



All Along Life's Way Multi-session Devotion

Is there a “prime time” for serving the Lord? Many would claim that they are too young. With youth comes “busyness” and there is no extra time to serve the Lord. Others would say that they are too old. With age comes tiredness and certainly, they feel God wouldn’t expect service from someone old and tired! The Bible, however, gives us many examples of women serving the Lord at all ages.

What these women did along life’s way may have been recorded in only a few words, such as the servant girl in Naaman’s household. Other times, an entire book is dedicated to the service of a woman, such as Esther or Ruth. In each case however, God thought their service to be significant enough to have it recorded for posterity in His Holy Word, the Bible.

What can we learn from these women of the Bible, young, old and in-between, whom God called to serve Him in special ways? Beginning with the young, we look at their service “all along life’s way.”

This is another series of “five minute devotions” written especially for (but not limited to) groups who would like to open their gatherings with more than a prayer, but less than a full Bible study.

THE BIBLICAL WOMEN

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Serving the Lord as a Child
NAMAAN'S SERVANT GIRL
2 Kings 5:1-19

Begin by reading 2 Kings 5:2-4

An old saying, "Bloom where you are planted," encourages people to make the best of a new situation and become productive and useful in their surroundings. Having a positive attitude and doing your very best will make the transition much less painful!

The prophet Jeremiah encouraged those Israelites who had been enslaved and carried away by the Babylonians to bloom where they were planted by "planting gardens, eating what they produce; marrying and having sons and daughters." (Jeremiah 29:4-7) In today's society, many families are uprooted, forced to move away from friends and family and seek a new life in unfamiliar places. Their transition is much easier if they, too, will "bloom where they are planted."

When we look at the servant girl in Naaman's household, we see a young girl who was kidnapped. It was not uncommon for bands of raiders to invade a territory and enslave and carry away its people. We know that in King David's early years as a king, the wives and children of the men in his army were taken captive and carried away by just such a party. (1 Samuel 30:1-3)

The Bible doesn't tell us the particulars about this girl in Naaman's household. There is no answer as to why she was there by herself. It may be that the other family members were killed in the raid or taken elsewhere. But in spite of the circumstances surrounding her displacement, she truly "bloomed where she was planted." Nowhere in this story is there evidence to suggest bitterness of any kind. Even though she was a captive and most likely a slave, she became a productive and influential part of Naaman's family. She, too, felt the pain that they experienced as he dealt with his leprosy.

The young servant girl, sensing the hardship and pain within the family as Naaman suffered, remembered a prophet in Israel who, she had been told, had been given the ability to heal people. The Bible says, *She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."* Her message carried so much weight that Naaman's wife told her husband what the young girl had said, and Naaman acted on the advice. He went to the king and asked for his permission to go and see Elisha, which was granted. Imagine! The message of this captive young girl went all the way to the king of the country! She wanted the best for her captor. Little did she know that he would truly get the best when he went to see the prophet Elisha. Not only did Elisha cure him of his leprosy, but also God worked a miracle of the heart! Naaman learned of the true God and turned to him!

Age is certainly no barrier in serving God. This young girl, who may not yet have been in her teens, could have kept quiet in her situation. She could have thought that she was too young to make a suggestion. She could have been embarrassed to mention her God, since she was in a foreign land where other gods were worshiped. She could have been angry and thought that since she was a prisoner, Naaman, too, should be imprisoned by the sickness of his body. None of that is evident.

It is significant that this young girl knew about the prophet Elisha. There must have been many discussions around the dinner table in her home where the family talked about God and His prophets. How important that is! This girl knew about the Lord. Her parents knew that they were to teach their children the ways of the Lord. And they did! Otherwise she would never have been able to impart the message of salvation to Naaman and his family.

Is anyone ever too young to serve the Lord? Probably not! When a toddler sings “Jesus Loves Me” as he shops with his mom, he is serving the Lord! When a child delivers a food basket to a needy person, that is serving the Lord! When a teen delivers an invitation to a church event, he is serving the Lord! When Sunday School students invite their friends to join them in class, they are serving the Lord!

