**A Charge to Keep!**

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



**EARLYE JULIEN**

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**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 particular 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 to Mother and Daddy for being amazing, God-centered role models for marriage and parenting.

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.

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**INTRODUCTION: Teach Them Diligently**



**6And you must commit yourselves wholeheartedly to these commands that I am giving you today. 7Repeat them again and again to your children. Talk about them when you are at home and when you are on the road, when you are going to bed and when you are getting up. 8Tie them to your hands and wear them on your forehead as reminders. 9Write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.**

**Deuteronomy 6:6-9 (NLT)**

Before the foundation of the world, God knew you, loved you, chose you and charged you with responsibilities to fulfill His purpose and plan for the salvation of the world.

This book is an invitation to observe a disciple in the making through one mother’s love and determination to help her daughter discover some of the responsibilities God calls each of us to fulfill.

Using the words of a song, my mother wholeheartedly committed herself to teach me the godly principles each line of the song represents. As directed by Deuteronomy 6:6-9, she repeated those principles again and again in word and deed before I went to bed at night and when I got up in the mornings until they were woven into my heart’s desire for the work of my hands as if literally tied like reigns and unbeknownst to me, guiding my every move. She repeated them again and again in my going out and my coming in until my every decision was like glancing into a mirror of principles pasted to my forehead as a reminder to check my actions against the reflection of those principles.

It is my hope that not only will you be inspired to fulfill the charge God has assigned to you, but that you will be inspired to teach your children and your children’s children again and again, the importance of fulfilling the responsibilities God has charged them to fulfill.

**CHAPTER 1: Planting Season**



***PLANTING SEEDS***

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 due season those mysteries would be revealed.

The words to the hymn, “A Charge to Keep I Have” written by Charles Wesley was one such mystery. 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 in the style of a spiritual meter hymn also referred to 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 exact phrase or the next one.

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 an elementary school 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!

***FERTILIZING***

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. I really only had to say a few of the words by myself then everyone would join 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 the seeds she planted in me to ensure a great future harvest. 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 and thanking Him in faith for what she believed was already done.

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 Ministry of the preached Word. However, they were sometimes tasked with giving a meditation. 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 the Worship Service which we informally 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 admonished loudly, “Get a hold of yourself! Sing your song!” While at the same time, it served as an encouraging nudge, “Go on now, you can do this!” 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 sang 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 seeds in the soil of my heart. Seeds were planted to teach me how I have been charged by God with the responsibility to make a difference in this world. Seeds were planted to teach me that I must obey the charge I have been assigned. Seeds were planted to teach me that I must glorify God with my life. Seeds were planted to teach me that I must serve others and seeds were planted to reassure me that I am empowered by God to fulfill the charge. After planting these seeds of Godly service and devotion, Mother continued to water and fertilize what she had planted but she knew it was God who ultimately would make them grow.

***6****I planted the seed, Apollos watered it, but God has been making it grow. (1 Corinthians 3:6, NIV).*

I didn’t understand it then when I was first introduced to the song. It was not until years later that Holy Spirit revealed to me what the words to that song meant and how Mother hadn’t just taught me a song, but more importantly, she had nurtured good works within me that God had already purposed for me to do.

***10****For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:10, NIV).*

Dear friend, as I share the revelation that I have come to understand and embrace regarding “my song,” it is my hope that you will be inspired just as I have been. The world is waiting for your good works to be released when you surrender and respond to the charge God has commanded you to keep. May these words be planted like seeds deeply into your heart and produce a fruitful harvest in your life that will glorify God and edify the body of Christ.



**READ:**

Luke 8:4-18

Matthew 13:24

Galatians 6:9

**CONSIDER:**

1. What good seeds has a parent, relative, teacher, pastor or other person planted into your heart that has had the greatest influence on your life and the lives of others?
2. How have you or others watered or fertilized the good seeds that have been planted in your heart that have resulted in a harvest?
3. How will you intentionally plant good seeds into the hearts of others?

**PRAY:**

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the good seeds that have planted that have fallen into the good soil of my heart. Help me to always plant the good seeds of Your Word into the hearts of others. Help me to reap a tremendous harvest for Your Kingdom and Your Glory. In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

**CHAPTER 2: A Charge to Keep**

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**“A Charge to Keep I Have”** 

***YOU’VE BEEN CHARGED***

It has been recorded that Charles Wesley, an English clergyman, poet and hymn writer, consulted a commentary written by Matthew Henry, an English Presbyterian minister and Bible expositor regarding Leviticus 8:35 (NKJV) which reads:

***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.”*

Mr. Henry wrote the following commentary 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 supposedly 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 very early along my Christian 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 (Blue Letter Bible).

When I was a little girl, one of my favorite occasions where I witnessed people being charged with responsibilities was a practice within the Baptist church called the “Right Hand of Fellowship.” This was our way of welcoming a new member who had just become a part of our church congregation. It was also the first place outside of Mother’s teachings at home that I learned Christians were charged with responsibilities by God and the church.

At the close of every sermon, the deacons would line up across the front of the church like a branch of the armed forces who had just received orders to offer an invitation to anyone who was interested in becoming a member of our church and the even bigger family of God. 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 ticket masters and door keepers of the heavenly train bound for glory. In my young imaginative mind, if someone professed to be a follower of Christ, they would be awarded with a receipt which they needed to display to the deacons who would verify their receipt was valid.

The deacons would browse the crowd and wait for someone to approach them with the appropriate receipt in hand, thereby indicating their bill of sin had been paid in full by Jesus. Once verified, the deacons could exchange the receipt for a ticket, “open the doors of the church,” and let the invitee into the train station (the church) where they would live out their new life in Christ and work here on earth until their train would come. I would have been ecstatic and quite proud to share my wisdom with anyone who might ask me about it (though no one ever did), because my knowledge of how it all worked had been solidified in my young mind by the famous singer, Mahalia Jackson. She sang a song about it. She sang, “I’m gonna hold on ‘til my work on earth is done, I’m gonna wait right here for the Lord ‘til my train comes.” Of course, now as an adult, I realize she was actually saying, “change” not “train” but at the time, it made a whole lot of sense to me. I’m laughing out loud just reminiscing about it!

Those deacons would look intensely turning their heads back and forth like data scanners, scanning from one side of the church to the other while extending one hand toward the congregation and waiting for someone to make a move. I would sit on the edge of the pew, leaning forward with my hands clasped together in the prayer position and teeth chattering as I waited in suspense. The deacons offered Jesus Christ as Savior with the tone of an urgent call to action and sometimes even warning the unsaved to, “Come now, while the blood is running warm in your veins!” I had no idea what that meant, but I could tell the offer on the table was going to expire. So, in my little heart, I prayed for God to let an angel give anyone who didn’t know Jesus a little shove so they would get right and accept him right then! Of course, I knew that late comers would get another chance because the song, “Get Right Church and Let’s Go Home” had a verse that said, “Back-back train and get your load.” I praised God for being so compassionate that he would back His train up to allow a sinner aboard even if they waited until the very last minute to confess their sins and profess Him as Savior, which is now another source of laughter for me. I absolutely loved music as a child and still do!

Every Sunday, at the close of the sermon, the deacons would stand before the congregation and explain that there were three ways a person could join the church. They could come by 1) presenting a letter from their previous church affirming their valid Christian experience; 2) they could make their own verbal statement to the church attesting to the validity of their Christian experience; or 3) they could be a person who wanted to profess their faith in Jesus for the very first time and subsequently be baptized.

Once an individual made their desire known in one of those three ways, and completed any other relevant requirements, such as baptism for a new believer, The deacon would ask the congregation to signify acceptance and agreement by raising their right hands. Everyone always did. Then, one of the deacons, usually the Chair of the Deacon Board would shake the new member’s hand and 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.” The entire church would explode in applause and Amen’s, then line up to also shake the hand of the new member and congratulate and welcome 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. I grew up in a time and place where children were never allowed to be in “grown folks business” as Mother would often say.

But when it came to the family of God, 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 charge of responsibilities as a member of the family of God and in their local body of believers. Then, on the appointed day after their work on earth was done, the Lord would call that family member home and they would get to ride that train home to glory!

Your conversion experience may have been different than what I observed in my home Church as a child. However, the most important thing is believing that Jesus died for your sins and accepting Him into your heart as Savior and Lord over your life, then taking your place to enjoy your rights and fulfill your charge of responsibilities as part of the family. Even as a child, I understood once you become a part of the family of God, we all must work together to build the Kingdom of God. We have all been charged.

***CHARGED TO CO-LABOR WITH GOD***

Most likely now, or at some point in your life, you have been employed. Most of us probably have a similar perspective of what it means to employ someone. According to the Merriam Webster Dictionary, to employ someone is to make use of or engage the services of someone. So, most employees would probably agree that an employer uses or engages the services of its employees to perform a particular skill or service for the employer. In other words, the employee works ***for*** the employer. But have you ever considered the perspective that an employee also works ***with*** the employer?

Let’s say for example that you work for a restaurant. The goal of the restaurant is for people to be able to come to the establishment and get food to eat. Whether you are the owner, the chef, a prep cook, a server, a dishwasher, a host/hostess, a cashier, a maintenance person or an accountant everyone works together and performs their portion of the duties, ultimately for a single purpose – for people to be able to eat food prepared by the restaurant. Yes, you work for the employer but in order for the employer to have a successful business, the employer and employees must work cooperatively together to make it all happen and subsequently, the employer, the employees and the customers all benefit from the cooperative efforts.

