s faith was failing. Our faith is designed to conquer fear and overcome unbelief. We must learn how to sit in the Word of God and eat every part of it that speaks to who God says we are in order to grow our faith. Those things that confront our faith head on are not meant to destroy our faith, but to take us from faith to faith. They are meant to grow us up in faith.

The Bible tells us we are a royal priesthood. It calls us sons and tells us we are first and not last, the head and not the tail, above and not beneath and that we are already healed by His stripes. It calls us more than conquerors and says we have already overcome. We can see the manifestations of all of who God says we are through the words of our very own mouths and through watching our testimony live out loud. *Proverbs 18:21 says, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruit."* *Deuteronomy 28:2* tells us, "blessings shall come upon you and overtake you." *This is faith talk and living this is our faith walk.*

Joyce Meyer has a famous quote, “Do it afraid.” Sometimes I let fear push my faith. Do you think my mother stood before so many people making a confession to the power of God for her life without having worked through the fear and unbelief? I honestly think in her times alone with Abba (Daddy God) she had moments of wrestling and confusion. I am convinced it was in those “closet times” or alone times that like Jacob she wrestled through to faith. I believe she got to a point where her fear and unbelief had to bow to her trust in a faithful God.

Faith @ Work

For at least 10 minutes today, go to a quiet place and meditate on the scriptures from this devotional.



Putting “Trying to Make a Difference” in Perspective

By Dr. Loyce Pailen

“Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.”

~1 Timothy 6:12 (NIV)

“I know that, whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God doeth it, that men should fear before Him.”

~Ecclesiastes 3:14 (NIV)

My weekly schedule is crazy busy! I seem to try to fill in every moment with something that I think is meaningful in some way or another. Not sure why, but I can say, I’ve been like this most of my adult life. Always working, volunteering, teaching, mentoring, exercising, mothering, grand-mothering, learning, traveling, writing, driving, ticking off the items on the list and any other thing to fill in the time to assure myself of some accomplishments in the great life. But, every now and then the Lord inserts a pause in this routine to tell me something profound. Recently, The Word, came to me at a school parent’s meeting that I attended to listen to the school’s planned sophomore activities. Lots of information was imparted at the meeting, but, I think I was placed there, at that time and at that place, mainly to hear the opening prayer given by the school principal Dr. Daniel J. McMahon.

The prayer consisted of excerpts from one written by Cardinal John Dearden of Detroit in 1979 often referred to as the "Romero Prayer." It went like this:

"It helps now and then to step back and take the long view. The kingdom is not only beyond our efforts; it is beyond our vision. We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny fraction of the magnificent enterprise that is God's work. Nothing we do is complete, which is another way of saying that the kingdom always lies beyond us. No statement says all that could be said. No prayer fully expresses our faith. No confession brings perfection. No pastoral visit brings wholeness. No program accomplishes the Church's mission. We cannot do everything, and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something, and to do it well. It may be incomplete, but it is a beginning, a step along the way, an opportunity for God's grace to enter and do the rest."

So, in my busy life, I certainly plan to listen closely to the Romero Prayer – It does help one get off the treadmill of being a “Jack of all trades and master of none.” It is liberating in having faith that if I can just attempt to do some good that God will take care of the rest. It’s liberating to know that you may never see the benefits of the work you do for the Kingdom but it was a beginning – “an opportunity for God’s grace to enter and do the rest... We may never see the end results, but that is the difference between the master builder and the worker.”



Increasing our Faith

By Sis. Julia L. Johnson

“And the Apostle said to the Lord, ‘Increase our faith.’”
~ Luke 17:5 (NKJV)

It seems strange that here are Apostles who were appointed to carry out missions yet who seem not to have the increased faith needed to complete such a daunting task. Could they be suffering from a decreased faith?

Does this sound familiar as you journey through your faith? Remember, faith is given to us by God to use to His glory. Therefore, let us increasingly grow in faith. How, one may ask? I have no precise answers, but will offer the following suggestions.

