**A Charge to Keep**

**How My Mother Nurtured Purpose with a Song**

**Other Possible Titles:**

* **A Charge to Keep: That’s My Song!**
* **That’s My Song! How My Mother Nurtured Purpose with a Song**
* **How My Mother Planted Purpose with a Song**
* **A Charge to Keep I Have**
* **We’ve Been Charged**
* **You’ve Been Charged**

**Other Possible Subtitles:**

* **That’s My Song**
* **The Song that Can Influence Purpose**
* **The Song that Defines Your Charge**
* **How My Mother Planted Purpose with a Song**
* **How a Song Influenced My Life**
* **The Song that Influenced My Destiny**
* **The Song My Mother Planted**
* **The Song that Influenced My Life**

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**A Charge to Keep!**

**How My Mother Nurtured Purpose with a Song**



**EARLYE JULIEN**

**DEDICATION**

First, I thank God for this wonderful opportunity to witness about His goodness.

Second, this book is dedicated in loving memory of my mother who planted, watered and nurtured this seed (and countless others) whose hard shell has finally erupted and pushed through the good soil in which she planted it.  I am forever grateful.

I also extend heartfelt gratitude to my childhood village, the Lanes Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Downsville, Louisiana.  I am a product of the often-quoted adage which proclaims, “It takes a village to raise a child!” Thanks to each and every one of you who are still in the land of the living and I honor those who have gone to be with the Lord for keeping their God-given charge which laid the foundation for me to ultimately discover and keep mine. May God forever shine His face upon you.

Finally, to my “Mighty Men of God,” my husband Pastor Angelo (AJ) and sons Wesley and Jacobe, thank you for your endless love and support.

**INTRODUCTION: Planting Season**



There are so many things my Mother used to do or say and so many things she taught me to do or say that I didn’t understand as a child. Sometimes when I was dumbfounded with bewilderment and it all just seemed too complicated to understand, Mother would respond to my confusion with these words, “Just keep living!” She knew that just living life is an amazing teacher and only in time, would I come to understand some of the wisdom she tried to impart, some of the experiences she tried to expose me to and some of the words she made me learn and recite even if I had no understanding at the time. She knew in time, those mysteries would be revealed.

The words to the hymn, “A Charge to Keep I Have” written by Charles Wesley was one such mystery for me. I had no idea what the words to that song meant, nor how deeply they would eventually resonate with me. With a royal blue felt tipped ink pen, my mother permanently penned the words to that song in the front cover of the Bible she had given me. She made me recite the words over and over.  Every time I picked up that Bible, which was almost daily, the words of that hymn were staring me in the face.  I had no idea at the time that Mother was multiplying the fruit from the harvest of her own life by transferring seedling to mine.  As a farmer strategically and diligently tills the ground to plant the seeds of an anticipated harvest to come, my mother planted the words of that song in my mind believing that one day my heart would reap a harvest.

More importantly, than staining the words in my Bible or inscribing the words in my mind, she reached deep down and planted the spirit of the song in my heart.  How did she do that? She taught me to sing the song and made me sing it over and over. Then, she made me take possession of the song. She told me, “This is ***your*** song!” Every time she would tell me to sing it, she would say, “Sing your song!” Unbeknownst to me, the words of that song were gripping the soil of my heart and gradually forming deep and wide roots to anchor themselves in place.

Now this wasn’t just any old simple song. Though it was a traditional hymn which has been published in numerous hymnals, it was often sung in Southern, African American Baptist Churches as a call and response song. Call and response songs are a unique way of getting your audience to participate and respond to you. The leader of the song says a phrase of the song and then the audience responds by repeating that phrase and/or the next one.

So, Mother would make me lead and call out a phrase of the song and then she would respond. The sounds we made were painful to the ear, like the sound of children awkwardly making attempts to play instruments in a band for the very first time. We shrieked and croaked but she didn’t seem to care about that because the goal wasn’t the singing. She was planting!

I wasn’t exactly thrilled about this gift of being assigned my very own song. In fact, it became the source of much fear and frustration for me. One particular memory regarding this hymn is etched in my mind so vividly that if I close my eyes and allow my thoughts to transport me back to that particular place in time, I feel as if I’m actually reliving the moment all over again.

Mother proudly and firmly issued her command, “You will be singing your song for devotion at church next Sunday!” It was clear this was not a request and there was no alternative. Like a newly drafted soldier headed to war, I attempted to reason with my fear-cramped stomach. I told myself maybe it won’t be so bad. After all it’s a call and response song.  I reasoned it was sort of like being picked by the teacher to lead the Pledge of Allegiance in front of your classmates. You really only say a few of the words by yourself then everyone joins in. No one will dare tease me because one day it will be their turn. At least, that’s what I hoped.

Every night for an entire week before I went to bed Mother would come in my bedroom and say, “Sing your song!” We would bellow and croak, “A Charge to Keep I Have” with unmelodious tones until she was satisfied she had sufficiently watered and fertilized her seedling. Then she would stand watch as I got on my knees to say my prayers; her eyes closed and head tilted slightly upward as if basking in the warmth of God’s sunlight.

Finally, it was Sunday. I always looked forward to Youth Sunday! The second Sunday of every month was transformed from a regular church worship service to a boot camp training ground for every person in attendance under the age of 18. Envisioning their prized church of the *future*, the church leaders deemed it imperative to train the youth of *today*.  Every Youth Sunday, the youth were tasked with leading the various aspects of the Worship Service.  The youth would serve in every aspect of the order of service except the Message. They welcomed visitors, made the announcements about upcoming events, collected the tithes and offerings, served as ushers, choir members and led the devotional period which included a Scripture, Hymn and prayer.

The Order of Service which we referred to as the “program” was always printed out on paper and distributed by the ushers to the congregation along with an envelope for tithes and offerings.  As I waited for the devotional period, I held my program in my hand and watched it as if I was watching the second hand of a clock; each aspect of the program indicating time was quickly passing and I would soon be called upon to execute the orders of my commanding officer, “Sing Your Song!”

