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GRATEFUL GIRL

a christian magazine celebrating faith, family, food & friendships

LAYING DOWN STRIVING FOR SURRENDERED EFFORT

MICHELLE MYERS

THERE'S MORE TO
MATURING THAN
GROWING OLD
SUE DONALDSON

NATIONAL BE ON PURPOSE MONTH

DONNA GIBBS

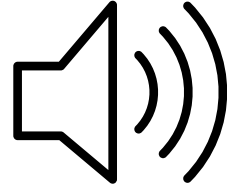
VALENTINES RECIPES
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welcome



Hello friends!

Happy New Year! Happy 2024!

Thank you for being a 2023 reader and supporter of the Grateful Girl Magazine! Your support, prayers and partnership have been an incredible blessing!

The word for the magazine in 2024 is MORE! Let's do MORE in 2024 to spread the love and encouragement of Jesus even farther and in greater ways in 2024! With you as our readers and partners we can do so much more in the coming year and we are eager to see what God does with our YES!

This issue has some incredible women contributors encouraging us to do MORE to focus on Jesus and our walk with Him. I know you will enjoy Michelle Myer's article entitled Laying Down Striving For Surrendered Effort because truly don't we all have that feeling of striving every day? He hasn't called us for that and Michelle does a wonderful job of reminding us.

We are honored to have Donna Gibbs as a contributor in this issue. Donna is a Christian counselor and brings our attention to Be On Purpose Month and what that can mean for us in this season. It's a great reminder to pause and consider what's important.

We welcome Sue Donaldson back with her article There's More to Maturing Than Growing Old and reminders that we should be continually growing and pursuing in Christ.

I have a short article in this issue as I share an article from the Grateful Girl blog about our family's experience with my husband's leukemia diagnosis and bone marrow transplant 26 years ago.

We also have new recipes for Valentine's (or anytime) free downloads and of course our amazing partner directory.

I hope you enjoy the first issue of 2024 and will follow us on Facebook and Instagram so we can connect with you and get your feedback! I pray your 2024 will be filled with MORE joy, MORE peace and MORE Jesus. Let's join together to encourage one another this year!

Patti Jensen

EDITOR/CREATOR/GRATEFUL GIRL

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**LAYING DOWN
STRIVING FOR
SURRENDERED EFFORT**

MICHELLE MYERS

LAYING DOWN STRIVING FOR SURRENDERED EFFORT

Life includes numerous roles and responsibilities. In the home alone, you can be nurse, teacher, chef, and taxi driver—all in the same five minutes. But can I ask you a question? When you look at “all the things,” do you ever get overwhelmed? Do you ever feel the pressure to find “balance” in your life, but don’t know where to begin?

I’ve been there, friend. I spent years trying to achieve life balance. But whenever I had a glimmer of hope that balance was in sight, our season would change, causing me to begin again. Can you relate?

MICHELLE’S WEBSITES + SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS

she works HIS way: sheworksHisway.com

Network Marketing Nobility:

networkmarketingnobility.com

Famous in Heaven and at Home book:

tinyurl.com/heavenandhomebook

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Michelle Myers is the founder of She Works His Way, a non-profit discipleship community for working women that exists to strengthen the churches (Acts 15:41) and stir one another up to love and good works (Hebrews 10:24) With the gospel as the foundation, Michelle helps puts practical steps to the ultimate goal of working for the glory of God and the good of others. Most recently, she co-authored a book with her best friend, Somer Phoebe, called She Works His Way: A Practical Guide for Doing What Matters Most in a Get Things Done World. She and her husband, James, live in Asheville, NC where James is the Central Discipleship Pastor at Biltmore Church, with their three children: Noah, Cole and Shea.



LAYING DOWN STRIVING FOR SURRENDERED EFFORT

michelle myers



“
*God never
intended me to
balance my life.*

It's been an imperfect journey, but over the last few years, I've realized why I never achieved that life balance I strived so hard to find:

God never intended me to balance my life.

The word “balance” implies everything in your life has equal importance. But God's Word lovingly teaches about our priorities:

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you” –
Matthew 6:33

In simple terms? Put God first, and He orders everything else.



I know I've spent a large portion of my life striving to get "all the things." Growing up, I strived for good grades and praise from adults. In my teen years, I added striving for extracurricular achievements, the right clothes, and popularity. Then, it was about getting into the right college, getting the right job, and getting married.