Increase your faith with:

Prayer - “Pray without ceasing.” 1 Thessalonians 5:17 (NKJV)

If one is to increase in faith, prayer should certainly be the starting point as it is the corner stone of our faith and gives guidance along the way. In order to stay connected, one must pray without ceasing; for this is the power, through God, which generates what we need as we put our faith to work. Remember, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, prayed throughout His time on earth even on the cross of Calvary.

Patience - “Knowing the testing of your faith produces patience.” James 1:3 (NKJV)

Two days prior to the day I was to be baptized, I became ill. What a disappointment. My mother informed me that I needed to get well first—which I did. Yet, I did not understand because I was taught in Sunday School that God wanted me to become a Christian, to be baptized. Why would God allow an illness to delay me? Well brothers and sisters, I truly believe this was the beginning of my test of patience as a Christian. As a reminder, God is patient with us as we continue asking Him for forgiveness of our sins.

Hence, my brothers and sisters, as we go in faith, let us joyfully continue singing blessed praises unto our God!

Faith @ Work

How do you keep the faith?
Increase your faith today by
praying frequently and practicing
patience.

“Praise God from whom all blessings flow;

Praise Him all creatures here below;

Praise Him above ye Heavenly hosts;

Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost.”

~ Thomas Ken

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A Response to the Times

By Rev. J. Frederika Eaddy

“God is our refuge and strength,
A very present help in trouble.” ~Psalm 46:1 (NKJV)

We live in a time in which threats are a part of life. The possibility of the total destruction of the world as we know it is well within our understanding with the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terror, pandemics and a not so stable president elect. Crime is such that many people daily live in fear for their belongings and even for their lives. People of color are left dead in the street for hours; many weaponless and children. But like the Psalmist, we know that God is our refuge and our strength. In other words, God is our shelter, our secure dwelling place and our relief from danger.

The thought of those mountains collapsing, the earth shaking and the sky about to fall is scary. In the midst of such a threat of chaos, the psalm confesses that God is our refuge and strength. Our God, who is creator and remains sovereign over the creation is also the God who is present with us. The 46th psalm urges faith in this divine presence in the midst of any and every threat we face. And since we know that God is our protection; our strong and secure dwelling place, and God is our provider; able to help with all that is needed in trouble, let's decide ahead of time, what our response will be when the challenge comes.

Prayer:

God, you are sovereign. You are all knowing and nothing that has happened in my life or in the world has caught you by surprise. My prayer is for my family, community and world. May those that know you as the true and living God be assured in knowing you are with us, providing and protecting us. Help me to know this when doubt creeps in and I am overtaken by the problems and conditions around me. And give me the courage to move beyond fear and doubt, in order to do the work you have assigned to my hands during this season. I know you are able! And with you, I know that I am able. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Faith @ Work

Take some time to read through the 46th Psalm. Write down what you learn (or are reminded of) about God in this text. How will you use this text to determine your response to the times in which we live?



Lord, Forgive Me

By Rev. Arnette L. Georges

“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: These are the words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand and walks among the seven golden lampstands. I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked people, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false. You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary. Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. 5 Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first.”

~Revelation 2:1-5 (NIV)

The longer we live the busier we become. There is always something to do and in setting our priorities we often consider whether someone is depending on us to do “that thing.” We do not want to disappoint anyone so we exhaust ourselves meeting our work deadlines; serving in the church ministries—visiting the sick, feeding the homeless, teaching Sunday School; showing up at funerals, revivals and bible study; completing our homework; spending time with family and friends, etc., etc., et cetera. But in doing so we fail to spend time with the one who gave us time.

I confess that I am included in the “we.” Although I pray daily and specifically, I often do not take the time to listen. I remember when I attended a Bible study every day of the week and spent time each morning in devotion. It was during those times that I heard clearly from God and felt closest to God. I cannot say that I am in that place today.

In this Scripture, God rebukes the church at Ephesus not because they were not doing good works in His name but because in so doing they had forgotten to love on Him—to make Him, not the works they do in His name, their priority. As I strive to discern God’s “next” for my life, I begin by asking the Lord to forgive me for not making Him my “first” in all things.