It’s truly amazing how God uses the message of even the youngest to bring others to Him. It’s doubtful that the young girl in Naaman’s household ever dreamed her words would bring her master to the Lord! But God made it happen. As parents, it is our duty to equip our children with the message of salvation, so when the opportunity arises, they are able to share that wonderful news. Talk about Jesus at the table, pray with the children regularly and let them know that Jesus is number one in your life. Then they will be able, even at a young age, to bring that good news, in their way, to the people God puts in their lives!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, so often we make excuses for not serving You. Sometimes we think we’re too young, sometimes too old! Give us willing hearts to look for opportunities to serve You. Open our eyes to the needs of those around us and then give us the power and strength to act. We pray this in Jesus’ Name. Amen.

Serving the Lord as Young Adult
ESTHER
Esther (Chapters 1-10)

Begin by reading Esther 4:12-14

When my family gets together, one of my favorite things to do is watching my grandchildren at play. It is interesting to see how often they role play—that is, pretending to be someone they are not, but doing what they think the person they represent might do. My little granddaughters often pretend to be princesses or queens. Seldom do they think of the responsibilities a queen or princess might have...they only think of the glamour, glitz and glitter associated with the role.

The story of Esther is a fascinating one, and while there is much glitz and glitter associated with her role, there is also a great responsibility. Her ascent to the throne of Persia as a young adult is one that little girls dream of! Esther was a beautiful, young, orphaned Jewish girl living in a foreign land and cared for by her older cousin, Mordecai, who treated her as though she were his daughter. Her family was taken captive when Israel was carried into exile. She was from the tribe of Benjamin, but the family had become acclimated to their new land and blended in well with the population living there.

Her ascent to the throne began when the beautiful reigning queen of Persia, Vashti, the wife of Xerxes, refused to come to a banquet the king had made for all his nobles. This act of insubordination infuriated the king, and after consulting with his cabinet, he banished Vashti permanently from the palace. Later on, the king regretted his hasty action, but because the decree was irrevocable, a search was made for beautiful young virgins to replace the banned Vashti. Esther was one of many girls chosen to come to the palace and be given beauty treatments in preparation for their introduction to the king. The king would then choose one of them to be his new queen.

After young Esther was chosen to be one of the candidates to become queen, Mordecai kept a close watch on her. Fearing that her Jewish ancestry might bring repercussions, he had told her to keep her background a secret. Mordecai understood the benefit of having influence in the palace, and also knew that if her Jewish ancestry were known, Esther's ascent to the throne would be in jeopardy. She did as he asked her to do. After a period of preparation, Esther was chosen to become the new queen in a lavish fairy-tale like ceremony.

Shortly after she became queen, a plot to exterminate the entire Jewish race living in Persia was proposed by one of the king's officials. This, of course, was terrible news for the Jews. Mordecai, then realizing how great Esther's position as queen could help not only him, but the entire Jewish race, sent her a message asking for her help. For her to assist was very difficult because there was a law stating that anyone, including the queen, could be put to

death by asking for an unauthorized meeting with the king. The law was set aside only if the king would extend his golden scepter to the one asking for the meeting.

Esther was hesitant to ask for an audience with the king. She told Mordecai the rules of having such an audience and that she had not been in the king's presence for thirty days. Mordecai did not accept her answer as valid and instead urged her to act. He, though much older, asked her to put her young, royal life on the line. His words, "*And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?*" (Esther 4:14b), pointed out the responsibility she had to her people, even though it may have been at great risk and cost to herself. In the story of Esther that follows, she acted and saved her people.

Even though the name of God is never mentioned throughout the book of Esther, His intervention in the lives and for the benefit of His people is clear in this account of the young queen.

The story of Esther points out how God used a young adult in His service. It was He who gave Esther a listening, obedient, teachable heart. He then used her to save her people. Throughout the Bible, we see God using the young in His service. Joseph was a teen when his brothers sold him, and God used him mightily throughout his stay in Egypt. David was a young shepherd boy when he was anointed and then he killed the mighty Goliath. Mary was young when told by the angel Gabriel that she would become the mother of her own Savior, the baby Jesus. And Timothy, the Apostle Paul's assistant, was young as he worked with the early Christians.

All of us must look to involve the young in our churches. St. Paul, in his letter to Timothy, says, *Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.* (1 Timothy 4:12) The young are the church of tomorrow and we must encourage them to be the Esthers, Josephs, Davids and Timothys of the church of today. Those in the church who are older would do well to serve in the role of Mordecai by listening, encouraging and mentoring those who will lead our churches in the years ahead.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we thank and praise You that You endow Your people with gifts which make them great servants for You. Give all of us willing hearts to be of service. Help us to be "risk-takers" for You. We ask You especially to endow our young people with the desire to serve You in their own ways and then lay the opportunities before them. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen.