The striving cycle continued into adulthood. I strived to be a great mom, to be a leader in my work, and to be an encouraging and influential voice within my church, my community, and on social media.

It wasn't necessarily that I wanted bad things. But my striving tried to accomplish good things in the wrong way. God doesn't want us to go about our lives striving for our own purposes, friend. The Christian life isn't about striving to be good so we "measure up" to deserve Jesus.

God knew that no matter how hard we tried, in our sin, we would all fall short of His glory, so he offers salvation as a free gift (Romans 3:23).

Jesus came to live the life we never could, to die the death we deserved, and to defeat the grave, so we could share in His righteousness and victory through our faith in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The gospel centers on surrender, and so should our lives. Through Jesus, God provides us a way out of the cycle of striving for our own goals that will never satisfy us. Instead, we can surrender to live for Him fully, which is the only way to find lasting satisfaction.

Striving is about me and what I want. Surrendered effort is about God and what He wants.



Surrendered effort is about God and what He wants.

Here are three ways I've discovered I can put this truth into practice:

1. Priorities aren't proven by merely a written list, but how we actually live.

If we don't live proactively, we will naturally default to living reactively. With reactive living, our priorities will change depending on the opinions and opportunities in front of us at that given moment. Proactive living allows us to keep our priorities by honoring them as we make decisions. For example, saying we prioritize family before work is easy.

But do we actually live that out? There will always be exceptions, but consider these questions:

- Are you more likely to make work wait because it's family time or more likely to cheat family time so you can get more done?
- Who gets your best and who gets your leftovers?

And here's the one that always gets me.

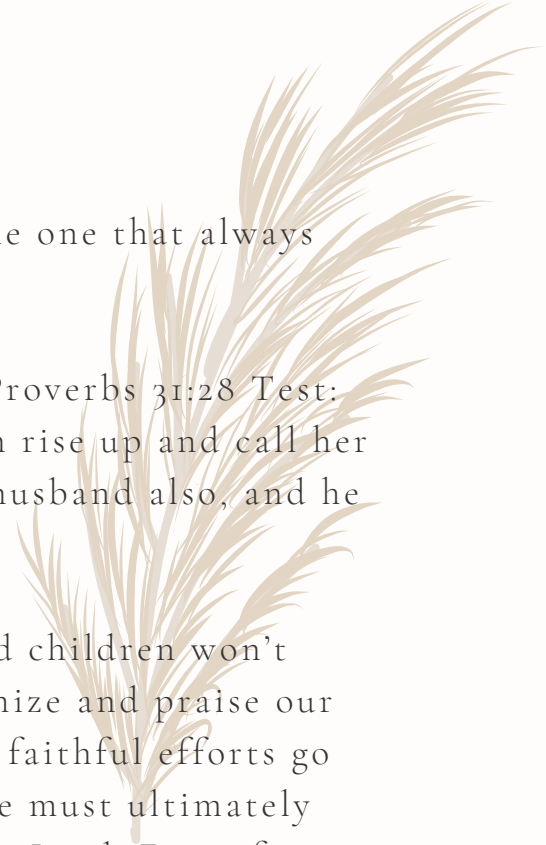
I call it the Proverbs 31:28 Test: "Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her."

Husbands and children won't always recognize and praise our work. As our faithful efforts go unnoticed, we must ultimately work unto the Lord. Even if others around us aren't calling us "blessed," it's a question that challenges us to consider whether or not our family feels loved and cared for:

- From the way I lived my life today, would my highest earthly praise come from my family?

Deciding to live our priorities means that, most of the time, our big decisions are already made before specific situations arise.

John Maxwell said it best: "Learn to say 'no' to the good so you can say 'yes' to the best."



Surrender



2. Her life won't look exactly like yours (and that's a good thing!).

Social media is not terrible in itself, but just like a hammer is a useful tool in the hands of a carpenter but it becomes a dangerous weapon in the hands of your toddler, we must be careful not to let the ability to watch someone else live their life prevent us from living our own lives.

Too often, we fall for the lie that the unfulfilled feeling that rises up inside of us would leave if we just had that new job, or that natural ability, or if we were simply in that next season of raising kids.

But often, that unfulfilled feeling is simply because we aren't making the most of where we are right now. We can stop waiting for what's next or wanting more. Fully investing in where God has us now is far more fulfilling than waiting on things beyond our control.