Likewise, we are co-workers with God. We work both for Him and with Him and He works both in us and through us to accomplish Kingdom business.

***9****For we are co-workers in God’s service; you are God’s field, God’s building. (1 Corinthians 3:9, NIV)*

The fact that we are referred to as co-workers indicates work is expected. A worker is one who “performs or carries through a task requiring sustained effort or continuous repeated or recurring operations in order to achieve a purpose or result” (Merriam Webster).

We are intended to be workers working together to perform the sustained recurring operations of building the Kingdom for and with God. Furthermore, as Christians, not only should we be working but we should always be working diligently and enthusiastically.

***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).*

When we get up each work day, whether we work remotely or on our employer’s premises, we have already purposed in our hearts and minds that we’re preparing to go to work. Our morning activities and conversations are often centered around the fact that we’re getting ready to go to work. Whether we’re feeling our very best or not, we push through those feelings and go to work. We put on the clothes that are appropriate for the tasks we perform, then onward to work. Additionally, we faithfully avail ourselves to the necessary training to perform our work duties effectively and we encourage, lift up and assist our co-workers in performing well so that our entire team is successful.

Most everyone can relate to what it means to work and can emphatically express how we have worked diligently, enthusiastically and cooperatively for and with our employer, alongside our colleagues daily on a consistent, recurring and long-term, basis in spite of tough times or difficult people.

Can we; however, with the same emphatic expression, assert that we have worked diligently, enthusiastically and cooperatively for and with God, alongside fellow believers daily on a consistent, recurring and long-term basis in spite of tough times or difficult people? Is your diligence actually the same? Have your efforts truly been the same? When you awake each morning is your heart and mind honestly purposed on getting ready to go to work for God as much as your heart and mind are set on getting ready to go to work for your employer? Do you faithfully make yourself available to training to ensure you perform your Christian duties effectively? Do you regularly encourage, lift up and assist other believers? Are you enthusiastic about the work of the Kingdom?

For some, the answer is unequivocally, yes! Mother was such a person. She was a diligent and hard-working high school teacher and just as diligent and hard-working for God. Actually, there was no distinction between the two. Everything she did, she did as unto the Lord.

***23****Work willingly at whatever you do, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people*” (Colossians 3:23, NLT).

When Mother awakened in the mornings, everything, her entire day and all the work she prepared to do was performed as an assignment for the Lord. Mother modeled that being a Christian is not just what you do, it’s who you are. It’s a way of life. She lived by the principles established in the Word of God and was guided by the Holy Spirit. She showed me that God’s Word should govern everything we do, when we do it, the way in which we do it and the reason we do anything we do.

Just as most of us can point out what it means to diligently work, we can probably also point out characteristics that indicate when work is not being done diligently, consistently, enthusiastically on a recurring basis. Nothing is more annoying than a worker who doesn’t carry their weight but expects the same pay and benefits.

One such type that comes to mind are those who are employed but are ***not really working***. Have you ever noticed anyone on your job that looks like they’re working but you know they can’t be working because as soon as they get to work, the first thing they do is take a break? Every time you see them, they’re on their cell phone or on their way to the restroom or to get coffee or they’re at someone else’s desk talking and taking them off task. They’re at work, but not actually working. They appear busy but aren’t really getting much accomplished.

Others do a share of the work ***part-time***. They don’t mind working sometime, as long as they are not inconvenienced and they can work it around their other more important priorities. There are also workers who are ***wishy-washy***. They’re inconsistent and not dependable. They may show up, they may not. They may do some good work, they may not. They may come to work in a great mood, they may not. Wishy-washy workers remind me of the Mars versus Almond Joy commercial. Sometimes they act like a worker…sometimes they don’t.

Finally, there are some people who are purposely ***unemployed***. They don’t work and they have no desire to work now or in the future. They are perfectly content allowing someone else to do the work while they critique and criticize it. I’m sure there are other variations but by now, you get the idea.

Imagine what it would be like if every individual put forth their very best effort using their particular unique gifts and talents and worked diligently, consistently and enthusiastically together with other workers for and with their employer to achieve the intended result. The possibilities are awe-inspiring! This is what the Body of Believers should look like.

If you reflect on your work history within the Body of Christ, what will you find? Will you find that you are kind of hanging out looking busy and talking about the work of Kingdom but at the end of the day, you haven’t really accomplished much? As you reflect will you find that you work sometimes, as long as you’re not inconvenienced or it doesn’t interfere with other more important priorities? Have there been times you’ve exhibited a wishy-washy attitude? Is it possible that you may even have to admit that you are or have been an unemployed believer within the Body of Christ?

I have to admit that in various seasons of my life, I have not been the diligent, enthusiastic worker that God deserves. In fact, there were times when I wasn’t focused on what God wanted at all. I was focused on what I wanted. I wanted Jesus to be the Savior of my life but I had not yet surrendered in a manner that would allow Him to be Lord over my life. As my husband often describes this mindset, “I wasn’t giving God what He wanted, I was giving God what I wanted Him to have.” Yet, God has always been patient, compassionate and merciful toward me. I’m so grateful he has given me the Holy Spirit to prompt me and people to inspire me to become a more diligent and enthusiastic worker and He wants the same for you.

Regardless of your past work history, whether you find yourself in a less than diligent and enthusiastic category of workers already mentioned, a hybrid of what has been mentioned or something else, it is my desire to encourage you to reconsider not just the things you’re doing, but the way in which you’re living. Do you see your labor at work and your labor for God as two different things? Or, have you surrendered all? God is calling us to work diligently and enthusiastically for and with Him to save a dying world before it’s too late.

***CHARGED TO WALK WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING***

We have all been charged to walk worthy of the calling we have received from God. Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines the word, “worth” as “having worth or value.” The Apostle Paul provided us with an example of this charge when he admonished the church at Ephesus regarding how they should live as Believers who were called to such a worthy assignment.

*“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).*

Mother reminded me often before I left the house to go anywhere, to remember that I represent God and our family’s name and I must always conduct myself in a way that would reflect positively on our family and maintain and protect the high standards, respect and good reputation that is associated with our family, as well as the effectiveness of our ability as Christians to witness to others about Christ. She believed that in a family unit, conduct (good or bad) that impacted one individual person, had the potential to impact the entire family unit. In other words, I was to strive every day to behave in a way that reflects the Bible’s characterization of a follower of Christ and also in a way that reflected the expectations of my parents as a member of our family.

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. As the saying goes, “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 which made me feel afraid, insecure, exhausted and most of all, unworthy.

Mother’s strict rules 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 accomplishing anything with God as the head of my life and if I worked hard enough, regardless of what anyone else thought, said or even how I might feel.

When it came to academics, 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 feeling I wasn’t good enough in the eyes of 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 of Farmerville, Louisiana were still racially segregated. My older siblings Oakland, Jr. and Alyce attended and graduated from Eastside High School, the high school for African American students, where my father was the principal and Mother was a teacher.

It was not until 1970, by Court Order, that the schools in Union Parish where we lived were integrated. 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 student at that time in rural North Louisiana, would inevitably yield many challenges. Instilling a mindset to excel in spite of such challenges was absolutely necessary. She wanted her children and all her students (especially students of Color) to perform with such excellence that our accomplishments couldn’t possibly be negated. She believed we were destined for greatness and wanted us to walk that way with our heads held high and have the academic wherewithal to back it up.

In spite of Mother’s nurturing and fostering esteem, the tension of the times was stressful and as an impressionable child, I struggled regarding 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 bad reports of what someone had done or said, she would always say, “Baby, kill ‘em with kindness!” The majority of the challenges were cultivated by adults. The elementary school children started to get along pretty quickly. My graduating class, the class of 1980, was a pretty tightly knitted group, in spite of the fact that there were still some systemic principles of segregation operating within the schools, disguised as equality - separate but equal.

For example, our high school yearbook named separate Black and White superlatives such as “best student,” “most athletic,” and homecoming Queen and King and the rest of the homecoming court. We had two of everything; a Black one and a White one. Nevertheless, against those odds, we fostered comradery as fellow students and built some solid friendships that exist to this day. Many keep in touch from all across the country via various social media forums and make time to get together at regular class reunions.

One of my most precious possessions is my high school yearbook. It’s precious certainly because of the high school memories documented within the pages but also because of what my father wrote in it to me. He expressed that while he was certainly proud of my accomplishments, he loved me simply because I’m me. That day, as I read that simple but profound declaration, it struck my heart in a way that caused me to finally understand and feel what worthy is supposed to feel like. My parents and extended family were very present in my life. So, I had heard my father tell me on numerous occasions that he was proud of me for various accomplishments. My intellect was well informed. However, this time, as I read the written words over and over and over again, this simple sentiment seemed to jump off the page, enter my ears, and flow right past my intellect to the eyes of my understanding, a place in my soul that I refer to as “my knower.”

This time, I knew down in my knower, beyond the shadow of a doubt that I was enough for my father just as I am. It was the beginning of my understanding that I didn’t have to earn my father’s love. He just loved me because I’m his.

Likewise, 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. Our Heavenly Father doesn’t love us based on our accomplishments and He doesn’t withhold his love because of our failures. He loves us always just because we are His.