Serving the Lord as a Mother-to-Be
THE WIFE OF MANOAH
Judges 13:1-25

Most women experience some unforgettable happening during a pregnancy. Sometimes it's the weather, an unusually hot and humid summer or unbelievably cold winter. Sometimes something happens within the family, maybe a job promotion or memorable moment at a family event. Perhaps your favorite team won the World Series. Maybe there was a shopping trip that ended up with you finding exactly what you had been looking for a very long time. Once the baby is born, this event is always associated with that pregnancy.

When one looks at the wife of Manoah, there is no doubt that she would always remember the events preceding her pregnancy. She had such an unusual encounter with an angel, that the very thought of what happened must have been breath taking and totally unbelievable even years after it happened.

We know very little about this woman who, by way of a miraculous pregnancy, ranks with Sarah and Elizabeth. We don't even know her name—we know her only as “Manoah's wife.” Yet she played a very important role in the story of God's people during the time of the judges. The chapter begins with the words, *Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord, so the Lord delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.* (Judges 13:1) The words that follow show God's plan to relieve his children of their problems with the ruthless Philistine tyrants. God chose the nameless wife of Manoah to be his instrument in fulfilling this special purpose for Him.

God may have chosen her because for her to have children required a miracle. The angel messenger who appeared to her begins his message by saying, “You are sterile.” What an unusual way to begin a conversation with a stranger! But immediately afterward he tells her that she must be careful in what she eats and drinks and that she will become pregnant and have a son. Not only that! He tells her that her son must never have his hair cut because he will be dedicated to God from birth and that he will begin to rescue the children of Israel from the Philistines. (v. 4-6)

What a message for this woman! Up to this time, children had not even been part of their table conversation. But now she learns that she will become pregnant, that this child will be a Nazirite dedicated to God, and that this unborn, yet to be conceived child will rescue the nation! Certainly a memorable moment to this lady!

Manoah's wife went and told her husband about her encounter with the angel. Can you imagine his surprise? Even as a man of faith, he must have wondered just what went on, but Manoah did something very special. He prayed to God and asked for the special messenger to come back to them. He asked that the angel teach them what they must do for this boy

who would be born. And God answered his prayer. The angel did return and repeat this wonderful message of the son that would be born and be dedicated to God. When the angel had finished the message, Manoah wanted to offer a sacrifice, which the angel permitted him to do, as long as it was a sacrifice to the Lord. While Manoah and his wife were sacrificing the goat and the grain offering on a rock, which served as the altar, the angel ascended into heaven in the flame. Upon seeing this miraculous ascent into heaven, Manoah and his wife immediately knew that they had seen something so miraculous, so sacred, that they thought they themselves would not live. When Manoah shared the thought that they would die because they had seen God, she comforted him by saying, *“If the Lord had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this.”* (v. 23)

The wife of Manoah served God in a way she never anticipated. Being barren, she never dreamed that she would be called upon to serve God by having such a special child. But as a family of faith, they called upon God to help them rear their baby even before he was conceived. We can surely use this as a lesson for ourselves. We have the opportunity to pray for our expectant mothers and fathers as they anticipate the birth of a child. There is no greater lifestyle change in a family than when the first child joins the family circle. Manoah and his wife knew the great responsibility that the Lord placed on them when he blessed them with a miracle. Births today, even though not announced by an angel, are no less miraculous; and the care and nurturing of a child no less taxing. What a blessing we can be to our young parents through our prayers and genuine concern.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, You give us such blessings in our children. Give us the power to realize that all children are miracles, and that Jesus suffered, died and rose for each one of them. Help us to remember all expectant parents in our prayers and encourage them as they bring their little one to You in baptism. In Jesus' Name we pray. Amen

Serving the Lord as Mother

EVE

Genesis 4:1-8

Can you imagine what it was like for Eve to become the world's very first mother? At one time she had been without sin, and therefore free from any pain and suffering brought on by it. The consequences of her disobedience have plagued mankind ever since. This once sinless woman now faced the curse of her own making when she was about to become a mother.