I wrung my sweaty hands together rhythmically as I rehearsed my song in my head. As I waited my turn and looked around the room into the faces of the people, sheer terror struck me as I feared the worst. Oh no! What if I’m so bad that when I call out my song no one responds?

I went from rehearsing my song in my head to repeating a prayer like a stuck song syndrome, “God please let them respond, God please let them respond, please let them respond, please let them respond, please let them respond!” The Mistress of Ceremony interrupted my pleas with an introduction, “Next, we will have our devotion.

That was my cue. Very slowly I shuffled to the front of that little old Baptist church and stood in front of the communion table, being ever so careful not to touch that table by mistake. As children, we were taught tremendous reverence for the ordinance of the Lord’s Supper and all the things associated with it that I’m sure I feared being struck by lightning or at the very minimum, a spanking and a long scolding about how disrespectful it was to touch that table.

So, I cautiously stood there looking at the people who were all looking back at me. I tugged downward at my little Sunday dress hoping it would hide my shaking knees. I could no longer hear the tune of my song in my head as it had been drowned out by the magnified sound of my racing heartbeat. I blinked frantically in an attempt to sooth my stinging eyes from the salty sweat that had begun to drip down my forehead and onto my lips which now tasted like the dense salt from saltine crackers. I tried to swallow but fear drained the moisture from my mouth as if I had bitten into an unripe persimmon and I longed for a cool glass of iced water. My body had frozen stiffly in place. Only my eyes moved.

As I slowly glanced left to right across the room, my eyes honed in on Mother. Without saying one word out of her mouth, her facial expression yelled, loudly, “Get a hold of yourself! You’d better get to singing your song!” My body suddenly broke out of its frozen pose, I closed my eyes tightly and just like we practiced, I bellowed out, “Aaaaaaaaa char-ar-arge,” “to-oo-oo kee-eep,” “I-I-I have.” Then, after what seemed like a long delay, the congregation responded in kind.

***“A charge to keep I have*, a *God to glory***

***A never dying soul to save* *and fit it for the sky***

***To serve the present age*, m*y calling to fulfill***

***Oh, may it all my powers engage* t*o do my master’s will.”***

That day, when I sung my song with the help of a live congregation, it reaffirmed Mother’s efforts to nurture purpose with every single phrase. The deep desire I now have to keep the charge God has given to me all started many years ago with that song.

Each phrase plowed deeply to plant a seed in the soil of my heart. One was planted to teach me how I have been charged by God with the responsibility to make a difference in this world. One was planted to teach me that I must obey the charge I have been given. Another one was planted to teach me that I must glorify God with my life and the final one was planted to teach me that I must serve others and I am empowered by God to fulfill that charge.

I didn’t understand it then when I was first introduced to the song. It was not until years that the Holy Spirit revealed to me what the words to that song meant and how my mother hadn’t just taught me a song, but more importantly, nurtured purpose.

Dear friend, as I share the revelation that I came to understand and embrace regarding that song, it is my hope that you will be inspired just as I have been. The world is waiting for your gifts to be released when you surrender and respond to the charge God has commanded you to keep.

**CHAPTER 1: A Charge to Keep**

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**A Charge to Keep I Have**

1. **You’ve Been Charged**

Leviticus 8:35 (NKJV) states:

***35****Therefore you shall stay at the door of the tabernacle of meeting day and night for seven days, and keep the [*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Leviticus%208%3A35&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-2953a)*]charge of the Lord, so that you may not die; for so I have been commanded.”*

It has been recorded that upon reading this passage of Scripture, Charles Wesley an English clergyman, poet and hymn writer, consulted a commentary written by Matthew Henry, an English Presbyterian minister and Bible expositor. Mr. Henry wrote the following words regarding Leviticus 8:35.

“*We have, every one of us, a charge to keep, an eternal God to glorify, an immortal soul to provide for, needful duties to be done, our generation to serve; and it must be our daily care to keep this charge, for it is the charge of the Lord our Master.”*

It was these words that inspired Charles Wesley to write the song, “A Charge to Keep I Have” and it was this same song that Mother used to teach, inspire and prompt me along my journey. In this particular context, Merriam Webster’s dictionary defines a “charge” as imposing a task or responsibility or commanding, instructing or exhorting with authority that someone perform a task or responsibility. Similarly, the Blue Letter Bible denotes that the word “charge” in Leviticus 8:35 is the Hebrew word, “mismeret” which can refer to duties or obligations we have been assigned to fulfill.

One of my favorite occasions to witness at church when I was a little girl was the “Right Hand of Fellowship.” This was our way of welcoming a new member who had just become a part of our congregation. It was also the first place outside of Mother’s teachings at home that I learned Christians had responsibilities.

At the close of every sermon, the deacons would line up across the front of the church like a branch of the armed forces to offer an invitation for anyone who was interested to become a member of our church. I had heard so many old Gospel songs and Spirituals as a child about getting your ticket and riding on trains that I always imagined those deacons as official train door keepers. They were browsing the crowd and waiting for someone to present them with the appropriate ticket indicating their bill had been paid in full. Once verified, the deacons could open the door and let the invitee get on the train to ride to their new life in Christ.

They would look intensely back and forth from one side of the church to the other while extending one hand toward the congregation and waiting for someone to make a move. The congregation was told that they could join the church by presenting a letter of recommendation from their previous church regarding their Christian experience, they could make their own verbal statement to the church regarding their Christian experience or they could be a person who wanted to profess their faith in Jesus for the very first time and subsequently request to be baptized.

Once an individual made their desire known, and completed any other relevant requirements, such as baptism, typically, the pastor or one of the deacons would shake the new member’s hand, and then announce in the most, Regal voice and manner possible that, “You are now an official member of the Lanes Chapel Missionary Baptist Church with all the rights, privileges and responsibilities of any other member.” Then, the entire church would explode in applause and Amen’s, then line up to shake the hand of the new member and congratulate them.

The official announcement was my favorite part. I was always happy to know someone had officially become a part of our church family but I was especially happy when that person was a child because that announcement made me feel like children were equally important to God in the church. There was no other time when I had ever heard anyone say a child had the same rights, privileges or responsibilities of an adult. Whether you were a child or an adult, everyone got the same welcome. It assured me that God loves us all the same and God expects everyone, adults and children alike to fulfill their responsibilities as a member of the family of God.