One of my favorite books in the Bible is the book of Ephesians. The book of Ephesians is a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a church he established in Ephesus, a city in ancient Greece. That letter to the Ephesians includes a prayer that Paul prayed for that church. Opening our hearts to learn about, understand and know the undying love that God has for us is absolutely life-changing. I thank God that prayer extends beyond geographical and time limitations because just as Paul prayed for the Ephesians, as I am writing these words, I am praying you will receive this life changing Truth about God’s love for you right now:

***18****And may you have the power to understand, as all God’s people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is.****19****May you experience the love of Christ, though it is too great to understand fully. Then you will be made complete with all the fullness of life and power that comes from God* (Ephesians 3:18, NLT).

I pray that whenever these words make contact with your physical eyes, they will jump off the page, enter your ears, and flow right past your intellect to the eyes of your understanding, to that place in your soul where you will know down in your knower how much God truly loves you.

Mother was avid about me developing a relationship with God because she knew it would be impossible for the eyes of my understanding to be enlightened regarding the hope of God’s calling on my life and the power that works in me (Ephesians 1:18, NKJV) without also understanding the width, length, height and depth of God’s love for me.

I believe Mother’s understanding of the value God places on each of us is why she didn’t let me settle for less. This is why she demanded that I walk worthy. When you understand who you are, whose you are, what you are entitled to and that the Almighty God has a purpose and plan for your life, you will want to live in such a way that reflects the worthiness of who you represent and the worthiness of the call you have been given and the value of the people you have been called to influence.



**READ:**

Deuteronomy 10:12

Matthew 9:37-38

Ephesians 2:4-10

1 Peter 2:9-12

**CONSIDER:**

1. What kind of worker are you? What kind of worker do you desire to be?
2. How does it feel to know that you have been chosen by God and are His workmanship?
3. Are you struggling with your worthiness, your commitment or struggling with the fact that everyone, including you has a call on your life? Consider taking the 30-day devotional challenge entitled, Fully Surrendered by Deborah Anthony.

[Fully Surrendered : 30 Day Devotional Challenge - Kindle edition by Anthony , Deborah. Religion & Spirituality Kindle eBooks @ Amazon.com.](https://www.amazon.com/Fully-Surrendered-Day-Devotional-Challenge-ebook/dp/B0CVSGD61L/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2EJ0CIBE19AXR&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.jt8u7iKqRiafYGa6WQPGzQ.siClYsexpO3JmmKEwZTe5oCMyp-gB5Fahxn5RZpcN64&dib_tag=se&keywords=fully+surrendered+deborah+anthony&qid=1733020932&sprefix=fully+surrendered+deborah+anthony%2Caps%2C126&sr=8-1)

**PRAY:**

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the good seeds that have been planted and have fallen into the good soil of my heart. Help me to always plant the good seeds of Your Word into the hearts of others. May we reap a tremendous harvest for Your Kingdom and Your Glory. In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

**CHAPTER 3: Charged to Glorify God**

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**“A God to Glorify”** 

***CHARGED TO GLORIFY GOD WITH WORSHIP***

We were created to glorify God (Isaiah 43:7, NLT). One fundamental way that a believer glorifies or shows reverence for God is through worship. Worship is core in the life of every true believer. It is front and center regarding all of what we believe, who we are and what we do.

The popular phrase, “I have no words,” is often used when it’s difficult to verbalize a circumstance or emotion. I feel that way about the love I have for my husband, for example. We have been friends since I was 14 years old. The love we have developed as husband and wife, parents, lovers, friends, confidantes, caretakers, supporters, and co-laborers through the journey of life together including good and bad times, health and sickness, abundance and lack, joy and mourning, accomplishments and failures, pleasure and pain is pretty much indescribable. I have no adequate word or words that encompasses all of what we are to each other in love. Similarly, for me, the inadequacy of words to describe worship for God goes well beyond even that.

We worship God because He is worthy of our worship. “The word worship is derived from the old English word, ‘weorp’ which means to assign worth to someone. Worship assigns honor, praise, and glory to Him who is worthy and who is valued” (Weliever, 2022). We worship God not only for what He does but also for who He is. Describing God is so all-encompassing that when Moses was sent by God to deliver the children of Israel from the bondage of slavery in Egypt, he asked God what he should tell them His name is and God responded, “I AM WHO I AM.” And He said, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you’” (Exodus 3:14, NKJV).

Much focus is often placed on singing as worship. I love to worship with singing as do most of the family members I know on my mother’s side. Mother’s mother taught her children to sing and play various instruments. So, Mother and her eleven siblings were quite musically inclined. Worship through singing was a common activity in their home, church and throughout the community as the sisters (there were 6 girls and 6 boys) actually had a singing group, the Meadors Girls. There was Aunt Tate, Aunt Madge, Aunt Dean, Aunt Myra, Aunt Martha and Mother. I used to love to hear them sing, play instruments, recite poetry, tell stories and impart Godly wisdom whether collectively or individually. As much as worship through singing is revered, worship is much more than just singing.

Worshiping such an all-encompassing omnipotent (all powerful), omniscient (all knowing), omnipresent (all present) God requires a response that is all-encompassing of who we are. Jesus said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind” (Matthew 22: 37, NKJV). That means we are to worship God with everything; with all that we are. I love the way Warren Wiersbe, a Christian pastor and author defines worship. He said, “Worship is all of who we are responding to all of who He is.”

***CHARGED TO GLORIFY GOD IN EVERYTHING***

The whole earth is filled with God’s glory. Every good thing comes from God and is intended for His glory. Romans 11:36 (NLT) states, “For everything comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.”

The mere existence of a thing, speaks to its inherent value and demonstration of God’s glory. The wonder, the beauty and the magnificence of the heavens and the earth and all things in the earth, allows us to see a small sample of God’s glory.

We too, reveal His glory. When each of my children were born and I looked into their little faces for the very first time and thought about the remarkable miracle of birth that I had just witnessed, I beheld God’s glory without them doing anything at all. Just watching their diaphragms expand and contract with the breath of life was a display of God’s glory.

Glorifying God should be interwoven into every fabric of our lives. Every time Hank Aaron hit a home run, every time James Earl Jones used his incredible voice, every time Maya Angelou graced us with her majestic poetry, every time Luciano Pavarati released the amazing sound of his tenor voice, every time Michaelangelo created a sculpture or painting or every time an eagle takes flight, they all proclaim the glory of God.

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

That means everything we do, has the potential to serve as a billboard for God’s glory. While deeply desiring to do all for the glory of God, I found myself harboring the ungodly spirit of comparison.

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 in comparison to others? 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.

I think everyone wants to be excellent at the good works God has called them to, so much so that people will see their good works and glorify God (Matthew 5:16). I sometimes struggled with that as a child. Mother went above and beyond to expose me to all types of things to give me a broad appreciation for many things and to help me discover my interests, talents and abilities. I took piano lessons, guitar lessons, golf lessons, tennis lessons, dance lessons, swimming lessons, public speaking lessons, trampoline lessons, saxophone lessons, motorcycle safety lessons, cheerleading and she taught me to play one song on the ukulele. I disliked most of those things and wasn’t very good at any of them. However, I did enjoy playing saxophone in the marching band, riding my motorcycle and playing basketball but I’m pretty sure no one watched me do any of those things and started glorifying God as a result.

I longed to be like others who clearly seemed to have been born to do a single, specific thing and they were killing it! I could see clearly that certain people did certain things extraordinarily. Some were born to play music on certain instruments like the piano or trumpet or sing music with their voices and when they did, the music seemed to grasp my emotions and manipulate me like a puppet with every crescendo and decrescendo. Others were born to paint beautiful paintings that when I looked at them, it was like having an out of body experience and being transported into the depths of the soul of the artist. Some were born to play basketball or football with such superhuman agility and dexterity that I felt certain that my eyes had deceived me or someone was duping me with camera tricks.

Witnessing God’s fingerprint on the beautiful way in which he made such individuals would leave me in awe of the glory that exuded from their lives, but at the same time leave me wondering what is the thing or things I was born to do that would bring God glory? Or, at a minimum, what was I supposed to be doing in that current season of my life where I could be a valuable vessel being used by God?

Time after time throughout my life I’ve asked myself that question and most every time, Holy Spirit reminds me of Colossians 1:16 (Message Bible) 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. I like 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).*

This helps me not get lost in the forest for the trees. God has blessed me with multiple abilities, skills and spiritual gifts. He has called me to do different things during different seasons in my life sometimes influencing many and sometimes only one person at a time. Sometimes visibly for others to see and sometimes hidden behind the scenes. Sometimes a huge undertaking and sometimes a miniscule task. Sometimes complicated and sometimes straightforward. Sometimes difficult and sometimes effortless. Most importantly, is knowing that no matter what I do, my perspective of achievement must be evaluated by whether or not it glorifies God.

***CHARGED TO GLORIFY GOD WITH YOUR TALENTS AND GIFTS***

I believe that everyone is innately good at something. Over time, you discover what those innate talents and abilities are and learn that you are naturally better at some things than others. We are generally born with certain innate abilities or we develop these talents and abilities over time. Additionally, when we are born again, we receive certain spiritual gifts. The Bible declares 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.”*

While you have probably recognized that you have one or more talents and spiritual gifts, have you ever feared your talents and gifts aren’t dynamic enough to be used by God?

As you watch others seemingly flow effortlessly in their talents and 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 natural talents and spiritual gifts God bestowed upon me hidden, silent and at the mercy of other people’s approval and my own criticism.