God spoke to Eve directly when He said to her, *"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing."* (Genesis 3:16a)

This warning by God that she would experience terrible pain as she bore her children must have been frightening in itself. To be the only one going through a pregnancy must have been intensely lonely and bewildering. She could not go to another woman for counsel or ask her what was happening during the nine months she carried her child. How would she know about the discomforts associated with bearing children—the morning sickness, tiredness, the difficulty in breathing? How would she know what was going on when the baby kicked or what was happening when the baby was about to be born? She, who knew no suffering, now would experience the intense pain of childbirth.

Eve must often have thought about her time together with Adam in the Garden of Eden. How perfect life was in the garden—perfect peace without sin or pain. She must often have longed for God's visits with them at the end of the day. She must have had the deepest regret as she thought about her pride when the snake tricked her into believing that eating the fruit would make her wise like God.

But she also knew that her sin was forgiven, for God promised her and Adam a Savior right there in the Garden of Eden. God's first promise of a Savior was given to them. God said to the snake in Genesis 3:15, *"And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."* Eve believed that promise. It was something she took to heart and remembered. It reminds us very much of what the Bible says about Mary, the mother of Jesus, when it tells us, *But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.* Luke 2:19

How do we know this? The Bible tells us in Genesis 4:1, *Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man."* She thought the Lord had kept his promise for a Savior right away and that He had chosen her to be the mother of His son. Little did she know that her Lord and Savior would not be born until thousands of years later!

In Biblical times, motherhood was considered to be a woman's greatest blessing. God's directive to Adam and Eve was to be fruitful and multiply. God planned to fill the earth with

the children that He would give to them and their descendants. We can imagine Eve being with her children and telling them about the beautiful garden, how God made her from Adam to be his helper, and how on one sad day they were driven from the garden, never to see it again, lest they eat from the tree of life and be confirmed in their sin for eternity. We also can hear her telling them that God still loved them and that He promised them a Savior, who would save them from their sin.

One thing that remains unchanged in humanity since the time of Adam and Eve is sin and its evil consequences. It is hard to think that Eve's firstborn son, who surely must have been her greatest joy, would also be the source of her greatest heartbreak. The sin brought on by her disobedience would lead her oldest child to murder his brother. How horrible this was for this very small first family who, at one time, knew no sin or sorrow.

In many ways, motherhood has not changed from Eve to this day. Most women consider children to be a true gift from God and value this gift highly. They treasure their children and do only what they consider best for them.

But in many ways motherhood has changed. Many mothers work outside the home and are under great stress as they try to manage their homes along with their jobs. Sadder still is the fact that many children live without a father in the home. Many fathers have abdicated their responsibilities as father—they have given no financial or moral support to the mothers of their children, leaving the mother to cope with them alone. When time pressures become a factor, mothers often delete worship, study and prayer from their busy schedules, creating a great void for them and their children. Spiritually undernourished mothers and children then become easy prey for those who would lead them into physical and spiritual danger.

We know that Eve did not deal with outside employment! Neither did she have to deal with an absentee father. She was in every sense a full time mother and wife, and being the first one who dealt with sinful, human nature, also had to deal with the enormous consequences of her own sin. Dealing with murder in her own family had to be the most difficult of heartbreaks. It was at times like this that this first mother and all other mothers to this day rely on God's promise of His unconditional love, grace and mercy.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we place all mothers in Your tender care. We know that life today is difficult for many as they face the pressures of jobs and home management. We ask You to give them the grace to bring all their cares and concerns to You. Give them the desire to study Your Word faithfully and to bring their children to You in baptism and regular worship. Help them to forgive one another, to know that You will never leave or forsake them and that Your promises are sure. Amen.

Serving the Lord as the Mother of a Teen

EUNICE

2 Timothy 1:1-4

It seems to me that from early childhood all the way through maturity, there is no time in life when Satan is more active than in the teen-age years. An old saying claims that when children are little, the troubles are little; but as the size of the child increases the size of the problems increases. Teens deal with all kinds of problems—some brought on by their journey to maturity; others brought about by peer pressure; still others by their inability to cope with the world around them.

The high rate of suicide among the young is alarming. The number of young that run away from home is sad. There are many teens who would be happy to shut themselves in their rooms and use the computer as their only friend. The life of a teen is hard and so is the life of the parents who deal with them. Because of the high rate of divorce in America today, many single parents deal with the challenges their teenagers present and cannot rely on the reinforcement of the other, making their work of parenting just that much harder.