1. **Charged to Walk Worthy of Your Calling (Ephesians 4:1)**

*“As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received” (Ephesians 4:1 NIV).*

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word, “worth” as “having worth or value.” As a child, I worked hard at trying to earn worth because I wanted to feel worthy of the acceptance of my friends, worthy of my parent’s love, worthy of my teachers’ praise and worthy of God’s blessings. Trying to earn worth resulted in a continuous uphill battle. While I wanted to always experience the thrill of victory, I often experienced the agony of defeat. Although I believed I was a loyal friend, a loving daughter, a good-natured sibling and a highly accomplished student at school and an attentive student in my Sunday School class at church, I struggled with *feelings* of unworthiness and often felt pressured to perform.

That set me on a long and frustrating path of people-pleasing attempts, well into my early adult years. Failed attempts at people-pleasing were the source of much disappointment for me because it was a futile effort. It was an unrealistic goal. I could not please all the people all the time. Heck, most times I believed I had failed miserably at just trying to please Mother and trying to please some of the people some of the time and it made me feel afraid, insecure and unworthy.

Mother’s strict methods and high expectations in no way were intended, nor was it the intention of most of the other people in my life to make me feel unworthy. On the contrary, Mother’s objective was always to encourage and stretch me to excel. It was her desire to instill in me that I was capable of reaching the stars if I worked hard enough, regardless of what anyone else thought, said or even how I might feel.

When it came to school work, Mother had no tolerance for slacking, fooling around or subpar grades. She would say almost daily, “You have to be twice as good just to be allowed on an even playing field.” So, every day I awakened knowing I wasn’t good enough for some people. No! Somehow, I had to always strive to be twice as good just to be tolerated.

Now, I realize to some people, Mother’s expressions of exhortation may sound like cruel and unusual punishment; however, Mother was trying to equip me for success under cruel and unusual circumstances. The 1954 Brown v. Board of Education case ruled that state-sanctioned segregation of public schools was unconstitutional. Yet, in 1969 when I started elementary school, all the schools in my hometown were still racially segregated. It was not until 1970, by Court Order, that the schools in Union Parish where we lived were desegregated. My sister, Saundra and I were among the first students to integrate the schools in our hometown. Further, Saundra was in the first ever integrated high school graduation class in my hometown in 1971. Mother knew that being an African American female at that time in rural North Louisiana, would inevitably yield many challenges. Instilling a mindset to excel in spite of obstacles was absolutely necessary. Nevertheless, the tension of the times was stressful and as an impressionable child, I struggled to determine who I would believe about who I was and my worth, Mother (and Jesus) or others. Mother never allowed us to waller around in anger or spew hatred; not even in the face of hatred toward us. Whenever I would come to her with evil reports of what had been done or said, she would always say, “Baby, kill ‘em with kindness!”

One of my most precious possessions is my high school yearbook, only because of what my father wrote in it. He said that while he was certainly proud of my accomplishments, he loved me simply because I’m me. That day, I finally understood and felt what worthy is supposed to feel like. I felt like I was enough just as I was to him. It was the beginning of understanding that I didn’t have to earn my father’s love. He just loved me because I’m his. While there is a calling on our lives and while God is pleased when we walk worthy of that calling, His love for us is not dependent upon our performance. He loves us just because we are His.

One of my favorite Scriptures is Ephesians 1:18. The book of Ephesians is a letter that Apostle Paul wrote to a church he established in Ephesus, a city in ancient Greece. A portion of that letter includes a prayer that he prayed for that church.

Paul prayed (Ephesians 1:18 NKJV)

*“****18****the eyes of your [*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=ephesians%201%3A18&version=NKJV#fen-NKJV-29225a)*]understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”*

Above all, I think this is what Mother wanted me to understand. This is why she didn’t let me settle for less. This is why she demanded that I walk worthy. It was because the eyes of her understanding were enlightened. She knew the hope of His calling and the riches of the glory of His inheritance for me.

1. ***Charged to Co-laborer with God* (1 Corinthians 3:9)**

**9**For we are both God’s workers. And you are God’s field. You are God’s building (1 Corinthians 3:9 NLT)

**58**So, my dear brothers and sisters, be strong and immovable. Always work enthusiastically for the Lord, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever useless (1 Corinthians 15:8 NLT)

1. ***Charged to Steward Over Our Gifts* (talents parable; Matthew 25:14–30)**

It is irrefutable that God has given every believer at least one spiritual gift. I Peter 4:10 (NKJV) states, ***“****As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.”* So, you have received one or more gifts; but, have you ever feared your God-given gifts weren’t dynamic enough to be effective for the Kingdom? As you watch others seemingly flow effortlessly in their gifts that shine intensely and gloriously like bonfires ablaze, do yours appear to be a flickering spark in comparison? My dear friend, I can relate. For years, I was bound by feelings of insignificance that kept the gifts God bestowed upon me hidden, silent and at the mercy of other people’s approval.

The good news is that those long-engrained fears and feelings of insignificance were all lies introduced by Satan in his attempts to kill, steal and destroy the purpose, impact and effectiveness of my God-given gifts.

Satan wants that same demise for you too. But his weapons against you will not prosper because I have a charge; a command from God that I must keep and part of that charge is to reveal the truth about the purpose of your God-given gifts so the world can experience God’s grace through you. The truth is your gifts are unique and were specifically designed by God. The truth is your gifts are significant. The truth is God can do amazing things with your gifts according to the supernatural power that works in you. The truth is your gifts were given to you to glorify God. The truth is your gifts are necessary for such a time as this and you have a spiritual responsibility to minister to others as a good steward of the manifold grace of God.

**CHAPTER 2: Charged to Glorify God**

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**A God to Glorify**

1. ***Charged to Glorify God with a Transformed Life (Romans 12:2 NKJV)***

**2**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what *is* that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

***INSERT HERE***

1. ***Charged to Glorify God in Everything (1 Corinthians 10:31 & Colossians 1:16)***

*“So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31 NIV).*

Have you ever gone through whatever is a typical week for you, month or even a full year and at the end of that week, month or year felt empty or unaccomplished? At various seasons in my life, I have felt sort of like those display maps at the entrance of a shopping mall that shows, “*you are here*” and you realize that where you want to be is somewhere far over “*there*” and you’re not quite sure how to get there or even if you get there if you will find what you’re longing for.