In fact, a popular verse about "doing all things thought Christ" that we often see accompany victory is really about contentment more than achievement. Read the preceding verses:

"Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me." – Philippians 4:11-13

Contentment is much more likely to result from trusting God, no matter what, not in longing for another assignment.

3. Join God's main mission to find your specific assignment.

Most of us would prefer our own burning bush moment like Moses had or the blinding light on the road to Damascus that sparked the Apostle Paul's conversion. But those moments are the exceptions in the Bible, not the rule.

Think of it this way. If you played a sport when you were younger, you joined a team first, and then, you were assigned a position.

So ask yourself: Are you asking God for a specific position without showing up to be a part of the team?

Jesus put it this way:

And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age" – Matthew. 28:18-20



This is God's agenda.

So when we find ourselves in those new seasons, trying to identify where God wants to use us, we can aim to be obedient to His general call to all believers.

Right where He has us.

Right now.

You know the beautiful part of the Great Commission? God doesn't ask any of us to take on this giant task alone. As Christ-followers, we come together, knowing God has uniquely placed and called each of us to be His representative to those around us.

“Surrendered effort leads you to the only One who satisfies.”

For some, God's call will mean actually picking up and going to the ends of the earth to spread the gospel.

For others, it will mean pursuing intentional discipleship in their homes and their local churches.

Both matter, and both are needed. There are no insignificant Kingdom contributions.

God doesn't merely love what is big; He loves what is His.

Please know the work you do to display the gospel, whether leading a Bible study for hundreds, or reading a Bible story to your kids at bedtime, is eternally significant.

There is a very real battle for your heart happening. The world's view often makes us believe that our impact is attached to doing “more.”

But God's truth reminds us that our impact is tied to doing less of most things so we can do more of what really matters.

So the next time you find yourself navigating “all the things”, remember this:

**Striving will never satisfy you.
Surrendered effort leads you to the only One who satisfies.**



He says, “Be still, and know that I am
God; I will be exalted among the
nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Psalm 46:10

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN ALL-PURPOSE CLEANER



(eLivingtoday.com) Making your own all-purpose household cleaner is an easy alternative to store-bought chemicals. This version of a homemade cleaner is environmentally friendly and less likely to cause irritation.

You can also control the strength of the cleaner by rationing the ingredients while knowing exactly what's in your DIY concoction. Adding essential oils provides natural fragrance and helps deodorize. For example, the tea tree oil in this Homemade All-Purpose Cleaner has antibacterial, antiviral, antifungal and antiseptic qualities, making it a versatile and safe solution for cleaning around the house.

Find more DIY household solutions at eLivingtoday.com.

Homemade All-Purpose Cleaner

- 1 empty spray bottle (1 quart)
- 2 cups distilled water
- 1/4 cup vinegar
- 12-20 drops tea tree essential oil
- 1 teaspoon castile or phosphorous-free dish soap or washing soda

Fill cleaning spray bottle with distilled water.

Add vinegar, tea tree essential oil and soap or washing soda. Shake well.





NATIONAL BE ON PURPOSE MONTH

Donna Gibbs



DONNA GIBBS

Donna Gibbs is a Co-founder of Summit Wellness Centers, PLLC, and provides real HOPE and practical HELP for life's HURTS through the venues of professional Christian Counseling, writing, speaking, and consulting. Donna is the author of numerous book releases, and her blogs, devotions, and articles have frequently been shared in various media outlets. Additionally, she has been featured on radio broadcasts and podcasts across America.

Follow Donna's author page at <https://www.facebook.com/DonnaGibbsResilience/>

There is a day, week, and month for most any observance under the sun. And among many other observances in the month, January is National Be On-Purpose Month. It's quite fitting, don't you think? We are all more aware than ever of goals and commitments for the coming year.





In the January-February season of this year, you probably fall into one of a few categories:

- 1) You may be pushing successfully towards New Year Resolutions;
- 2) You may have established a couple of resolutions, but are at a quitting point; or
- 3) You may not have set resolutions at all, feeling they are just a worn-out fad, or even worse, a set-up for failure.

I get it.

Sometimes setting goals by way of New Year Resolutions is just a fad. A popular point of conversation.



in this hustle and bustle culture, it is healthy to pause and consider our year ahead.