Eunice, the mother of Timothy, is a good example of a Christian mother of a teenager. The Bible does not tell us a lot about her, but enough to let us know where her priorities were. St. Paul wrote these words to Timothy, *I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.* 2 Timothy 1:5

Eunice's husband, the father of Timothy, was Greek. Because Eunice was of Jewish descent, it would have been customary for Timothy to be circumcised as was required by Jewish law. We know that did not happen, however, since St. Paul states that he circumcised Timothy prior to taking him on his second missionary journey. (Acts 16:3) It is possible that Eunice submitted to the will of Timothy's father in not having this done for their son.

But that does not mean that she didn't instruct her son in the way of the Lord. Acts 16:2 tells us that *The brothers at Lystra and Iconium spoke well of him.* Timothy had a good reputation among the Christians in nearby towns and villages. Good reputations don't come from bad training. She undoubtedly taught Timothy the ten commandments and imparted to him the message of the Psalms as well as the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. But more than that, the account in Acts tells us that Eunice was a believer, which means that she knew Jesus as her Lord and Savior and taught her son the meaning of God's grace in Jesus Christ.

Eunice also had a partner in relaying the message of Jesus to her son. In his opening sentences to Timothy in his second letter, Paul mentioned Lois, Timothy's grandmother, and her great faith. In those days intergenerational living was common. It is obvious that both women in the household lived their faith. How important that is! All the words in the world

won't change what children, and most especially teens, see their parents and elders doing! Do they pray? Do they forgive? Do they study the Word? Are there home devotions? Do they help others? Are they kind? Do they take a sincere interest in each child of the family? Are they responsible stewards? Does God come first? Do they contribute time, talent and money to the work of the Lord? All these questions turn into actions to those closest to us. And, as the old saying goes, actions speak louder than words.

The life of parents of a teen has never been easy. We must pray not only for them, but the teens as well. With so many worldly things for teenagers today, numerous choices are there. They can choose to go the way of the world or by the power of the Holy Spirit choose to walk with the Lord. The parents have choices, too. They can train their children and commend them daily to the Lord or they can choose to let others do it. Many would consider it to be the job of the teachers and the school or the church. And while the church is always there to assist, the training, teaching, loving and disciplining of children is the God-given privilege and responsibility of parents.

Rearing children does not get easier as they mature. It requires more prayer and much more love in the teenage years than at any other time. For those of us no longer involved in the care of teens, we must take time to remember our teens and their parents as they tackle this challenging God-given responsibility.

Prayer: Lord, we thank You for the great gift You give us in our children. Raising them is sometimes so difficult. We ask You to be with the parents and teens as they deal with the challenges presented to them. Help them to make godly choices. Help the parents to show by their actions how much they love You. Help all of them to be kind and forgiving to each other and be with us as we remember them in our daily prayers. Amen.

Serving the Lord as a Working Woman

LYDIA

Acts 16:11-15

Many would think that the “working woman” is a phenomenon of the twentieth century. And it is certainly true that beginning with World War II, many women went to work to help with the war effort. Following the war, a good number stayed on the job. As time went by, more and more women joined the workaday world, relegating full time motherhood and homemaking to part-time status.

But the Bible also mentioned women as part of the “working world.” The woman described in Proverbs 31 leads one to believe that she too was a “working woman.” Phrases like *She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard* (v.16) and *She sees that her trading is profitable...* (v.18) show that she did more than run the household. Deborah was an energetic and able judge as well as a prophet as recorded in Judges 4. Huldah was a prophet of the late seventh century B.C. who was consulted by King Josiah. (2 Kings 22:14-20)

Lydia was a business owner who lived at the time of St. Paul. Her home was in Thyatira, a city a considerable distance from Philippi, where she had her business. The Bible tells us that she sold expensive purple cloth. Her business was one that catered to the upper crust of society. Purple cloth was reserved for those people who had money, and Philippi was a city with a large population of Roman military personnel; some retired, others still on active duty.

Lydia was a convert to Judaism. The Jewish population of Philippi was small and the believers there had no synagogue of their own. Their custom was to meet at a place outside the city gate near a river for prayer. As was his custom, Paul sought out Jewish worshipers in order to proclaim the Gospel to those present.

It was at a gathering such as this that Lydia became a Christian as the Bible records in Acts 16:14b: *The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul’s message.* God, through the words of St. Paul, performed a miracle in Lydia’s heart. She became a believer in Jesus now believing that all the Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled in Him.