Those are the seasons I have most struggled with purpose. Those are the seasons when I long to be like others who clearly seem to have been born to do a single, specific thing and they’re killing it! I can see clearly that a particular person was born to play the piano. Another one was born to teach children. Another person was born to play football and the glory that exudes from their lives has left me wondering what is the thing I was born to do? Or, what am I supposed to be doing in this season? Time after time I’ve asked myself that question and most every time, the Holy Spirit reminds me of Colossians 1:16 (Message) which states:

*“We look at this Son and see God’s original purpose in everything created. For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels-everything got started in Him and finds its purpose in Him.”*

No matter what I do or what I set out to accomplish, whether related to family, church, work, school, community or otherwise, it should be initiated with a single purpose in mind. My purpose is to glorify God with my life. This, for me, establishes the foundation upon which everything in my life should be built and all my plans should be constructed. Rick Warren’s book The Purpose Driven Life: What on Earth Am I Here For? Regarding purpose, Rick stated in part:

*[Without purpose, life has no meaning. Without a clear purpose you have no foundation on which you base decisions, allocate your time and use your resources. You will tend to make choices based on circumstances, pressures and your mood at that moment. Knowing your purpose simplifies your life. It defines what you do and what you don’t do. Your purpose becomes the standard you use to evaluate which activities are essential and which aren’t. You simply ask, “Does this activity help me fulfill one of God’s purposes for my life?”] (Warren, 2008).*

Purpose is appointed, revealed and fulfilled by our Creator.

1. **Charged to Glorify God with Worship**

INSERT HERE

1. **Charged to Glorify God with Light**

INSERT HERE

(\*Note to Self: Keep this passage of Scripture in mind when writing this section.)

Matthew 5: 13-14 (NIV)

**13**“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled underfoot.

**14**“You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. **15**Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16**In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.

1. **Charged to Glorify God with Much Fruit (John 15:1-2 NIV)**

My grandparents lived in a community where many people were farmers, if not primarily, at least part-time. My grandfather and three of his brothers, (Uncle Henry, Uncle Joe and Uncle Clarence Hodge) were neighbors on a fairly large estate of land and they all engaged in farming. They purchased minimal food from grocery stores, as they raised or grew most of their food themselves. Their livestock included hogs, chickens, cattle and horses. They also had several ponds in which they raised fish. Their agricultural produce included too many to name but I especially recall corn, field peas, string beans, greens of various sorts, sweet potatoes, okra, tomatoes, watermelon and sugar cane.

As children when playing outside, we didn’t have to struggle to inarticulately or unsuccessfully express the perfect words to persuade our grandparents to let us have a snack before dinner. Snacks were readily available within an arm’s reach as they grew peaches, pears, figs, plums, persimmons, pomegranates, blackberries, pecans, walnuts, hickory nuts, dark purple muscadine grapes and greenish-bronze colored scuppernong grapes which we referred to as “scuff-a-dines” to rhyme with muscadines. Needless to say, they were extremely hard-working people. Their consistent commitment to hard work day-in and day-out from sun-up to sun-down during the planning, planting and growing seasons were diligently endured for the purpose and hope of producing not just a good harvest, but a great one.

Jesus used this concept to teach his disciples what is necessary for our lives to produce a great harvest. In John 15:1 (NIV) Jesus said,

“*1 I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener*.”

Further, verses 4 and 5 state:

“*4Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. 5“I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you* ***will*** *bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (emphasis supplied, NIV).*

First, notice, that Jesus promises that if we remain in him, we ***will*** bear much fruit but disconnected from him, we can’t do anything. So, if we want fruitful lives, we must remain in him. Insert definition for remain. To remain in Him we must stay connected to him. Most of us understand what it takes to stay connected to someone. It requires time, effort and commitment to cultivate a relationship and it requires time, effort and commitment to sustain or remain in a relationship.

When you remain in a relationship with someone that typically means you are in regular communion with them. As a result of that regular communion, they are on your mind more often. When you see someone often and talk with them often, you tend to consider their thoughts and opinions because they are an active part of your daily life. You include them in your decisions and may even call them to share what’s going on in your day or ask them about there day. You invite them to attend events with you and remember to celebrate special occasions with them. You buy them gifts to celebrate what is important to them and expect them to celebrate you. You come to know their characteristics better and anticipate their needs.

However, have you ever noticed that distance can negatively impact a relationship? Most people don’t intend to disconnect with a person with whom they have a good relationship. It just sort of seems to decline over time. It starts with small things like talking less or forgetting to include them in your day-to-day activities. Then eventually, you realize that you have “lost touch” as we often say. That’s what happens when we fail to stay connected with God. We lose touch and find ourselves totally disconnected.

There are several things I find to be critical to cultivating and sustaining a connection with God. The first one is prayer.

INSERT HERE about prayer

Another way to maintain your connection with God is to practice keeping your mind on the things of the Spirit. That requires spending time reading, meditating and focusing on the Word of God.

Read the Word and/or listen to it. Find someone to talk with about it. Then spend some time just thinking about it. Then consider the different ways it is relevant to you. Then pray about it and ask God to help you apply it and adopt its principles without compromise as a way of life.

*John 15:15 “I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener.*

*2He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes[*[*a*](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=John%2015&version=NIV#fen-NIV-26702a)*] so that it will be even more fruitful.*

Besides the cutting that takes place when you are bearing no fruit, notice that even if you’re bearing fruit, God desires for us to be even more fruitful and to accomplish that, He prunes. Prunes means to cut. (insert definitions here)

Most of us probably want to bear much fruit but we’re not always willing to allow God to do everything that it takes to bear much fruit. So, we must consider how serious we are about really wanting to bear the most possible fruit we can bear because what we say we want from God has to drive how much we are willing to surrender ourselves and everything associated with us to God. That means 1) letting go of anything and everything that hinders us from bearing fruit and 2) allowing God to prune the things that are bearing fruit.