Faith @ Work

Consider when you were closest to God. What changed?

What do you need to get back to that place?

Prayer:

Lord, forgive me for



Speaking Life

By Rev. J. Fredericka Eaddy

“Death and life *are* in the power of the tongue,
And those who love it will eat its fruit.”
~ Proverbs 18:21 (NKJV)

When I was younger, I often heard people say, “Sticks and stones, may break my bones. But words, shall never harm me”. This statement is so far from the truth.

Words have a powerful impact on our lives. Words are potential waiting to give birth. They affirm and build up. They negate and destroy. Encouraging words spoken to a child might prove to be just the thing that causes her or him to want to pursue a career in art or science or music. A discouraging word spoken to the same child might crush their esteem.

Think about it. Can you remember when someone said something to you that you just couldn't let go. “You'll never be anything”. “You can't do that”. “You're ugly”. “You're a failure”. “You're too old”. “You're too young”. Did it affect you? Be honest.

At some point in all of our lives, we have been the recipient of soul-crushing words; words that hurt us to our core and perhaps took years from which to recover. Perhaps we have been the ones to spew words that have hurt someone else. Well, it is time to stop speaking so loosely. It is time to turn the destructive way we use words into authentic, loving and healing speech.

Prayer:

Loving and Holy God,
Far too often I hear or speak words that do not affirm and encourage. Forgive me for not speaking life to Your children. Forgive me for using my words to hurt, gossip, belittle, or discourage others.

Faith @ Work

At some point, in all of our lives, we have been on the giving or receiving end of a soul-crushing word. What can you do to ensure the words you speak give life to those around you? What can you do to ensure that your self-talk brings life to you?

You remind me that Jesus sent a word and it healed them. Teach me to choose my words wisely, so that they too, bring healing. And help me to identify the words that have been spoken into my life that have caused damage to my soul. I don't want those words to thrive any longer, Help me, through your word, to pluck up and cast out anything that will not be life-affirming. I choose life over death. I will speak life over death. In Jesus' name, I pray.
Amen.

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Understanding God's Plan

By Bro. Sydney O. Garth

“When he saw that he had not prevailed against him, he touched the socket of his thigh, so that the socket of Jacob’s thigh was dislocated while he wrestled with him.”
~Genesis 32:25 (NASB)

September 16th, 2013 I found myself in a haze not really knowing where, when, how, or why my life had taken this drastic turn.....

I remember starting my weekly trip to New Jersey like I'd been doing for the previous four years approximately . I was taking care of my grandmother, who had begun to show the signs of early Alzheimer's disease. After traveling to and from by bus and train for a short time, I was blessed to have the opportunity to drive. I was actually dreading this particular trip—because it was decision time—I was also looking forward to the relaxing four-plus hours drive. As I sat in a line of traffic at the Harbour Tunnel in Baltimore my mind began to wander.....and then nothing.

As I traveled in and out of consciousness after the accident, and I began to realize the scope of my situation, I found myself trying to put things into perspective—my perspective. I began to wonder of God “I know that You have a purpose? I know that you have a plan, but, what I don’t know is how I fit in now?” But then reality took over my mind and I thought "What am I going to do about the decorations for the Messiah which were in my head? What about the Questers arrangements that were in my living room finished? But even bigger question who could take care of my grandmother?



Sydney's car after the accident.

I began to see that my perspective was not the perspective that I should be looking through. It's a little bit different than what I was thinking or had mapped out for my life. So I PRAYED and READ the Bible. Even after my grandmother transitioned, even after continual month-long forced bed rest, even after losing my ability to dance & sing, I continued doing as God laid on my heart to do. I would take the time to talk and show others the difference between doing what they wanted and doing what God’s purpose was in their life.

Faith @ Work

Has something caused you to lose perspective of God’s plan for your life? Take time today to meditate and talk to God to rediscover His purpose for your life.

It’s not an easy Journey that I’m on nor is it one that I thought I would ever be on. God has a purpose and a plan and as long as I listen to that small voice and touch others’ lives, I will continue to give God glory and praise, even where I am until I understand his plan!