What did this new insight do for Lydia? Did it change her life? The first thing that happened is that she and her family were baptized. According to Acts 16:15, *When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. “If you consider me a believer in the Lord,” she said, “come and stay at my house.”* Her baptism, the entrance of the Holy Spirit into her heart, brought about action. It was not just she herself that was baptized, but her entire family. She brought her family to the Lord in a new and significant way.

She also offered her home to Paul and his helpers. Her hospitality is well known, since Paul did not accept this invitation with great enthusiasm. The Bible says, she kept on begging. She knew that the men needed a place to stay, and she freely opened her home to them. She also was aware that if Paul accepted her invitation, she and her family would be under the tutelage of one who had been intercepted by Christ himself, one whom God had set apart and taught. She was able to surmise that he, indeed, was a special messenger sent by God to bring the Words of eternal life to her family. It was a special joy to her when Paul agreed to stay. We can only imagine the many questions she and her family asked every day, and how God drew all of them closer to Himself through the words of her reluctant house guest.

The life of the American working woman of today is a busy one. Never has time been a more sought after commodity, especially among families where both parents are working. So often, the “busyness” of the day takes away the most important thing in the day, the time spent with the Lord in study, meditation and prayer. With Lydia we know that was not so. Her goal was to invite her guest and then spend time with him getting to know her Lord and Savior better. It should be our goal, also, to make Jesus a significant part of our everyday life, to begin and to end the day with Him in devotions, study and prayer. What about the time in between? Just spend it the same way. God always listens, His ear is always tuned in to us!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, we confess that so often we put You last. So many other things come in the way—our jobs, our children, our “to do” list, and our other responsibilities. We ask You to forgive us. Help us as we struggle with time pressures and teach us that time spent in prayer and meditation is not wasted, but is well spent and more profitable than anything else we could do. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

Serving the Lord as a Wife
ABIGAIL
1 Samuel 25:1-44

Begin by reading 1 Samuel 25:2-27, 35

One has to think that if Abigail had been living in today's world, she would have sought and been granted a divorce shortly after her marriage. Parents, most often the fathers, arranged the marriages of their children in Biblical times. There is little doubt that Abigail's father chose a "loser" for her. He may have looked only at outward appearances and since the man he chose for Abigail was wealthy, thought he set her up for "the good life." Outward appearances are often deceiving, and Nabal was not the kind of man a father would have chosen for the daughter he loved.

This account of Abigail took place during the time David was on the run from King Saul. David had some 600 loyal followers, a small ragtag army who helped to protect him. Since King Saul was intent on killing him, David often hid out in remote places. One of the places he frequented was Carmel, and it was here that he came in contact with Nabal, Abigail's husband.

The Bible says, *A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings.* (1 Samuel 25:2-3) In reading this account, one has the feeling that the couple was a mismatch. There is every indication, however, that Abigail accepted her husband for who he was and made the best of the marriage. She was aware of his shortcomings and seems to have developed a way to overlook or deal with them.

She was also aware of the importance of hospitality in those days. She knew that when strangers needed food and rest, it was an honor as well as a duty to provide it. Hospitality was important not only in the home, but in the fields as well. Shepherds needed each other for protection, safety, company and companionship.

When David sent men to Nabal requesting food at sheep-shearing time, the request was not unusual. The rules of hospitality dictated that they be treated as guests at the event. After all, David's small army had protected Nabal's men. Even the shepherds themselves thought that Nabal should have invited David for the meal.

Nabal responded in his usual gruff and unkind manner and told the messenger to tell David, *"Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?"* (1 Samuel 25:11) This response made David very angry, and he prepared his army to seek revenge.

One of Nabal's servants realized the seriousness of the situation and rather than voicing his concern to his master, he decided to put the situation into Abigail's hands. According to 1 Samuel 25:17 the servant told Abigail, "*Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him.*" Abigail acted quickly, decisively and wisely. She wasted no time in preparing and sending all the food necessary to save all the people in the household. By her quick action she not only saved her own family, but she kept David from acting in a manner which he would have regretted for the rest of his life.

Abigail, the wife of Nabal, and then later on, the wife of David, truly served the Lord by serving her husband and family. She was placed into a marriage which we today would consider to have "irreconcilable differences." She had an abusive husband—one who treated her and his servants with disrespect and dishonor. He was a drunkard. Even though her life was difficult, she maintained an attitude whereby she gained the respect and honor of the servants. They knew that when they needed action, she would be the one to approach. They had seen her godly lifestyle and knew that she would act in the best interest of all.