But in this hustle and bustle culture, it is healthy to pause and consider our year ahead. To worship and listen to the whisper of God's leading. To consider our strengths, passions, resources, and callings.

Because if we don't, we'll either passively do nothing, passively continue the forward movement from the previous years, or passively and impulsively say "yes" to each and every shiny opportunity that comes our way.



Simply put, unless we're intentional, we're passively vulnerable to being misguided, without godly ambition or direction.

While we're on the topic, did you know that nearly half of our enthusiastic New Year Resolutions are dropped by the end of January?

Even worse, some of our "successful" achievements aren't even worthy of our efforts. Without prayer, careful consideration, and confident purpose, we may do some really great things in the next year, but we'll likely not meet the objectives of most importance.

.Wow! That stings!

But that's a good sting, because we want God-honoring, purposeful, persevering, and successful goals for 2024. So let's start with an essential ingredient related to our goals: wisdom. You see, we can work intentionally toward anything. In fact, we can work with great passion toward a destructive goal! Toward a goal that will ultimately harm!

Who wants the successful result of a destructive goal?

MY NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS

Solomon, who wrote much of the Proverbs, spoke of wisdom in the first chapter.

Solomon makes a point to separate the foolish from the wise. And the distinctions are clear. A foolish person doesn't seek instruction. A foolish person has their own agenda, and seeks that agenda very passionately, but perhaps against the advice of a more knowledgeable consultant. To the contrary, a wise person is teachable, and constantly seeks learning. A wise person yearns for guidance and instruction, insight and understanding.

To know wisdom and instruction,
to understand words of insight,
to receive instruction in wise dealing,
in righteousness, justice, and equity;
to give prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the youth—
Let the wise hear and increase in learning,
and the one who understands obtain
guidance,
to understand a proverb and a saying,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
The fear of the Lord is the beginning of
knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 1:2-7

The primary reason that our yearly goals fail is because our hearts are not fully engaged with wisdom. A shallow motivation is only strong enough to sustain us for a few weeks amid the challenges that undoubtedly will arise.

So let's pause and dig a little deeper, beyond the shallow. Examine your 2024 goals in light of wisdom. If you can only ask yourself one question, ask this one: "Can God be glorified in these goals?" We were created for His glory (Isaiah 43:7), so there is not a more significant and purposeful inquiry related to our goals. There are also some good secondary questions for pondering as you examine your goals and your motivations for them: "Would I guide someone I care about toward these same goals?" "What is the feedback I am receiving from those in my life who have earned the right to speak truth into my goal-setting?" "Who may be harmed if I am successful in achieving these goals?"



LIVE ON
PURPOSE



Admittedly, these are deep, contemplative questions that require time to process. But this life is a vapor, and it matters how we invest our minutes, our talents, our resources, and our dreams in 2024.

This evaluative aspect of goal-setting decision-making is worthy of pause because it is glory-driven and purpose-driven.

Now that we have explored the vulnerability and danger of a misaligned goal, let's consider why we fail at so many goals of true importance.

We generally fail to achieve a goal because of four correctable stumbling blocks:

1. We fail to write down our goals.

Without a rhythm of being reminded, we simply forget. Display words or phrases related to your goals in your home and/or office. These must be strategically placed in convenient locations that you will frequently see throughout the day.

2. We forget our why.

We lose sight of God's calling, and how life could be once a goal is achieved. When we often ponder our why, we allow ourselves to imagine a healthier future, starving complacency and apathy.

3. We are isolated. If we are surrounded by others who are finishing well, we are likely to do the same. Iron sharpens iron, and perseverance is inspiring and contagious.

4. We give up too quickly.

By definition, a task that requires a goal, or requires resolve, is a task that has previously brought intimidation. The quest of a goal typically brings discomfort. It requires more work than we expected. It may cost more than we were prepared to pay. Pursuing a goal may even create conflicts. To squelch the discomfort, we quit. And we often quit prematurely.



PURPOSE

When I consider the word, “Quit,” I reflect on my track years, and specifically to the 400-meter race. Sprinting for that distance is a physical and mental challenge. During the last curve, muscles burning, and out of breath, I often wrestled with my mind and body and sometimes wanted to drop-out and forget the finish line altogether.

I think this is the reason Paul used the example of a race so many times in scripture. “I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.” (Philippians 3:14, NLT.)