Good Thinking

By Sis. Shirley Jackson

"But we have the mind of Christ." ~1Cor. 2:16b (NKJV)

Do you sometimes feel that you deserve more out of life? Do you take the easy way out or settle for "good enough"? I'm convinced that life is not meant to be boring or mundane. Everyday should be full of excitement and challenge, giving us a chance to use the brain power, gifts and talents that God has gifted us with. I'm okay, you're okay is not good enough. In fact, it's unacceptable. I recently came across two different leadership books, *Thinking for a Change* (2003) and *How Successful People Think* (2009) by Dr. John C. Maxwell. He discussed eleven (11) types of thinking that are essential to living a successful life. What a novel concept to hold ourselves accountable to do our best thinking in order to live life to its fullest. Since the books were not written from a religious perspective but had a rich religious overtone, I set out to match each type of thinking with scripture, and even added a 12th good thinking skill. Good thinking that leads to success includes:

1. **Big picture thinking:** even Donald Trump said, "since we all have to think, we might as well think big!" However, the concept describes one's ability to think beyond ones' self in order to process ideas from a broader perspective (Eph. 3:20).
2. **Focused thinking:** the ability to think with clarity on issues by removing distractions and mental clutter (Phil. 3:13-14).
3. **Creative thinking:** the ability to break out of the box and explore ideas and options in order to experience a breakthrough (Isa. 54:2-3).
4. **Realistic thinking:** the ability to build a solid foundation on facts, to think with certainty (Lk. 14:28).
5. **Strategic thinking:** the ability to implement plans that give direction for today, and increase your potential for tomorrow (Prov. 19: 20-21).
6. **Possibility thinking:** the ability to unleash your enthusiasm and hope, to find solutions for even seemingly impossible situations (Matt. 19:26).
7. **Reflective thinking:** the ability to revisit the past in order to think with understanding (Psalm 1:1-3).
8. **Questioning popular thinking:** the ability to reject common thinking and accomplish uncommon results (Isa. 55:8-9).
9. **Shared thinking:** the ability to include others who can help you think "over your head" and achieve greater results (Ps. 133:1-3).
10. **Unselfish thinking:** The ability to consider others and their journey, to think with collaboration (Rom. 12:10).
11. **Bottom-line thinking:** the ability to focus on results, in order to reap the full potential of your thinking (Mt 25:14-30). Let's add:
12. **Spiritual thinking:** the ability to see ourselves and others as God sees us. We are the apple of his eye, fearfully and wonderfully made with gifts, high potential, talents and resources abound. We are blessed to be a blessing to others, to unite and build God's kingdom, to use our full potential for his glory. "We have the mind of Christ (1 Cor. 2:16)." One God-given thought can change your life!



When Life Gives You Lemons, How to Make Lemonade

By **Min. E. Missy Daniels**

“He gives power to the weak, and to those who have no might He increases strength.”
~Isaiah 40:29

This past Spring, HBO released a special on Beyonce’s album *Lemonade*. I watched it with my sister who is a 1950’s born baby-boomer, my niece who is a recent college grad millennial and my nephew another millennial who is a high school senior. I am a 1960’s born baby boomer.

Boy, what different perspectives we initially had on it, viewing it from different generational lenses. My sister focused on everything from the music, to the dress. My niece focused on the songs, the different genres of music and the celebrity women featured in the segments. My nephew who can’t remember what he has for homework, knows the words to a good portion of the songs. And me, I focused on the message in the lyrics. I heard something that I could really write sermons out of in each segment. I also focused on the message the presentation as a whole gives to women especially those who purchase Beyonce’s music. One thought we all had in common, is the thought that when something happens to you in life, something hurtful or maybe even tragic, your mind and body respond with a range of emotions.

Regardless if this story is borne out of personal experience or is purely for entertainment, the entire presentation gives a story about someone who has experienced something emotionally painful and is using music and artistic expression to convey a message to others who may have experienced the same thing.