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 talents and 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 and importance of your God-given talents and gifts so the world can experience God’s grace through you. The truth is your talents and gifts are unique and were specifically designed by God. The truth is your talents and gifts are significant. The truth is God can do amazing things with your talents and gifts according to the supernatural power that works in you. The truth is your talents and gifts were given to you to glorify God. The truth is your talents and 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.

The enemy wants you to believe that your contributions for the Kingdom of God are not important. Or, what you do for the Kingdom doesn’t matter, when in fact, everything God made you to do for the Kingdom is valuable. You are valuable and the world is waiting on you and provide the answer God has provided through you.



**READ:**

* + Matthew 5: 13-14; Matthew 22:37-40; Matthew 25:14–30?
  + Psalm 96:8-9
  + 1 Corinthians 10:31

**CONSIDER:**

1. What are the various ways you worship God with your heart? Your mind? Your soul?
2. What talents and spiritual gifts has God bestowed upon you that have remained hidden? How might you allow your light to shine so that God can get the glory?
3. Are you struggling with identifying your God-given talents and spiritual gifts? Are you trying to determine a career path that you will love that will glorify God that uses your God-given talents? Have you discovered your God-given spiritual gifts?

Consider reading, How to be Wired for Career Success by Dr. Evelyn Roberts. You may access that book [Amazon.com: How To Be Wired For Career Success eBook : Roberts, Dr. Evelyn: Kindle Store](https://www.amazon.com/How-Be-Wired-Career-Success-ebook/dp/B01C0FCD02/ref=sr_1_2?crid=D3IXU1ZRYWSG&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.-T06KoPJEO9dbGZ1yu-eiMY0f9WSg9XMvvXJ4YFrO6ZgDRbpOWrGpP7KT47Ime3Hk4GDp3gtShxjv2rOmwcgoRhlJTkD9-hnhdjzXBpbU8ADkL8ZfuhybOBUlqy6V_iryEeHSqejR54XQtDx5oBIK2AcXmYOaHnJFPx752joyoREpV03fMbfg051IlAs8X_u-SQaDREbgqPjLWDkt_Rm_xshDE4rsyYRGQ-U4w0lH-c.oAMNbB5vyqYWgTo6QsQ3xg2Gqjo-mUqzW2p9htTEysc&dib_tag=se&keywords=dr.+evelyn+roberts&qid=1733117398&sprefix=dr.+evelyn+robert%2Caps%2C781&sr=8-2).

Also consider reading, Your Gifts: Discover God’s Unique Design for You by Dr. Larry Gilbert. [Your Gifts: Discover God's Unique Design for You: Discover Gods Unique Design for You: Churchgrowth: 9781570522895: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/Your-Gifts-Discover-Unique-Design/dp/1570522898/ref=sr_1_1?crid=ZTQNL9EDQ169&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.rocrf_RsE5McDdsOY15MBlIsZKJ2BdnGlUwRhmHix1Qi_1ia2mQ5LLKUvvoWliwTWhr8QRwRToFSU5NUVn08tgOrSb6cNhKqqNmK9StJUNUHSUaC1XxcaAj0k3Y99o1KZHtildmSBtl9yu_oZfuI_A.eRKlS0D7cd4x7t2Mi-0ZMssH3CK7rEgnao1TWZ4dhrk&dib_tag=se&keywords=your+gifts+dr.+larry+gilbert&qid=1734297154&sprefix=your+gifts+by+Dr.+larry%2Caps%2C194&sr=8-1)

**PRAY:**

Heavenly Father, I thank You that I am wonderfully made for Your glory. Help me to draw closer to You that I might increase in the knowledge of all that You are and all that You want to accomplish through me. Then show me how to respond with worship in spirit and truth.May all that I do, all that I say and the way that I live glorify You. In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

**CHAPTER 4: Charged to be a Disciple**

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

***CHARGED TO MAKE A DECISION***

In the grand scheme of things, Mother knew that time passes quickly. She herself, had been given a charge. As a mother she had been charged with the gift of stewardship over me and my never-dying soul. She knew she had a limited amount of time to serve as a role model and teach me God’s Word and the ways of a believer so that when I came to an age of understanding, by grace and through my own faith, I would embrace the fact that Jesus died for my sins, then rose again with all power in His hands and is coming back to retrieve His bride, the church. She wanted me to be in that number of chosen believers who will be raptured with Jesus at His second coming and spend eternity in Heaven. She wanted to impart all that she could so that one day I would gladly choose to ask Jesus to save my soul and come into my heart and allow him to be Lord over my life. She knew that after her appointed time of carrying me through this race of life, that she would one day have to pass the baton to me and I would have to run my leg of the race myself. She knew that one day I would have to choose whether I would lay up treasures on earth or lay-up treasures in heaven and she wanted me to choose rightly. Then one Friday night when I was 6 years old during a revival at the Lanes Chapel Missionary Baptist Church in Downsville, Louisiana, I made the right choice and my discipleship journey with Jesus began.

***CHARGED TO LEARN***

During a discussion about being a disciple of Christ, a colleague, fellow Believer and Christian Educator, Attorney Amber Wells made this statement, “Christians are practitioners.” I absolutely love that because a disciple is a student or learner who accepts the views of the teacher and adheres to those views by putting them into practice in their daily life (Bible Encyclopedia, 2024).

One wouldn’t dare join a basketball team, football team or team of any sport and never learn the fundamental rules and regulations of the game or the skills necessary to be a practitioner of a particular sport. No one becomes a qualified, certified professional in any profession without thoroughly studying the profession under knowledgeable teachers.

A practitioner must be dedicated to learning. Athletes spend years, often starting as young children, learning about their sport. They must learn the terminology, the equipment involved, the rules, strategies, habits, customs, routines and mannerisms of skilled successful players. Professionals study for years getting the relevant education and training to thoroughly learn all they need to know to be a successful practitioner in their chosen profession.

We wouldn’t expect an individual who never studied what equipment should be used, how to handle the equipment or what they are specifically supposed to do with it to be a successful team member. In fact, such a person is not likely to even make the team. We are also not likely to select an attorney who has never actually studied law to practice law and successfully represent someone in a court of law or a trust a surgeon who never studied medicine to successfully perform a life-threatening surgery.

Likewise, one would expect that a Christian would place great value on studying the Bible. I was disappointed to find a study conducted by the Pew Research Center revealed 45% of survey participants who professed to be Christians estimated they read the Bible only once per week, 12% only once or twice per month, 9% only several times per year and 33% seldom or never read the Bible.

My husband often says, “Make the main thing, the main thing.” When, I find myself getting distracted from the “main thing”, I like to read Psalm 119; especially the New Living Translation. The authors speak passionately about their love and desperate need and desire to learn, understand and practice the precepts, commandments, decrees, laws, regulations, principles, instructions and truths in the Word of God. Once we have accepted Christ as our Savior, it is imperative that we grow in the knowledge of the Word of God. We must learn and be transformed by the renewing of our minds to the Word and will of God.

Mother knew this very well and was adamant about the need for everyone in her circle of influence to have a Christian education. I was extremely blessed in that I was raised by Christian parents and grandparents who both professed and lived the lifestyle they professed.

Mother took me to Sunday school, Sunday worship services, Baptist Training Union (BTU), prayer meetings, bible studies, choir rehearsals, mission meetings, Baptist District Association meetings, Children’s Sunshine Band, Red Circle, Vacation Bible School, Revival services and other gatherings and venues where people were teaching and learning about the Word of God.

Regularly on Saturday evenings, we would all gather at my grandparents’ house and my grandfather would go over the Sunday School lesson for the next day. The lesson topic was typically the same for all age groups. The lesson materials for each Sunday School class presented the information in an age-appropriate manner. Mother expected me to pay close attention to what my grandfather was teaching and would often ask me to review for the family what the lesson was about.

On Sundays, before the close of Sunday school and before the start of the Worship Service, the church took the time to come together as one large group and allow one representative from each class to summarize what they had learned. Mother made sure I was ready in case I was called upon to represent my class. Mother took education, including Christian education seriously and knew both required a lifelong commitment to learning.

***CHARGED TO PRACTICE***

A disciple must not only learn the principles contained in the Bible. A disciple must practice daily the way of life Jesus taught and modeled. One wouldn’t dare join a basketball team, football team or the team of any sport and never simulate those who play the sport well or practice the necessary skills under the guidance of a coach to become a skilled player and valuable part of the team.

No one becomes a qualified, certified professional without both thoroughly studying the profession under knowledgeable teachers and also practicing those skills in supervised practicums and internships.

A disciple is a practitioner. You can’t just read about or attach yourself to other practitioners. You, yourself must practice!

***22****But don’t just listen to God’s word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves.****23****For if you listen to the word and don’t obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror.****24****You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like. (James 1:22-24, NLT).*

Having worked in youth ministry, my husband heard many young men express the things they wished their fathers had talked with them about. Having also experienced some of those same or similar regrets, he was determined to be physically and emotionally available in the lives of our sons and regularly engage in critical conversations with them. Subsequently, when our sons were just toddlers, my husband interviewed several godly men that he admired regarding fatherhood who had good relationships with their sons. He wanted to know what conversation topics they deemed most important in teaching their sons to be godly men. He is grateful to those men for taking the time to share with him and he gained valuable insight and instruction. He especially esteems the ongoing counsel he received from my father and most notably, my father’s response to the following question. When he asked my father what he deemed most important to focus on saying to our sons, my father responded, “I wouldn’t focus on ***saying*** anything. I would ***show*** them how to be a godly man and use words only when necessary.” My father was a man of few words. Rather, he was a man of immeasurable actions. Mother was never short on words or actions. Ultimately, they both taught by example, as Jesus did. If you are a disciple of Christ, you must assent that wisdom regarding all of life resides in the Word of God. As such, you are charged to hear, learn and faithfully demonstrate the principles of the Word of God. The more you hear, read, meditate on and obey the Word of God, the more you are transformed into the image of Christ.