In other words, let’s accept that we’re going to wrestle with our mind and our body, but it does little good to compete in a race that we don’t finish.

Many earthly struggles are far more daunting than a 400-meter sprint, and often our yearly goals are reflective of these deeper struggles... areas that we crave victory.

We long for victory related to our relationship with people. Our relationship with God. Our relationship with money. Our relationship with substances. Our relationship with food. Our relationship with our body. Our relationship with our past.

So we set a goal.

But things get tough... just like they always have. The resistance is strong. The temptation is stronger.

And hope wains...

When we face persisting struggles in life we often want to disconnect from our goals, exit the race, and run for the sidelines.

All too often, we burn out and lose steam before the finish line. Like a sprinter who doesn’t know how to pace themselves and is passed by other runners in the last turn of the race.

We don’t finish well.

We give up.

We quit.

We quit prematurely.

If God is urging you to release a superficial goal that you have established without His leading, then obey. But quit only if you are certain God is prompting you to do so. Don’t ever give up prematurely on a goal that God hasn’t led you to release. If God can speak creation into being, then He can speak life into your seemingly hopeless, purpose-driven goal. And if God can resurrect His Son from the dead, then your challenge is not a problem!

Ponder that!



If you're feeling weary related to a goal, take a few moments to reflect and remember why you started this goal, and your experience in feeling led by the Holy Spirit toward this objective.

It's not a time to quit. It's just a time for a healthy re-grouping. If you are certain God has called you to this task, it increases the likelihood that you will finish it. Purpose is a significant propelling force for enthusiasm and resolve, and it has to be revisited often. Reinvest in your time and intimacy with God. If you are walking daily in a journey with Him, you are likely to finish what He leads you to do. We can't genuinely, consistently and intimately walk with Him and also persistently resist something He is actively doing in our life.



So this month, Be on Purpose, as the observance declares. Yes, focus on your goals and continue your resolve toward your objectives.

But don't do so with blinders. Wisdom is the beginning of healthy ambition. Seek biblical wisdom. Be teachable. Reach out for competent and biblical help and coaching.

Stay the course!

Don't give up!

Persevere!

When you have a failure, evaluate what you can learn from it, dust off your boots, and continue your course. Join me in clinging to this inspiring verse: "Better is the end of a thing than its beginning" (Ecclesiastes 7:8). Yes, the beginning is going to be hard. But it's the end result that we look forward to celebrating!

GOAL PLANNER

GOAL	STRATEGIES	DUE DATE	COMPLETED
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	1 2 3		<input type="checkbox"/> DONE <input type="checkbox"/> DONE <input type="checkbox"/> DONE
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DOWNLOAD & PRINT

Family-Friendly Fun to Beat Winter Blahs

FAMILY FEATURES

Explore What Surrounds You

Cool winter days may have you tempted to burrow under a blanket and wait out the weather, but there are plenty of entertaining and affordable ways to enjoy quality family time together despite chilly temperatures.

Kids who are cooped up indoors during the winter often get restless, but you can make the most of that boredom by gathering everyone and discovering new ways to create memories together.

Get Your Game On

Forget about screen play and instead show the younger generation how much fun it can be to take on family rivals with classic board games or work in teams to complete age-appropriate puzzles. These activities allow everyone to participate and practice skills like problem solving while having fun.

Make a Meal Together

You likely know it's a good idea to gather the family around the table for a meal, but there's no need to wait until the food is done. Not only does cooking together give you something fun to do as a family, but it also helps kids develop important life skills and healthy habits, exposes them to new food options and allows them to practice reading and math when they follow recipes.

Get everyone in on the prep work with kid-friendly foods such as these flavorful frozen waffles that can be used as the base for simple and delicious recipes. A fun, easy way to enjoy a favorite cereal in waffle form, PEBBLES Waffles are available in betoved Fruity and Cocoa flavors. Start the day by making breakfast a family affair or mix things up and prepare a breakfast menu for dinner. Try one of these easy recipes for a sure way to put a smile on your loved ones' faces.

Resist the temptation to huddle indoors and instead explore how your community transforms with the seasons. Look for the best sledding hills or check out seasonal attractions like ice rinks and festivals. Even taking a family drive to see the holiday lights or marvel at the way snow transforms your surroundings gives you a way to break out of the house and enjoy some entertaining fun.