The book, **Good to Great** by Jim Collins explains the concept that good is often the enemy of great. We get comfortable and often settle for good, when what God really desires for us is great. When we work hard and accomplish something that we set out to do, our tendency sometimes is to become complacent. But as followers of Christ, we should never get too comfortable staying in the same place, doing the same things. God is committed to our fruit bearing and that includes cutting away things that get in the way but we must be willing to cooperate with Him and trust that He knows what is best for us.

We must take a position of absolute vulnerability and surrender. We must be willing to release even those things that we believe are good things to do because not everything we spend our time doing bears fruit. Some things that once bore fruit are no longer bearing fruit. Some things we spend our time doing are not what we’ve truly been called to do. Some things we spend our time doing have reached God’s expiration date. Some things we spend our time doing are really for the purpose of self-satisfaction and some things we spend our time doing are to please other people.

Ultimately, we must seek God’s plans for us daily.

**CHAPTER 3: Charged to Grow in Grace**

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**“A Never Dying Soul to Save and Fit it for the Sky”**

1. **Charged to Be a Good Disciple**
2. **Charged to Keep Oil in My Lamp**
3. **Charged to Run a Good Race**

**CHAPTER 4: Charged for This Generation**

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**To Serve the Present Age**

1. **Charged for Such a Time as This**
2. **Charged to Use Your Voice**

When I accepted my call into the ministry, my husband encouraged me to just be myself. I felt so much pressure trying to please everyone. My husband cautioned me not to ever try to please people, rather try to please God. He also said you’re not called to minister to everyone. You’re called to minister to the people God has fashioned to hear his voice through your voice. That relieved a lot of the pressure to know that just like everyone has their favorite styles of music, certain people can explain things in a way that we can understand it better than others.

1. **Charged to Make a Difference**

**CHAPTER 5: Charged to Fulfill the Calling**

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**My Calling to Fulfill**

1. **Charged to Do Your Part**

Lately, it seems I’ve seen an increase in adages publicly posted that promote the concept of togetherness. “Better Together,” “Teamwork Makes the Dream Work,” “Strength in Unity,” and so on. We need each other. Even scientific studies have confirmed that social isolation negatively effects mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. (Maybe insert a study or 2 to support this claim)

The extent of that need for others may vary from person to person but everyone has a need for human interaction and belonging. That’s not surprising because God made us that way. The church is intended to be a body of many believers working together, each doing their part in the body.

1Corinthians 12:20-21 states:

***20****But now indeed there are many members, yet one body.****21****And the eye cannot say to the hand, “I have no need of you”; nor again the head to the feet, “I have no need of you.”*

1Corinthians 12:26 states:

***26****And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.*

My childhood memories of my church reflect so much more than a gathering place to worship on Sundays. Church served as the village that we so often refer to that is necessary to effectively raise a child. I’m sure my church wasn’t perfect because even churches are made up of imperfect people relying on the perfection of Jesus and his love to cover our multitudes of offenses.  Also, I grew up during an era when children weren’t allowed to be in “grown folks’ business.” So, if there were serious problems, I didn’t learn about them first-hand. Children weren’t allowed to even be in the same room when adults were discussing the life issues and problems (including church) that I now know were probably taking place.

Nevertheless, church was a place that taught me a little bit about what the Acts 2 church might have been like. My church was a small church located in a small farming community in Downsville, Louisiana where everyone knew everyone and everyone seemed to, in some way, impact everyone else’s life and was an extended family.

It wasn’t uncommon to observe group projects at my church. For example, periodically, the church scheduled clean-up days. Everyone would bring their own cleaning supplies and yardwork tools and clean the church together. The men and boys typically worked on the outside mowing the grass, pulling weeds, painting and making minor repairs. The women and girls typically worked on the inside dusting, sweeping, mopping and the like. I’m sure I didn’t do much cleaning but I sure did enjoy helping to prepare the lemonade and sandwiches for the lunch breaks.

Mother always verbally stressed the importance to “do your part!” However, what she actually modeled was to do your part and as a back-up be prepared to do someone else’s part as well, which she often did! She was always prepared to step in for the less fortunate who wanted to do their part but couldn’t as well as those who had the means and ability to do their part but wouldn’t. She had a special God-given ability to anticipate potential gaps and mitigate them before they had an opportunity to manifest. She was the proverbial glue that always seemed to hold things together. She possessed and exercised apostolic qualities to bring people of all differing experiences and abilities together and lead them in accomplishing great works collectively. I think Mother loved those days too. She took pleasure in serving people and working with people to make a difference. Those church members worked together like a well-oiled machine and afterward, everything looked and smelled amazing.

One time after one of those clean-up days, as I started getting ready for bed, the pleasant vision of those people working so diligently together yet also incorporating laughter and fellowship kept invading my thoughts as I read from the little black Bible my mother had given me.

***18****But our bodies have many parts, and God has put each part just where he wants it.****19****How strange a body would be if it had only one part!****20****Yes, there are many parts, but only one body.****21****The eye can never say to the hand, “I don’t need you.” The head can’t say to the feet, “I don’t need you.” (1 Corinthians 12:18-20)*

My imagination operated without adult limitation and the words marched like soldiers from the pages manifesting the spiritual intent in a visual way that my young mind surprisingly accurately perceived. Each soldier represented a different body part with different features, functions and abilities, yet all working together for the good of each part and the whole body.  The arms didn’t compete with the legs nor the eyes with the ears. They were all committed to their own God ordained charge working in concert with the other parts so that each part and the whole body could function optimally.

***26****If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad. (1 Corinthians 12:26)*

I imagined the toe soldier accidentally stumped itself against a rock, and all the other body part soldiers reacted to his pain. I imagined the stomach soldier ate a delicious meal and the entire body danced and flailed around with joy because they too experienced the stomach’s satisfaction.

***4****Pay careful attention to your own work, for then you will get the satisfaction of a job well done, and you won’t need to compare yourself to anyone else.****5****For we are each responsible for our own conduct.*

In the Kingdom of God, everyone has a responsibility to fulfill. People are waiting to be blessed by you choosing to do your part.