***CHARGED TO RUN YOUR RACE***

It is important to understand that learning and practicing the principles in the Word of God are preparation to actually run the race you have been charged to run. While the decision to be a follower of Christ is a wise decision and God’s desire for all of humanity, the race is not easy. Jesus warned his disciples, “…Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 15:33, NLT).

***24****Don’t you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!****25****All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.****26****So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing.****27****I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified (1 Corinthians 9:24-27, NLT).*

Your faith will be tested, but you must focus on the prize and remember why you originally made the decision to follow Christ. Remember the love that Jesus first showed you and the love you showed Him by surrendering to Him your broken and contrite heart and your commitment to serve Him and allow Him to be Lord over your life.

My father was the epitome of commitment. Truly, his word was his bond. Once he made a decision to do something, no matter how hard the task, no matter the trials, tribulations or sorrows, you could count on my father to fulfill his commitments. Early on in my relationship with my husband, I saw inklings of that same type of commitment.

At the time of our marriage engagement, my husband and I were members of the Tabernacle Baptist Church in Moline, IL which was pastored at that time by Rev. Dr. Melvin Grimes. Dr. Grimes conducted our premarital counseling and I will forever remember that first counseling session. Dr. Grimes posed the question to each of us, “Why do you want to get married?” My response, which I thought was an obvious one, was a lengthy soliloquy about my deep-seated feelings of love for my husband. Conversely, when it was my husband’s turn, his response was short and to the point. He responded, “I want to marry her because I’m committed to her.” I waited for the rest of his answer but to my surprise, that was it. I was appalled. In fact, I was downright angry! I couldn’t believe he didn’t talk about how much he loved me. Committed? That sounded like some sort of business arrangement or contract. Nevertheless, had I known back then, what I know now, rather than angry I would have been overjoyed because I married a man who understood love ***requires*** commitment. It wasn’t until we went through the tests and trials, ups and downs, better and worse, richer and poorer, sickness and health that I understood he was actually saying, his love for me was so absolute that nothing, not even fluctuating feelings, could cause him to abandon his decision to be joined to me until death. Maintaining an undying love for your spouse, your children, and even love for your charge to run this Christian race means you must be committed to your decision to love.

***CHARGED TO GLORIFY GOD WITH MUCH FRUIT***

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 fishing ponds. Their agricultural produce included too many to name but I especially recall corn, purple hulled peas, greens of various sorts, sweet potatoes, okra, cucumbers, tomatoes, watermelon and sugar cane.

As a child, when playing outside, I didn’t have to go inside and struggle to articulately express the perfect words to try to persuade my grandparents to let me have a snack before dinner. Snacks were always readily available outside where I played. My grandparents grew peaches, pears, figs, plums, persimmons, pomegranates, blackberries, pecans, walnuts, hickory nuts, dark purple muscadine grapes and greenish-bronze colored scuppernong grapes which I referred to as “scupp-a-dines” to rhyme with muscadines. Needless to say, they were extremely hard-working people.

While crops were only yielded certain times each year, the work of farming was year-round work. 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 taught 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. That means we must abide in him or 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. 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 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. By their failure to intentionally stay connected, the relationship just starts to decline over time.

The decline may start with an event such as one party moving to a new location. Or, a change in job that takes more of their attention. Or, loss of a loved one that causes them to retreat to be alone or other 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 that are critical to cultivating and sustaining a connection with God. The first one is prayer. It almost goes without saying that to maintain a relationship with someone, you must regularly commune with them. The Bible instructs us in 1 Thessalonians 5:17 to pray without ceasing. What a privilege it is that God’s availability is unrestricted. We can talk to God about anything, anytime, anywhere, in any posture, and in all circumstances.

Another way to maintain your connection with God is to practice keeping your mind on the things of God. That requires guarding you heart and mind by carefully choosing what you watch, what you listen to and the people you spend time with.

Spending time reading the Word of God is another way to maintain your connection with God. Participate in bible studies with others. Spend time talking about God’s Word. Then, meditate on the Word and consider the different ways it is relevant to you in all of life’s circumstances. Finally, pray the Word of God and ask God to help you apply it and adopt its principles without compromise as a way of life.

During my formative years, Mother was careful to keep me connected to her. She believed children and youth required supervision at all times. Why? Because she knew that being disconnected from her or another responsible adult, posed a danger to fruit bearing. Jesus warns us of that very thing. To bear fruit we must remain in Him. However, God doesn’t just want us to bear fruit. We are charged to bear ***much fruit.*** John 15: 1-2 (NIV) states,

*“1I 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.*

Notice that even if you’re bearing fruit, God desires for us to be even more fruitful and to accomplish that, He prunes. 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. We must consider how serious we are about really wanting to bear the most possible fruit we can bear because what we want from God has to drive how much we are willing to surrender ourselves and everything associated with us to God. That means letting go of anything and everything that hinders us from bearing much fruit and allowing God to prune the things that are already 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.

  
**READ:**

2 Peter 3:18

Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 9:23

Matthew 11:29

**CONSIDER:**

1. Becoming a disciple is a process of following, learning, practicing and growing in Christ. Identify things that you do or stopped doing that indicate you are following, learning, practicing or growing in Christ.
2. How does your lifestyle resemble that of the disciples described in the New Testament?
3. What are ways in which you maintain your connection with God. Identify a time when you felt disconnected. What things did you allow to come between you and your connection with God?
4. Consider strengthening your prayer life by reading books and listening to podcasts about prayer.

**PRAY:**

Heavenly Father,

I desire to bear much fruit. Teach me Your ways. Help me to be disciplined in the things that keep me connected to You. May I never allow anything to come between my connection with You. In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

**CHAPTER 5: Charged for This Generation**

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**“To Serve the Present Age”** 

***CHARGED TO USE YOUR VOICE***

It’s important to note, your voice, like mostly everything else in the Kingdom, comes in seed form. At first, I didn’t even recognize mine because I expected it to be like all the other voices I admire. Then, when it didn’t, I was sorely disappointed and presumed my voice wasn’t worth sharing.

I recently had a hip replacement. Shortly after the surgery, the doctor ordered physical therapy. Much to my surprise, when I arrived to the facility ready for therapy, most of the time during that initial visit was spent on evaluating my current state and planning out my future therapeutic activities.

As I looked around the gym, I was pretty excited. So, I started focusing intently on what everyone else was doing. Certain exercise motions just showed off God’s creation in a way that made their bodies look strong and healhy. I was excited about engaging in those activities. However, I soon discovered that the plan that was followed for those individuals was designed specifically for their bodies. My plan would be specific to me. I couldn’t follow someone else’s plan and get the desired results for my body.

When I accepted my call into the ministry, my husband encouraged me to just be myself. I felt so much pressure trying to be like the best of all that I have seen. My husband cautioned me not to try to be like someone else or to try to please people, rather allow God to develop me into the minister He wants me to be and focus on pleasing God.

He also expressed that we’re not all called to minister to everyone. In other words, not everyone will be drawn to, interested in or even like your ministry. However, there will be people who will hear God’s voice clearly through your voice. Your voice, in the way that God has made you and in the unique way He has made You to minister is important. That relieved a lot of the pressure to know that just like everyone has their favorite styles of music, art and foods, there will be people who need, want and will be drawn to hear God through my specific voice.

***CHARGED TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE***

I once overheard a conversation where a man told another man who held a prominent position at a major corporation how blessed he was to be employed there. The man in the prominent position corrected the other man and said, “No, it’s the other way around. My employer is blessed because I’m there!” He was not showing arrogance. This was a man who understood his charge. He understood that he brought salt and light to his workplace. As Believers, any place where we are should be better because we are there. Why? Because Jesus declared in Matthew 5:13-16 that we are the salt of the earth and the light of the world.

Author, Mike Riley told a wonderful story that illustrates how we should attract people as the salt of the earth.

*A young salesman was disappointed about losing a big sale; and as he talked with his sales manager, he lamented, “I guess it just proves you can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink.” The manager replied, “Son, take my advice: Your job is not to make him drink. Your job is to make him thirsty” (Riley, no date)**.*

This is what our lifestyles should be like. By the way we live, we should make people thirsty and hungry for what we have. Whatever God has put on your heart to do, you have to recognize you’re helping to touch the world – one person at a time.

***CHARGED FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS***

My husband loves to watch those Alaskan shows like Life Below Zero, Alaskan Bush People and Alaska: The Last Frontier, where the people learn to live off the land with very few amenities. Each family taught the next generation how to survive in the extremely cold climate and how to take care of themselves and how to take care of nature in a way that nature will take care of them. They also teach them how to honor their elders such that their first kill is never taken for themselves. Instead, they give it to an elder to embed the idea that family is important.

Mother taught the values that helped her family to excel and be the family we see today which came from the values her elders taught her that weren’t lost but embraced and are still being passed on to the next generation. While each generation may be a little bit different, some basic values and ways of doing things don’t need to change because they are too invaluable and future generations of the family will continue to prosper if they just follow the plan that’s already been set before them.