Wouldn't we consider that to be the responsibility of the wife of today? As sinners, we are painfully aware that our sinful nature causes us to do things of which we are not proud. As partners in a marriage, we are to honor each other, to forgive each other, and to put the best construction on the worst things our spouse does. And most of all, we are to pray for each other and commend each other daily to the Lord's tender care.

Prayer: Lord Jesus, You came to save us from our sins. We confess that we sin daily and are in constant need of forgiveness. Sometimes the most difficult thing is to forgive those we love the most. Help us to be kind and patient with our families, most especially our spouses. Strengthen us in our prayer and devotional life, knowing that You are always anxious to help. Amen.

Serving the Lord as a Mentor
PRISCILLA
Acts 18:1-4, 24-26

The word *mentor* has come into great use in the last several years. One dictionary describes a mentor as a wife and faithful teacher, guide and friend; another defines it as a trusted counselor or guide. Much has been said about the benefit of being mentored, that is, being guided and befriended by someone who has “been there, done that.”

As we look at Priscilla, the wife of Aquila, we see a woman who, along with her husband, went through great hardship to serve the Lord. The Bible tells us that the Apostle Paul met them in Corinth where Aquila and Priscilla had come following their expulsion from Italy by the Emperor Claudius. He had ordered that all the Jews were to be expelled from Italy, so Aquila and Priscilla had no choice but to leave. The emperor had banned all assemblies of the Jews in Rome which meant that they could no longer practice their religion or meet in worship.

As Paul met with Aquila and Priscilla, he realized that they shared common interests. The first common bond was the fact that they were all Jewish. Secondly, they were all tentmakers. Paul soon worked alongside them and made tents out of felt goat hair. He was familiar with this work since his home province, Cilicia, was known for its tent making. It is not known whether Aquila and Priscilla had accepted Jesus as their Savior when they first met Paul, but there is no question that their knowledge of and faith in Jesus grew greatly under the mentoring of Paul. They became committed followers of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul had been a faithful friend and companion to Aquila and Priscilla as they worked together in Corinth. Their friendship was cemented further when Paul was able to stay in their home as he earned his living as a tentmaker. This enabled him to share God’s Word with them as he proclaimed the Gospel to the fledgling Corinthian congregation.

When he left Corinth, Paul took Aquila and Priscilla with him and the three went on to Ephesus. Paul was intent on visiting some of the young churches he had established earlier, but Aquila and Priscilla remained in Ephesus. Their reason for staying may have been that they felt they could earn their living there and at the same time provide a home for their trusted friend, Paul, when he came to revisit the Ephesian congregation.

After Paul left, God put another man into the life of Aquila and Priscilla. This man’s name was Apollos, a Jew from Alexandria, a city in Egypt with a large Jewish population. The Bible says, *Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue.*

When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. Acts 18:24-26

The mentored now became the mentors! God had placed a man in Aquila and Priscilla's life whom they perceived knew the Lord Jesus, but not yet fully. They felt they could shed greater light and share the good news more fully as their mentor, Paul, had explained it to them. They had been the recipients of the Good News of the Gospel, given to Paul by the greatest mentor of all time, Jesus Christ, and now they passed this Good News on to someone who was still a baby in the faith. What a privilege they had! What a gift they imparted!

In order for mentoring to be successful, humanly speaking, a bond has to be established, a bridge built. The common bond between Paul, Aquila and Priscilla and their associates was their heritage, religion, occupation and their love for the Lord. The qualities of a mentor are the ones recorded in Galatians 5:22 as fruits of the Spirit—*love joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control*. A mentor walks gently using gentle words. A mentor is patient and kind. He is self-controlled, not bursting out in fits of rage or anger.

There are many ways in which we can mentor today. Young mothers can benefit from the advice of an older mother who has walked in their shoes. Older people can learn from the young. We who love the Lord Jesus can show by our words and actions what He has done and is doing in our lives. We must do it lovingly, kindly, patiently and gently. How unfortunate that gentleness has often disappeared from the American scene, especially in the language used by so many today. Television and films are rampant with ugly, unnecessary words which do nothing to enhance the plot—they only degrade the speaker. Women, thought to be more gentle in the use of words, regularly use unbecoming language today. Words, when mentoring, must be carefully chosen and gently spoken.