1. **Charged to Love**

Besides the command to love God, he has also charged us to love others. Loving others can be difficult because we erroneously have a plethora of criteria for who does and does not deserve our love. Prospective recipients of our love must look a certain way, sound a certain way, have a special connection with us and prove themselves in advance. If ever I was hesitant to extend kindness or if I made preconceived judgments, Mother would quote, “Love will cover a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8 NKJV). Then she would say, “Always remember, you are not better than anyone else, you’re just better off than a lot of people. There will always be people greater and lesser than you. Learn from those who are greater and help those who are less fortunate.” Mother taught me a valuable lesson about loving people we may deem unlovable. She said with a smirky grin, “God’s love inside you is so strong, if given a chance, you can learn to love an old mangy dog.” I knew exactly what she meant.

There was an old stray dog that had been hanging around the area near our house looking for scraps of food. He was affected with mange which is a skin disease caused by parasitic mites and looked absolutely horrific. He was skinny, had only a few patches of hair and always walked with his tail tucked and ears hung down as if he was embarrassed. Whenever he came near, the kids in the area, including me, would throw rocks at the scary looking animal and yell for him to “Get away!”

One thanksgiving my mother told me to take all the scraps from our plates, empty them into the, now empty, gallon ice cream bucket and set it out for the old dog. Reluctantly, I gathered the scraps of food and set the bucket out far across the street near an open field where the dog had often been spotted. Then I ran home as fast as I could in case the dog actually showed up. He didn’t show up right away. So periodically, I would crack the front door slightly and stick my head out to see if the dog had discovered the scraps. After a period of time, the dog showed up. Too afraid to watch with the door open, I watched the dog devour the scraps from our living room window. The next day we feasted on Thanksgiving left overs. So once again, Mother instructed me to take the scraps out for the dog. This time when I went to leave the scraps, I could see the dog peeking through some bushes from a distance. When we locked eyes, realizing we had seen each other, we both took off running in opposite directions out of fear. Shortly after I made it home, I watched through the living room window as the old dog slowly and hesitantly moved toward the food and began eating. Day after day, I collected our scraps and continued leaving it out for the dog. The dog and I had both grown accustomed to our ritual. Except, now instead of across the street, I would leave the bucket of scraps just at the edge of our yard. When I left the house, I called out, “Dog!” and the old dog would come out of hiding and head to the designated bucket. We had both become comfortable enough that I would stand near while he ate and even talk to him as he appeared to look up periodically and listen.

Mother, who was ironically very afraid of dogs if they got too close, got some sort of medicines from the pharmacy for my Daddy to spray on the dog and another kind of medicine to put in the dog’s scrap food. Eventually, the mange cleared up, the dog gained weight and grew a full healthy looking fluffy coat of black hair. When I called for him, it was no longer, “Dog!” Rather, I affectionately called out, “Here Fluffy! Come here Fluffy! There was no more hesitation. The dog now responded quickly to my call and I in turn waited anxiously for him to come to the new designated spot right at the edge of our front porch. I had fallen in love with an old mangy dog. And the old mangy dog had responded to my love. Love changed that old unlovable mangy dog into a fluffy lovable pet.

1 Corinthians 13:4-8 (NIV) states,” ***4****Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.****5****It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs.****6****Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth.****7****It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*”

**INSERT MORE TO CLOSE THIS SECTION HERE**

1. **Charged to Give**

**INSERT HERE**

1. **Charged to Help**

**INSERT HERE**

1. **Charged to Disciple/Teach (Luke 22:32)**

I once heard a colleague, Attorney Amber Wells say, “Christians are practitioners.”

INSERT HERE

**CHAPTER 6: Charged with Power**

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**Oh, May It All My Powers Engage**

1. **Charged with Power to Witness**

INSERT Story about Miss Jessy’s Jelly Curl

Talk about witnessing and how it’s just telling your story and how good God has been to you.

1. **Charged to Believe in the Power of God’s Word**

Often, we’re not fulfilling our God-given potential because we’re afraid or intimidated. Our first response to God is often, “I can’t do that” or “I feel inadequate.”

If you’ve ever responded this way, trust me, you’re not alone. Truth be told, we’re all inadequate. We can’t do anything that God has called us to do in our own strength, nor does he want us to do anything in our own strength.

I’ve heard numerous people say, “God doesn’t always call those who are qualified, but He always qualifies those whom He calls.” I’m learning to embrace the fact that what God wants is willing vessels who will lean and depend on Him and boldly and courageously walk by faith; not because of the confidence we have in ourselves, but because of the confidence we have in Him. In 1 Samuel Chapter 17: 45-46 (NLT), King David exemplified this type of confidence in God. David boldly and courageously proclaimed to Goliath:

*“You come to me with sword, spear, and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the Lord of Heaven’s Armies—the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.****46****Today the Lord will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head.”*

Notice, David said, “The Lord will conquer you.” Even though David physically engaged in the fight with Goliath, he was able to do so with boldness and courage because he understood this was the Lord’s battle and the Lord would cause him to be victorious. This shows us that the more we exercise our faith in God to allow God’s power to **work “in us”** the more we will see God’s **greatness working “through us.”**

I used to be paralyzed by feelings of inadequacy. Many times, I had felt God’s urging me to do various things but I had allowed fear and insecurity to speak louder in my life than the voice of God and that was causing me much pain and sorrow in my heart. One time in particular, I was asked to serve as the speaker for the upcoming Sunday morning Women’s Day Service by the Women’s Day Committee at Second Baptist Church in Rock Island, IL where Rev. Joseph D. Williamson, III serves as Pastor. I quickly, emphatically and without hesitation, responded, “No!” Yet, at the same time, I had a craving for more. I knew that there was more of God to be revealed that I was missing out on, I knew that there was more to me that I hadn’t discovered yet, and I knew that there was more to the plan God had for my life. I desperately wanted to grow in my faith so that I could be obedient to the call of God on my life. I wasn’t able to verbalize exactly what “more” meant or what that would look like. I just knew that where I was in my relationship with God and my service to the Kingdom was not where I needed to be.