The oldest architectural company in the world managed to stay in business for approximately 1500 years and was run by 40 generations of descendants because they practiced the principles that had been proven from years before. The values I learned from my family have sustained me more than anything else I have learned.

In circumstances where I felt the need to scold my children for doing something they shouldn’t do, Mother would say, “Your children only know what you teach them.” Of course, sometimes children will do wrong things in spite of what you’ve taught them but I understood what she meant. Mother believed parents should be a child’s first Bible teacher. The church is a secondary or extended source of learning.

My parents had an amazing ability to transfer the important values of their generation to the next generation because they knew those values would be needed. The Bible states in Hebrews 13:8 that, “**8**Jesus Christ *is* the same yesterday, today, and forever.” That means that the Gospel is timeless. 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.

Some years ago, I read a story told by Rev. Hosie Waters. To paraphrase, he said there was a little girl who was very close to her grandmother. Her Grandmother always took time to go to the little girl’s room at bedtime, pull up the rocking chair and read a story 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 her grandmother had gone to be with the Lord, the little girl became very concerned. She was not concerned about her grandmother’s death because she understood that grandmother was with the Lord. The question that bothered the little girl was, "Who is 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 that grandmother used to sit in. 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.



**READ:**

Deuteronomy 6:7

Psalm 78:1-7

Proverbs 22:6

Joshua 4:5-7

**CONSIDER:**

1. In what ways are you making sure that the legacy of Jesus Christ will be passed down to the next generation within your family?
2. Are you living your life in such a way that people are thirsty for Jesus? Think about a time when someone approached you because they saw Jesus in you.
3. In what way are you making a difference? What places are better because you are there?

**PRAY:**

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the opportunity to daily serve as salt and light in the earth for this generation. Help me to be keenly aware of the Holy Spirit’s guidance to be the necessary seasoning to lives that have grown dull toward You and may I be a light to those in darkness who have never known You. In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

**CHAPTER 6: Charged to Fulfill the Calling**

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**“My Calling to Fulfill”** 

***CHARGED TO DO YOUR PART***

Lately, 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. Numerous scientific studies have confirmed that social isolation negatively effects mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. Examples of such studies include a study conducted by Louise Hawkley and John Capitanio (Hawkley and Capitanio 2015), a study conducted by Kassandra Alcaraz, PhD, MPH et al (Alcaraz et al. 2018) and a study conducted by Nicole Valtorta, et al. (Valtorta et al. 2015).

The extent of the 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, NLT)*

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.

***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.*”

***“34****A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.****35****By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35).*

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***CHARGED TO SERVE OTHERS***

I was an adult before I ever saw Mother asleep in a bed. When I went to bed at night she was still up doing various things. When I got up in the morning, more often than not, I wasn’t awakened by an alarm clock but rather by the noise of her already up and doing various things. She didn’t work like the average hard-working person who goes to a job and works out of need for a paycheck. No, she worked like it was a duty. It was as if she was obeying military orders or something that wielded the power of life and death. That woman was like the energizer bunny! She just kept going and going and going hard. Most of the time, she was doing something for others; very rarely anything for herself. When I was a child, I thought maybe she was one of those workaholic people I had heard about. It wasn’t until later in life that I realized Mother’s vice wasn’t a vice at all. It was a spiritual gift. In fact, she had several. She had a divine calling on her life to serve others, encourage others and show kindness.

Once, during my early teen years, Mother and I were traveling on a Greyhound bus (I can’t remember to where or why). Keep in mind, as with most teens, my teen years were those years when I prayed daily that my extroverted Mother wouldn’t do or say something that would embarrass me and make me want to crawl under a rock. Nevertheless, I knew that being confined in an enclosed space with people on a bus ride for any length of time was bound not to end well for me because Mother was known to strike up a conversation with total strangers, and ask all kinds of nosey questions.

It would be two hours before we made our next extended stop. This was a pre-cell phone era. So most everyone settled in with their books, magazines, newspapers, crossword puzzles or curled up with their sweaters or jackets and leaned against the seat to take a little nap. There was a very young woman, around 20 or so with a baby on the bus who was sitting across the aisle from us. At first no one paid much attention to the young woman or her baby, except of course, for Mother. She struck up a conversation with the young woman and started asking all kinds of questions about her and her baby. She asked where they were from, where they were going, if she was married or single, if she worked or was in school, who helped out with the baby and how long they had been traveling already that day. Mother even asked when and what she had eaten for breakfast. It got on my nerves, so I tried to tune out Mother Columbo but the young woman didn’t seem to mind at all. Eventually the baby dozed off to sleep and Mother suggested that the young woman should probably try to take a nap while the baby napped.

It was all good until about an hour and ½ into the trip when that baby woke up and began to cry. She cried and cried and cried. The young woman bounced and rocked and consoled the baby who would calm down for a few minutes, then start up again. The last ½ hour of that bus ride was annoying. Mother began to stare at the young woman and her baby. She did that sort of thing a lot. She closely watched people and I always found it embarrassing and a little rude that she stared so intently at people that way. Or, at least that’s what I thought at the time. In actuality, she was exercising her gift.

Have you ever seen a movie that went back and forth between two different eras of time? The movie might show what is currently happening then take you back in time; often pointing out some hidden details that happened back then, that help make sense of the current time?

As I pondered over the past, I realized everyone on that bus noticed the crying baby but no one noticed that most everyone on the bus had light sweaters or jackets on except the young woman and her baby. No one noticed, that as she was rocking the baby, she was also gently running her hands up and down the baby’s little arms and legs, except Mother.

I know Mother noticed because she removed her favorite brown, plaid shawl she was wearing, placed it in one hand, then extended her hand across the aisle toward the young mother and said with a smile, “Here, Sweetie! Wrap her up in this.”

After what seemed like an eternity, we finally made it through that last ½ hour to the extended bus stop location. Everyone exited the bus and went in varying directions to get food, as it was time for lunch. Some headed to a little shop next door to the bus station, some to the vending machines, and some took a seat in the little café within the bus station. Some sat at tables and others at the counter. We sat at the counter in the cafe.

No one noticed the young woman who sat in a chair in the bus station just outside the café, looking out the window and rocking her fussy baby. No one noticed that the young mother wasn’t eating anything; no one except Mother.

I know Mother noticed because when we sat down at the counter, she ordered not two, but three hamburgers and three Coca-Colas. Then, Mother got up from the counter, got the young mother’s attention and beckoned for her to come. Given mother had already developed a rapport with the young woman on the bus, the young woman came to her without hesitation. When the young woman sat down next to Mother at the counter, Mother slid that 3rd burger and Coka-Cola over to the young woman and said with a smile, “Here Sweetie, eat this.” The young woman thanked her profusely, then held her baby tightly in one arm and took large bites of the burger with the other hand in between rocks and bounces.

No one noticed that while the young mother was now eating, the baby was not. In fact, the baby had only a pacifier while on the earlier bus ride. No one noticed, except Mother.

I know Mother noticed because when the server returned to check on us and ask if she could get us anything else, Mother requested a large glass of water with no ice and a cup of coffee with cream and sugar, which I thought was a bit odd because Mother usually drank her coffee black. Shortly thereafter, the server returned with the large glass of water, then poured Mother a cup of coffee and passed her a container of sugar and one of those little miniature sized cups with creamer. As the server turned to leave, Mother said, excuse me, ma’am but by chance do ya’ll have any pet milk? Now, if you’re a Southerner, you probably know what pet milk is. If you’re a Northerner, allow me to explain. Pet milk is a popular brand of evaporated milk. The server said, “I’m pretty sure we do. Would you like me to replace your cream with pet milk?” Mother responded, “No ma’am, I would like a cup of pet milk in addition to the cream, which I will gladly pay extra for and an extra glass, please.” When the server returned, Mother took the large glass of water, the cream, the pet milk and sugar and began pouring varying amounts of each into the empty glass, stirring and mixing with confidence as if the concoction she was mixing was her gourmet specialty. She then turned to the young woman and asked where the baby’s bottle was. The young inexperienced mother explained that she had run out of baby formula and money on the trip and would have to wait one more hour to make it home to her parents. Mother asked her for the empty bottle, went to the water fountain to rinse it out, then came back to the counter and poured the concoction into the bottle. She extended her hand with the now filled bottle toward the young mother and said with a smile, “Here Sweetie, feed her this.”

Philippians 2:3–4 (NLT): " **3**Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. **4**Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too."

This is what a servant’s heart looks like. There were no may-I-have-your-attention announcements here. There were no referrals to someone who handles these types of things, or phone calls to the Pastor or requisitions to the Trustees for a benevolent fund. There was only Mother and the Holy Spirit, caring enough to notice, identify a need and meet that young woman’s need right where she was.

Every born-again believer is charged to not only look out for your own interests but to be keenly aware of the opportunities God places before you to take an interest in the needs of others and serve them.



**READ:**

1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Mark 10:45

Acts 20:35

Matthew 22:36-40

**CONSIDER:**

1. In what ways have you been doing your part to advance the Kingdom of God? Identify areas where you may have been slacking and develop an improvement plan.
2. If unknown to you a hidden camera followed all your interactions with others for the past three months, what would you be most noted for? Would you be known for your love?
3. Make a list of the various ways you have served others in the past year. Are you satisfied with your service?