Beyonce’s range of emotions, eleven of them to be exact—intuition, denial, anger, apathy, emptiness, accountability, reformation, forgiveness, resurrection, hope and redemption. I could write a series based on my life’s experience on each area when it comes to relationships. However, collaboratively, my message is this, when a situation occurs in life that may cause you to experience any of these, how do we rely on the Lord to get us through one to eleven? How do we get to the good news, how do we make lemonade out of a lemon/sour experience?

A message I read in the May 2016 Daily Word sums it up nicely:

“We just have to hold on, stay in prayer and remain faithful. When we're in the middle of the madness, it's sometimes hard to see past the present. But the good news is, we don't have to! All we have to do is give it ALL to God. Trust Him to sustain and protect you. Trust Him to handle it and work everything out exactly as it should be. TRUST GOD... then watch Him go to work.”



Blind Faith

By Rev. Emily D. Jenkins

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.”
~ Hebrews 11:1. (NKJV)

One Sunday I was preparing a worship/communion service for a nursing home where I volunteer. I noticed the room seemed darker than usual. Between the time I looked out the window where the sun was shining brightly, and back into the room, everything was as dark as midnight. I began to be concerned about the darkness. I looked into the next room and saw the same darkness that was surrounding me there. Was I dreaming? Had creatures from another planet invaded us and taken something very valuable from me? I found no answers to those questions. However, I was certain of one thing, in a matter of seconds, I had gone completely blind! Questions came that I could not answer. Would I ever be able to see again? Where should I go for help? But the most important one was how quickly could I get help for my unusual, and yes, very frightening situation?

Matthew 20: 29-34 tells of two blind men who Jesus healed of their blindness as He returned from Jericho. They began to call out to Jesus, “Oh *Lord, Son of David, Have mercy on us.*” The crowd tried to make them keep quiet but the two blind men called Jesus even louder, this time asking for mercy again. Would you believe that Jesus stopped right where they sat? Of all the people who were in that crowd, Jesus had no trouble identifying them. So, He asked them a very personal question, “What do you want Me to do for you?” They were ready with their request. “Lord, that our eyes may be opened.” They had probably been blind for a long time. And Jesus had compassion on them, touched their eyes and immediately their eyes received sight. And they followed Him. I started to pray as I remembered the blind men prayed. In their prayer, they called Jesus, Lord or Son of David. Jesus stopped and went to them. They recognized His healing power and they followed Him after Jesus had healed them. I can relate to their desire to regain their sight, or as in the case of the man born blind, to see something for the first time.

Faith @ Work

How would you respond to some drastic situation in your life that you had never experienced?

Where would you start looking for a remedy?

How could you put your faith to work in such a situation?

In the case of my blindness, I only had to endure six hours of darkness, from about noon to around six pm. My sight returned as suddenly that evening as it had left me that noon. I had laser surgery in the next day or so. And at my last doctor’s report, all should continue to go well. To God be all the glory and praise!



Worshipping

By Rev. J. Fredericka Eaddy

“The Lord says: ‘These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is based on merely human rules they have been taught.’”
~Isaiah 29:13 (NIV)

We have learned how to present ourselves in the best light, especially on Sunday morning. As preachers, teachers, worship or ministry leaders, we know what to say and how to say it in order to get a response from the congregation. Even when we are not directly responsible for leading worship, we have developed a vocabulary and memorized the clichés that go along with worship. But regardless of what others see and regardless of our ability to say the right thing, God knows the position of our heart.

And if our heart isn't in it, our worship is empty.

Real worship is a transformative act. It positions us before God with an open heart, receptive to revelation that will produce real change in our lives. For how can we be close to God, without seeing our need for God to wash us clean. How can we be close to God, without recognizing that without God we are nothing. There is no need for music or song. Sometimes, just sitting, in the silence, in God's presence is enough.



Photo Credit: Metropolitan Photography Ministry

Faith @ Work

Ask God's Holy Spirit to reveal to you the condition of your heart.

Prayer:

God,
Thank you for inviting me into your presence. Forgive me for the times that I honored you with my mouth but not my heart. Create in me a clean heart and renew within a right spirit that I might worship you will all of me. In Jesus' name.
Amen.



Faith @ Work

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