My cousin, Kysundra Collins had been experiencing some similar feelings. As we encouraged one another, we recognized the only way to access more of God was to seek Him more. So, we agreed to be each other’s accountability partners and get up early before work and pray together. That was really a struggle for me because I tend not to be an early morning person, so this was a real sacrifice for me so I needed an accountability partner. Every week day, we would meet at the church at 6:00am to pray. We always ended our prayer time by reading aloud, Ephesians 6:10-20. We knew that being consistent in this endeavor would not be easy and that the enemy would raise attempts against us to try to cause us to quit. So, every day we read that Scripture emphasizing the pieces of armor that God has given us to put on so we would be able to stand against the schemes of the enemy.

A year later, the Women’s Day Committee, once again asked me to serve as the speaker. This time, I still hesitated but was asked to pray about it. I had never done anything quite like that before, so I was quite baffled as to how they had even come to consider me. I loved singing in the choir and directing children’s and young adult choirs. While I had attended regularly, I had never even taught a Sunday School class. So, as I prayed to God, I asked Him why He would have them consider such a thing. In response, I felt the Holy Spirit urge me to ready Ephesians 6:10-20, the daily Scripture I had been reading for almost a year. However; I resisted, rationalizing to myself like a know-it-all teenager that I already know. I knew that reading about putting on the armor of God had absolutely nothing to do with speaking before a congregation and wouldn’t be helpful at all to read regarding this matter. So, I asked God again why I was being asked to speak before a crowd of people and got the same response. Reluctantly, I picked up my Bible and began to read that passage of Scripture. At first, it was just what I expected it would be. I was disappointed because after all, I had read this Scripture every day for almost a year and could visualize the pieces of armor in my head. I knew all about the Belt of Truth, the Breastplate of Righteousness, having my feet shod with the Gospel of Peace, the Shield of Faith, the Helmet of Salvation and the Sword of the Spirit and I needed to pray always. Then suddenly, there it was. It hit me like a brick in the head sight unseen. Why had I not seen this before? Even though I had read these words many times before, it was as if I had only focused on the armor and kind of checked out on the rest of the Scripture. The Lord revealed to me that He was merely answering my prayer. That for almost a year, not only had I clothed myself in the armor of God (verses 10-18) but I had also prayed verses 19-20 which stated:

***19****and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel,****20****for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

So, I thanked God and told the committee, I accept the invitation.

1. **Charged to be Bold and Courageous**

Once I accepted the invitation to minister the Word for the Women’s Day Celebration, I went to seek out my Pastor for counseling. I was in desperate need of encouragement and direction now that I had agreed to the invitation. When I arrived, I knew he was somewhere in the church but he wasn’t in his office. Since his door was open, I assumed he would be back shortly. So, I went inside his office and sat down in a chair closest to the office door to wait for him. While I was waiting, I calmed by nerves by focusing on the décor and various objects in his office.

I had seen him wear a Superman belt and t-shirt before but I hadn’t realized until then, that he obviously had a real fondness for the character. His office was filled with Superman paraphernalia. There was even a decal on his computer. I sat there wondering what was up with the Superman infatuation. The chatterbox of insecurity reasoned in my head, after all, surely, he knows Superman is nobody but old goofy Clark Kent. Clark is a clumsy introvert, who seems to be easily intimidated, lacks confidence, and can’t hardly make a full sentence in the presence of Lois Lane without stuttering. Nope, I thought to myself, I’m not impressed with Clark Kent at all. My eyes combed the room again, looking for something else to focus on that would calm my nerves and spark a little bit of hope while I waited.

For some reason, my eyes honed in on the “S” in the Superman logo that was encompassed by a diamond. At that moment, the Holy Spirit reminded me that while Clark Kent was indeed unremarkable, he had access to that special suit with the big “S” on it. Whenever he puts on the suit, he is suddenly transformed and Clark Kent with all his flaws hidden. He no longer presents as Clark Kent. Rather, Clark Kent is suddenly moved out of the way, so Superman can come forth and serve mankind. Superman has power. Superman has X-ray vision. Superman can leap tall buildings in a single bound. People look at Superman and immediately know there is something special about him.

It came to me that when Pastor Collins first gets up to preach, he’s just a man like any other man. He’s just Marlon Collins. But just before he preaches, he always says a prayer. And in that prayer, he always asks God to send the real preacher. He takes off himself and allows God to transform him into God’s mouthpiece by the power of the Holy Spirit.

As I began the writing of this book, I didn’t do it alone. I’m too inadequate for that. But God has provided to each of us a helper. It is through the power of the Holy Spirit that we can accomplish all that God has for us to do. Alone, we are limited but with God nothing is impossible. Nothing is too hard for God.

Whatever, you have been struggling over due to fear or insecurities or doubt as to whether you can, rest assuredly, that with God, you can. Yes, you can go back to school. Yes, you can start a ministry. Yes, you can own a business. Yes, you can stop a bad habit. Yes, you can raise your children. Yes, you can.

**CHAPTER 7: Charged to do the Master’s Will**

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**To Do My Master’s Will**

1. **Not My Will but His**

### [Ephesians 2:10](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ephesians+2%3A10&version=ESV) **ESV / 59 helpful votes**Helpful Not Helpful

For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.

1. **Discovering What’s in the Will**
2. **The Will is Sealed**

**CHAPTER 8: Your Charge to Keep**

The words of the song my mother taught me when I was just a little girl, demonstrate a commitment felt by a previous generation to know God themselves then tell the story to "the present age." We all have a charge to serve "this present age;” this present generation.

(Note to self: try to find the author of this story to properly credit and cite it).

There’s a story of a little girl who was very close to her grandmother. Grandmother always took time to go to her room at bedtime, pull up the rocking chair and read her stories from an old storybook given to her by *her* mother, every night … without fail. After a while Grandmother got sick. Shortly after the little girl learned that grandma had gone to be with the Lord. The little girl became very concerned. Not about her grandmother because she understood that grandmother was with the Lord. The question that bothered her was, "Whose going tell the story?"