**PRAY:**

Heavenly Father, I want to do all that You have charged me to do. Open doors of opportunity for me to show love and to serve others and when those opportunities are presented, give me the compassion to show love and the discernment to recognize the need and serve in a way that is pleasing to You.

In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

**CHAPTER 7: Charged with Power**

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

***CHARGED TO HAVE FAITH IN THE POWER OF GOD’S WORD***

Often, we’re not fulfilling our God-given potential because we lack faith and as a result, we manifest fear or intimidation. Our response to God’s call is, “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 urging me to do various things but I 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 a Sunday morning Women’s Day Worship Service by the Women’s Day Committee of 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 desired not to feel that way.

I knew I was missing out on something. I craved more. I knew there was more of God to be revealed. I knew there was more to me that I hadn’t discovered yet and I knew 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 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 partner and get up early before work and pray together. That was really a struggle for me because I’m not an early morning person. So, for me, this was a real sacrifice and I knew I needed an accountability partner if I was going to follow through.

Every weekday, we would meet at the church at 6:00am to pray. We always ended our prayer time by reading or praying aloud, Ephesians chapter 6, verses 10 through 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 time we gathered to pray, we also read or prayed 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.

Approximately one year later, the Women’s Day Committee, once again asked me to serve as the speaker. This time, I still hesitated but told them I would pray about it. I had never done anything like this before, so I was quite baffled as to how they had even decided to consider me. I attended church regularly and participated in the teaching arms of the church but I had never done any teaching or speaking or ministering the Word before the congregation.

My passion was singing in the choir and directing the children and young adult choirs. So, as I prayed to God about the matter of this speaking invitation, I asked Him why He would have them consider such a thing? In response, I felt the Holy Spirit urge me to read 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 knew all there was to know about that Scripture. I knew that putting on the armor of God had absolutely nothing to do with speaking before a congregation and it wouldn’t be helpful to me at all 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 as I expected. I was disappointed because after all, I had read this Scripture every Monday through Friday for almost a year and could visualize the pieces of armor in my head. I knew all about the need to gird myself with the Belt of Truth, put on the Breastplate of Righteousness, and have my feet shod with the Gospel of Peace (which in my mind meant in my dealings with people one-on one). I knew I had to take up the Shield of Faith, take the Helmet of Salvation and the Sword of the Spirit and I knew I needed to pray always.

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, it was as if I had only focused on the armor and kind of checked out on the rest of the passage. I thought to myself, “This must be how the disciples mentioned in Luke Chapter 24 who were walking to Emmaus alongside Jesus but didn’t initially recognize him must have felt.” For almost a year, I had read words for which I had not recognized their meaning. It was as if I had been purposely blinded until such a time as this; a time when after a year, my heart had become pliable enough to surrender.

Why had I been selected by the Committee to minister the Word to the women? God revealed to me that He was merely answering my prayer. For almost a year, not only had I prayed to clothe 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.*

I asked God almost daily for one full year, to allow me to serve as His ambassador to share the Gospel. I asked and God answered. So, after sitting frozen in awe for several minutes, I called the committee representative and told her, “I accept the invitation.”

***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 to advise me on how to get past the fear I was experiencing. I was in desperate need of a calmative and reassuring voice now that I had agreed to the invitation. Pastor Marlon C. Collins was my pastor at that time at the Olivet Missionary Baptist Church in Rock Island, IL. When I arrived at the church to talk with him, 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 tried to calm my 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 Superman 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 just old goofy Clark Kent. Clark is a clumsy introvert, who seems to be easily intimidated, lacks confidence, and can hardly make a full sentence without stuttering in the presence of the woman he secretly loves, news reporter, Lois Lane. Nope, I thought to myself, I’m not impressed with Clark Kent. 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 shape. 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 put on the suit, he is suddenly transformed and Clark Kent with all his flaws are 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 routinely 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, The 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.

Whatever, you have been struggling with 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. There is nothing too hard for God. So, yes, you can!

***CHARGED WITH POWER TO WITNESS***

Acts 1:8 states, “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Therefore, it is the responsibility of every born-again believer to share the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Each of us are to be witnesses for Jesus.

A Survey of the American Church Growth Institute said somewhere between 75-90% of people who come to Christ come as a result of a friend or an acquaintance shared their story with them on a one-on-one basis. So, the best thing we can do for someone is to witness to them about Jesus.

I used to feel some kind of way about witnessing. I knew it was something I should be doing but was insecure about doing so. I reasoned with myself that I didn’t have enough Biblical knowledge, I hadn’t memorized enough Scripture, I wasn’t good enough at persuading people, and I had not been trained in Christian Apologetics enough to be an effective witness. It wasn’t until I actually researched what a witness is and what a witness is expected to do, that I realized my perspective had been wrong.

The word *“witness”* comes from (an old English Word “wit”) which means “*to know”*. A witness is a knowledgeable person. Additionally, the Greek word word for “witness” in this passage of Scripture is “martys” and it means one who avers, or can aver, what he himself has seen or heard or knows by any other means (Strongs Lexicon G3144). So, a witness is someone who: 1) testifies to what they ***know***; 2) testifies to what they’ve ***seen***; and 3) testifies to what they’ve ***heard***.

Have you ever been a witness at a trial? Or have you ever seen one on television? All the witness has to do is just tell the truth about what they know, what they’ve seen and what they have heard. A witness doesn’t have to make the case or persuade the jury or sell anything or debate with anyone. All a witness has to do is tell their story; here’s what I know, here’s what I’ve seen and here’s what I’ve heard.

Jesus wants us to be witnesses. He doesn't ask us to be His defense attorney. We don't have to defend Jesus. We don't have to be a salesperson for Jesus. All Jesus wants us to do is be a witness.



**READ:**

Hebrews 11:1-40

Psalm 71:15-16

Psalm 107:2

2 Corinthians 5:7

**CONSIDER:**

1. What Christian disciplines do you regularly engage in to build your faith in the power of God’s Word?
2. Consider reading the book, “Thirty-One Days of Faith: Living the Faith-Filled Life! By Dr. Scott Reece. You may access this book at: [Thirty-One Days of Faith: Living the Faith-Filled Life!: Reece, Scott: 9798589697490: Amazon.com: Books](https://www.amazon.com/Thirty-One-Days-Faith-Living-Faith-Filled/dp/B08TFZ3DTZ/ref=sr_1_6?crid=3QSIH02LT0A3Z&dib=eyJ2IjoiMSJ9.rXQ5GQuDnAOO1_s_36vYZ9puQP0l94s1f0h-9I8ZOHG0pc5t1zhb715emKtRcjvqvwGuavlnkr5kOORoWc_O31NL7pjRPGenvP2o_zNvKDgCKDD1ETSryix7KqBbvak1Sf6JqUPfOzvkZvIa7qfrAkSre-QVLMRDSLAgxZuFTsn1UP0GwJvmOaJE2td5uDvvXUDakthZWmxJTfO42pW1c5AVYPUF0M4LDCIlLxkbDo8.45DYPTPNuxKq4EU-noDvONlcDBbIrlfm57yacXcTtRk&dib_tag=se&keywords=dr.+scott+reece&qid=1735958008&s=books&sprefix=dr.+scott+reece%2Cstripbooks%2C179&sr=1-6).
3. Write out your witness testimony. What do you know? What have you seen and what have you heard about Jesus that could be a blessing to someone else?

**PRAY:**

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for reminding me that I walk by faith and not by sight and thank You that I don’t have to do anything in my own strength. Help me to always recognize the value of sharing my story about my life-changing encounter with You so that others might receive the hope that comes from receiving you as Savior and Lord. In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

**CHAPTER 8: Charged to do the Master’s Will**

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**“To Do My Master’s Will”** 

***CHARGED TO DO HIS WILL NOT YOURS***

Have you ever experienced a situation that while you were going through it, you considered it to be a terrible experience, only to find out later that it was actually a good thing? In the movie Sparkle, a 2012 musical film, a woman named Emma, played by the late Whitney Houston was raising three daughters who were secretly pursuing a music career. Having experienced the perils of a failed music career of her own, Emma was not in support of her daughters’ music endeavors. In her efforts to protect them from her fear of the potentially ungodly lifestyle of artists who sing secular music, she was very strict on them and limited their activities outside of church and school.

There was a scene in the movie where the middle daughter Dee was informing her mother that she had been accepted into medical school. Dee told her mother, “I used to complain that you never let us do anything and I thank you for that kind of love and I’m sorry for calling it something else” (Akil, 2012).

I can’t even count the number of times as a teenager that I was angry with Mother for saying, “No” to things I wanted to do and places I wanted to go. I was focused only on my will for my life in those given moments. I didn’t understand that her will for me was greater than what I wanted for myself. I actually wanted some of the things Mother wanted for me but I didn’t understand all the potential dangers and distractions that could be a hindrance, interference or total blockage along the way.

I have made some bad decisions in my lifetime. Sometimes I slipped, sometimes I fell, sometimes I was pushed and at other times, I outright jumped into bad circumstances that were against Mother’s will and God’s for my life. Now, I understand Mother loved me enough to do all she could to protect me from anything or anyone she deemed might cause me to slip, fall or jump into circumstances that could negatively impact my future success and the will of God for my life.

When Mother would tell me I couldn’t go somewhere I wanted to go, she would reinforce her reason for her decision by saying, “The best way to avoid a bad situation is to first recognize it’s a potentially bad situation and the second way to avoid a bad situation is, don’t be there!”