Those who mentor are truly gifts of God. Those who have had mentors seldom forget the joy they bring, the wisdom they impart and the advice they give. They thank God for bringing someone so special into their lives!

Prayer: Heavenly Father, give us eyes to see how much the world needs You. When opportunities for mentoring are there, open our hearts to want to help, open our eyes to see them, open our ears to listen and open our mouths to speak. Give us gentle, kind words spoken in humility. Give us patience and help us to understand that You alone will bring success to our efforts. This we ask in Jesus' Name. Amen.

Serving the Lord as a Prayer Warrior

ANNA

Luke 2:36-38

It is hard to think of a woman as a warrior, particularly one who is in her eighties. The dictionary defines a warrior as masculine, a soldier or a man engaged in military affairs. When one thinks of a soldier, one pictures someone strong and agile, relatively young and physically fit, seldom an old, wrinkly, white-haired woman shuffling along slowly. But that's how Anna may well have been.

The warrior of Ephesians 6, however, uses weapons that are not limited to the young and fit. As a matter of fact, the armor of truth, righteousness, peace, faith, the Word of God and prayer may well fit an older person much better than one who has not yet come face to face with the greatness of God. The unfailing love of God often becomes much more real when the trials of life beset us. It is because the old have experienced so much that they can testify to the faithfulness of God and put themselves in His loving hands trusting that He will see them through.

The Bible devotes only three verses to Anna. According to Luke 2:36-38 she was 84 years old. The Bible describes her as being *very old*. She had lived well beyond the normal life span of people in those days. Her life had not been easy. She had been married only seven years when her husband died. She was a widow at a time when it may have been very difficult for her to earn a living. There is no mention of children, so she may not have had any. It's quite possible that she lived a very lonely life, and that perhaps drew her even closer to her God.

Loneliness often leads people to the Lord in prayer. Sometimes just wondering how to make it through the day leads them to ask God for help minute by minute. Sometimes the beauty of the day brings thoughts of thanksgiving that they can share with the Lord. Sometimes the visit of a friend reminds them of God's goodness in bringing someone to brighten their day.

There is no doubt that Anna was a warrior! She was old, may have been wrinkly, and white-haired, and she may have shuffled. But she was a warrior! Luke 2:37b tells us, *She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying*. At age 84, she served God night and day! And she did it by praying. She was a true prayer warrior. Don't you wonder for whom she prayed? Was it for herself? Was it for her neighbors? Her priest? Her country? Whom did she pray for all those hours?

It is interesting how older people respond (almost apologetically) when they talk about their daily life. They say they can no longer do the things they used to do and feel sad that they are not as productive as they used to be. They reminisce about the old days when their family was young and there was lots of activity around the house. Then with a deep breath

and a sigh, they say, “The only thing I can do now is pray,” as though they were doing something very insignificant or maybe nothing at all! If they only knew the importance of taking someone to the Lord in prayer, they would look at it as a very special privilege and an activity of great significance.

Are you a warrior? A prayer warrior? Praying is something that anyone and everyone can and should do. It may not always be easy, because becoming a prayer warrior requires dedication. It means setting aside special times just for praying. Anna did it in the temple, and she did it night and day!

However, prayer can take place anytime and anywhere. Many would think that in order to pray, prayer “posture” has to take place, that is, you stand or kneel, fold your hands and close your eyes and then begin your talk with the Lord. Anna may well have done that since she spent so much time in the temple. But that is unnecessary, and may well rob you of opportunities for prayer. It is possible to pray while driving, washing dishes, cleaning the house, grocery shopping and other routine activities. What is necessary is a heart which is open to the Lord and a sincere desire to commune with Him.

We need prayer warriors! Women of the church should pray not only for themselves and their families, but for others inside and outside the church. Prayer chains and prayer pals are needed who dedicate themselves just to praying for those in need. Churches who offer these kinds of groups are enriched and blessed beyond what they could ever know. God, who encourages us to pray to Him on all occasions, will bless those who do!

Prayer: Father in heaven, we thank and praise You that You encourage us to talk to You in prayer. Help us to use that privilege often. Help us to understand the power that prayer has. Give us faith to trust You in all that we do, knowing that You love us so much that You sent Your Son to be our Savior. In Jesus’ Name we pray. Amen.

Bible References are the New International Version

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