That night her mother came into her room and tucked her daughter in bed. And because she was tired from the day’s work, she sat in the old rocking chair. Instantly the little girl sat up in her bed and displayed the biggest smile. The mother asked her, “Why are you smiling so?”

The little girl pulled out the old storybook that had passed through three generations and put it in her mother's lap. She said, “You’re sitting in grandmother’s chair. So, ***you*** have to tell the story!"

The world is in need of a Savior, and the people of this present age want to know, “Who will tell the story?” We are all sitting in the seats of grandmothers and grandfathers past who have told the story of Jesus.

Each of us is charged to tell the story of the great things God has done in the past, what he is doing today and the greater things to come. And Greater can begin right now!

INSERT - worksheets

You have a charge to keep. Keep it.

You’ve been charged to glorify God. Glorify Him.

You’ve been charged to serve others. Serve them.

You’ve been charged for this generation. Serve this generation.

You’ve been charged with power. Exercise it.

You’ve been charged to do the Master’s will. Do it.

**CHAPTER 9: In Honor and Loving Memory of Mother**



Mrs. Mary Gordon Meadors Adams

1923-2019

**Early Years**

Mary Gordon Meadors Adams was born September 8, 1923 in Junction

City, Arkansas to the late Gordon Welcome Meadors and Vata

Slaughter Meadors. Mary accepted Christ as her personal savior and

joined the church at an early age. Mary’s mother taught all her children

to sing and to play the fiddle, organ and piano. As a young girl, Mary

and her sisters toured Arkansas and Louisiana singing gospel music.

**Education**

Mary was passionate about education for herself and others. She

boarded with principal R.J. McDaniel and his family while attending

Elliott High School in Bernice, LA. She excelled in her studies and

participated in many extra curricula activities. The Elliott girls’

basketball team even won the Louisiana State Basketball Championship

while she was a member of the team.

Mary attended college at Southern University in Baton Rouge, LA where she met her husband, Oakland Boyce Adams. She graduated with

a major in Home Economics and accepted a job in Virginia as a Home

Demonstration Agent. Mary later attended the University of Southern California and Grambling State University where she earned a Masters’ Degree in Sports Administration.

**Marriage and Family**

Mary married Oakland Boyce Adams on January 5, 1946. She

affectionately called him, “Daddy” and he affectionately called her,

“Sweet.” They were happily married for 63 years before his death in

May 2009. To this union 4 children were born.

**Career**

Mary earned a certificate as a practical nurse and was also a licensed

beautician. She taught 7th grade at Lincoln High School, Home

Economics at Union Parish Training School, Physical Education and

Girls’ basketball at Eastside High School and Social Studies, Driver’s

Education and Physical Education at Farmerville High School.

**Christian Living**

Mary was a devout Christian and truly a virtuous woman. Mary and

Oakland attended church at Lanes Chapel Baptist Church in Downsville,

LA. Mary loved God and His Word and was a gifted teacher. She was

passionate about Christian education and loved teaching children and

youth. Not only did Mary teach her own children about the Bible and

Jesus’ amazing love for us, but she reached out to other children in the

community and would teach them and take them to church along with

her family. She taught Sunday School, Baptist Training Union (BTU),

Sunshine Band, Red Circle and other educational arms of the church.

She served as a Deaconess and was a member of the Mission Board and

Mother’s Board. She was active in the 3 rd District Sunday School

Institute, served as Vice President of the Women’s Department of the

Liberty Hill Baptist Association and always attended the State Baptist

Convention, the National Baptist Congress of Christian Education and

the National Baptist Convention where she made sure that her children

participated in the Christian youth programs. Even at age 96, when her

health allowed, Mary still attended church services at Mt. Nebo and

would sometimes attend services at St. James in Sterlington, LA.

Community

Mary loved people and was extremely generous. She would make

quilts, jelly, preserves and bake fruit cakes and donate them all freely to

anyone who requested. She was also a great entertainer and loved to

cook and serve groups of family and friends. The highlight at many

gatherings would be her entertaining with one of her many stories,

poems or even “raps” which were often requested. She would receive

special requests from athletes, cheerleaders and fans to lead the crowd

in her signature “WHAT?” cheer at many sporting events. She also

wrote the school song for Eastside High School.

Mary had a special ability for bringing out the best in young people.

She would point out special gifts and talents that they had not seen in

themselves and encourage them to strive for success and excellence in

anything they attempted to do. She enjoyed teaching children how to

cook and sew and was a great public speaking coach. She taught young

people how to “enunciate” the English language with assertion and

conviction often using poetry and short speeches as a means to teach

and build their self-confidence. She was a stickler for proper etiquette

and hygiene and was never too busy to spend time teaching young

women to present themselves as ladies.

She was a member of the following Civic, Social and Educational

Organizations: Delta Sigma Theta Sorority (Lifetime member), Order of

Eastern Star, Southern University Alumni Association, Louisiana

Education Association and Foster and Adoptive Parents Association.

Mary retired from teaching in 1980, but continued to devote her time

to her family, church and community. She and Oakland delivered the

“Meals on Wheels” for senior citizens for Downsville, LA for 20 years.

After retiring from public school teaching, Mary and Oakland also

became the adoptive parents of three young children.

**Her Departure**

She departed this life on Friday, November 22, 2019 at 9:30 a.m.

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Clipart of little girl holding mic and singing

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**MISCELLANEOUS**

Note to self: (Below is just miscellaneous writing to possibly include somewhere or maybe not. This is from times when I just wrote what I was thinking about without knowing if it was intended for this book or not.)

Whenever, I got in trouble for doing something I shouldn’t have or for failing to do something I should, after Mother scolded me, she would always make me read Exodus 20:12 (NKJV), “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God is giving you.” Or, Ephesians 6:1 (NKJV), “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Or, other Scriptures about obedience to God, doing what is right or doing what is wise.

You may be wondering, how I made the transition. How did I go from feeling like my gifts are insignificant to feeling honored for any opportunity to use all that God has given me for His glory?

My memories of times like these are so good and pleasant that to this very day, whenever I have the opportunity to speak before a group of people at church for various celebratory occasions, it is common that I will begin by quoting, “Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1)