If Mother was alive today, I would emulate Dee’s sentiment to Emma in the movie Sparkle and I would graciously and apologetically say to my own Mother, “I used to complain that you never let me do anything and I thank you for that kind of love and I’m sorry for calling it something else” (Akil, 2012).

In Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:2-4 Jesus taught a model prayer which stated in part, that we are to pray for the Father’s will to be done in earth as it is in Heaven.

***CHARGED TO DISCOVER HIS WILL***

I used to be afraid to pray, “Thy will be done” because I didn’t know if I wanted what God wanted. We often avoid truly seeking God’s will because we don’t trust that when we discover His will for us, it won’t align with our own will. In fact, it usually doesn’t. Our limited thinking falls exceptionally short of God’s plans for us. When we avoid the will of God or behave contrary to His will, we put ourselves in danger of missing out on the great things He has designed for us.

It wasn’t until I heard a preacher preach about the will of God in a way that changed my whole outlook that I began to desire the will of God in my prayers over my own will. While I can’t remember who the preacher was, I remember this specific part of the sermon.

He explained, the Bible is divided into two main parts, the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word, testament is another word for a “will” and a will is a written document that defines what one is entitled to as a child or an heir of their father.

“***16****The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:* ***17****And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together” (Romans 8:16-17, KJV).*

### Since, I am a child of God, I am an heir of God and a joint-heir with Christ. That means if it’s in the will, then I’m entitled to it. When I started to dive deeper into the Word to find out what is in the will of God, I amazed. I found healing is in His will, deliverance, joy, peace, victory, financial blessings are all in His will. I realized that God actually wants to give me the very things that I want. However, for many years of my life I didn’t have sense enough to find out what was in His will, so I avoided it.

INSERT HERE



**READ:**

* Hebrews 13:20-21
* John 15:16
* Luke 9:23
* Proverbs 3:5-6
* Jeremiah 29:11

**CONSIDER:**

1. Research the promises in the Bible that God has made to us.
2. Pray the promises in the Bible, reminding God of what He has said.
3. Identify areas of your life that you have not totally committed to God’s will. Journal your journey as you learn to commit the things you once held dear over to Him.

**PRAY:**

Heavenly Father, I want to embrace all the promises You have made. Open the eyes of my understanding so that I will trust You will all my heart and grow to desire Your will over my own. Equip me with all I need to do Your will. Produce in me every good thing that is pleasing to You. In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

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

***CHARGED TO MAKE DISCIPLES***

Once we’ve learned to “be” a disciple, it is then our responsibility to “make” disciples. Each of the Gospels and the book of Acts declares God’s divine plan for salvation by directing us to make disciples. This is known as the “Great Commission.” Every born-again believer is charged with fulfilling the Great Commission to go into all the world and share the Gospel.

Mother worked to make sure this world would be a better place because she lived in it! She was consistently and continually reaching, preaching or teaching and she lived out what she preached and taught about. At her homegoing celebration I referred to her as a “walking sermon” and not some boring, lifeless sermon that no one wants to listen to. Rather, she was a ***great*** sermon! I researched some of the various attributes that others have identified as a great sermon and found that mother exhibited many of those attributes with her life.

I found that one can usually identify a “great” sermon not only by what proceeds out of the mouth of the preacher, but by what proceeds out of the heart of the preacher. A great sermon, like Mother, causes others to feel and respond to what they’ve said and more importantly respond to how they have seen the preacher walk out what they’ve preached in their daily lives.

A great sermon like mother is theologically strong. Mother’s life was God-centered. She was a passionate Christian educator who taught biblical principles not only at church, but also at home and anywhere that she was.

A great sermon like Mother is expository. She used all sorts of methods to explain Christian living. She used, poetry, sports, cooking, music, rap and even cheerleading. When you left her presence, one way or another you got the point and understood how a Christian is supposed to live.

A great sermon like mother is encouraging. Mother loved to teach and encourage others. She taught us to be overcomers of the trials we face and believe we can accomplish anything with God’s help. So, she didn’t except too many excuses. You couldn’t come crying to mother with an excuse that someone was to blame for your failure to succeed. I once overheard some of Mother’s previous high school students blissfully reminiscing about a young man who came crying to Mother that he was being bullied by some other students that were making fun of him because he had extraordinarily big lips. Mother told the young man, “Then, go pick up a horn and use your big ol’ lips to learn to play that horn with excellence and put them all to shame!” They recalled the young man did exactly that. He got so good at it that he earned a college scholarship playing trumpet in a college marching band.

A great sermon like Mother provides correction. Mother was a stickler for etiquette; especially teaching young ladies to behave in a way that is becoming of a young lady. I think the favorite aphorism that every young woman who has ever been graced by Mother’s presence loves to recollect is how Mother responded to any group of young women laughing in a loud, uncontrollable manner. She would always say, “Laughter should sound the way it’s spelled. It’s spelled h-a, h-a, h-a.” Then she would demonstrate with a soft little giggle, “Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.” That was often followed by emphasizing, “Pretty is as pretty does.” As you can imagine, that demonstration to a group of teenaged girls was hilarious and often triggered even louder, more uncontrollable laughter from the group. But it was a demonstration that has been engraved in the hearts of many women, who now, greatly appreciate her various act-like-a-lady sentiments and euphemisms.

 Lastly, a good sermon like Mother responds to people’s needs. Mother was selfless and tireless in ministering to others. She taught, cooked, cleaned, made preserves and fruit cakes and made quilts and all sorts of things to meet the needs of other people.

The very first poem my mother taught me, eloquently describes how mother not only overcame obstacles and built a wonderful life for herself, but how she worked so passionately and tirelessly, to disciple and help prepare and position others to build better lives for themselves and contribute to building the Kingdom of God. It impressed upon me my responsibility to reach, preach, teach and pass the baton.

It’s called, **The Bridge Builder** by Will Allen Dromgoole. It may be accessed on the Poetry Foundation’s website at: [www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52702/the-bridge-builder](http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/52702/the-bridge-builder).

 Mother didn’t live her life just for herself. She lived it for others; not just her children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren but she has left a legacy for everyone she has ever encountered and the legacy of any great work is that it gets passed down to the next generation.

So, in honor of Mother, I encourage those of you who knew her don’t just honor her by merely ***talking*** about the great things she did. And if you didn’t know Mother, but have been inspired by a great Christian who has impacted your life, don’t just talk about the things that person did. Or prayerfully, perhaps you have been inspired by this book. If so, don’t just read this book, set it on a shelf and forget about it. Rather, carry on the legacy of the great work that has impacted ***your*** life and strive to be a “walking sermon.” Mother fulfilled her charge and made sure that others would be prepared to fulfill theirs. Now, it’s your turn to do the same.

***“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.”***



**READ:**

* Matthew 28:16-20
* Acts 1:8

**CONSIDER:**

1. Consider watching the movie, “The Forge,” a Kendricks Brothers Production.
2. Who might the Lord be calling you to personally disciple?
3. TBA

**PRAY:**

Heavenly Father,

Thank You for the charge you have given me to introduce you to someone who doesn’t know you and walk with them on their journey of coming to know you as Savior and Lord, so that they too, might do the same. Lead me to the people who need me and lead them to me.

In the Mighty Name of Jesus, Amen.

***A CHARGE FULFILLED***



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, Mr. Oakland Adams, Jr., Dr. Alyce Adams Payne, Mrs. Saundra Bland and Rev. Earlye Julien.

After retiring from public school teaching, Mary and Oakland also

became the adoptive parents of three young children, Sophia, Mary Elizabeth and Alton.

**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 own 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 3rd 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 Baptist Church 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 high school and professional 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.

**Her Departure**

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

**CHAPTER 10: Your Charge to Keep Action Plan**

1. **Purpose (Why am I making this commitment?)**
2. **“*A Charge to Keep I Have*” (What have I been charged to do?):**
3. ***“A God to Glorify”* (What are the Specific Ways I will glorify God with my life?):**
4. **“A Never Dying Soul to Save and Fit it For the Sky” (In what ways will I continuously develop as a disciple of Christ?):**
5. **“To Serve this present age, my calling to fulfill” (What legacy am I leaving for the next generation?)**
6. **“Oh May it All My Powers Engage to Do My Master’s Will” (What Actions Will I Commit to?)**
7. **My Potential Excuses:**
8. **My Countermeasures to My Excuses:**

**I, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_make this commitment on this date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_.**

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Mother and Daughter singing holding hair brushes (Cover)

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Mother reading book to young daughter (Introduction)

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Clipart of little girl holding mic and singing (Chapters 2-8)

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**About this Author – Earlye Julien, M.S. Ed.**

Earlye’s writing journey began as a young girl inspired by her love for God and poetry. While she honed her writing skills working in Higher Education as a Compliance Officer, her true passion is writing to encourage and uplift the Body of Christ to overcome obstacles, deepen their faith and advance the Kingdom of God. She has earned Master’s degrees in Counseling and Educational Administration and is a strong supporter of life-long learning.

Earlye is married to her childhood sweetheart and best friend, Angelo (A.J.) and is a proud. loving mother to their two gifted sons. She serves in ministry alongside her husband as campus pastor of River City Church, Uptown Campus in Moline, IL.

You can find her on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/earlye.julien>

You can find her at [River City Church - Meet The Team (myrcc.church)](https://myrcc.church/meet-the-team)