Encourage Artistic Expression

Once kids are bundled up properly, there's little that tops good old-fashioned snow days. Snow angels, snow forts and snowmen are just the beginning. Inviting kids to create and design lets their imaginations run wild and, with a little luck, they'll run off some of that pent-up energy, too. If you're stuck inside, encourage creativity through arts and crafts, or make mealtimes a chance for children to explore their artistic sides by allowing them to customize toppings on favorites such as waffles.

Give Back to Others

It's never too early to learn the intrinsic good of giving back, and cold winter months are an ideal time to instill a giving mindset. As a family, you could volunteer time at a local food bank or work together to assemble care kits with warm blankets and socks for the homeless. You could write letters to soldiers or make seasonal greeting cards for seniors at a local nursing home. Big or small, they're gestures that make a lasting impression on young minds.

Find more family-friendly ideas for a winter to remember at postpebblescereal.com.



Fruity Smiley Face Waffle

2 Fruity PEBBLES Waffles
1 container whipped cream
1 cup Fruity PEBBLES cereal
blueberries (optional)
rainbow sprinkles (optional)

maple syrup (optional)

Heat waffles until golden brown and place on plate. Use whipped cream to make smiley face eyes, nose and mouth.

Place cereal on top of whipped cream to make eyes, nose and mouth colorful. Add blueberries, rainbow sprinkles and syrup, if desired.

Cocoa Smiley Face Waffle

2 Cocoa PEBBLES waffles
1 cup Cocoa PEBBLES cereal
1 container whipped cream
chocolate chips (optional)
chocolate sprinkles (optional)
strawberries (optional)
chocolate syrup (optional)

Heat waffles until golden brown and place on plate. Use whipped cream to make smiley face eyes, nose and mouth.

Place cereal on top of whipped cream to make eyes, nose and mouth colorful. Add chocolate chips, chocolate sprinkles, strawberries and chocolate syrup, if desired.





Sue Donaldson

There's More to
Maturing Than
Growing Old

THERE'S MORE TO MATURING THAN GROWING OLD

I may be a grown-up now but I don't always act my age. That is, I don't always act like I know Jesus, even a little bit.

I should know better—I grew up in the church. Still, on any given day, I can show more signs of a baby believer than one practically weaned on the Word. Yes, God loves me whatever age or stage I'm in—but His love doesn't cancel out His desire for my spiritual progress. I'm grown up now—it's time I grow something besides old.

In Ephesians 4:14, Paul writes: “No prolonged infancies among us, please. We'll not tolerate babes in the woods, small children who are an easy mark for imposters. God wants us to grow up, to know the whole truth and tell it in love—like Christ in everything”(MSG).

Speaker, Podcaster, and Author Sue Donaldson and her husband, Mark, live in San Luis Obispo, California. Sue taught high school English in Brazil with Wycliffe Bible Translators. She and her husband, Mark, have raised 3 daughters who keep them at the bank and on their knees. Sue loves connecting people to one another, to God, and to His Word. She blogs at [Welcome Heart](#), hosts a weekly [podcast](#), and has been speaking for women's retreats and conferences for the past 20 years with long pauses for babies, diapers and soccer pasta parties.





GROWTH IS A PROCESS: A MATURE BELIEVER STAYS IN THE RACE

Currently, we're in the middle of remodeling our kitchen—a project that my husband is doing himself. So far, we have an extra 1400 sq. ft., including an extra garage and bedroom I didn't know we needed. The kitchen hasn't been touched.

I have to remind myself we are in a process. The end result will be worth the wait and I'm confident that someday I will have a bigger kitchen—with or without the backsplash! The key is not to give up in the middle of the mess.

Our spiritual growth is a process—and it takes perseverance to stay there.

What does it look like to grow up spiritually? To be like Christ in everything.

Years ago after expressing my frustration with my lack of spiritual maturity, a wise friend reflected on my outburst: "Sue, do you imagine you will someday reach a plateau where you no longer need to grow?" I understood what he meant—we shouldn't expect perfection, this side of heaven. The important thing is to keep growing.

So how do we do that? Here are three lessons to keep in mind as we develop our spiritual maturity and cultivate Christlikeness this side of heaven:

Growing is a process—A mature believer stays in the race.

Growing is a partnership—A mature believer is dependent on God.

Growing is a privilege—A mature believer values her family ties.

GROWTH IS A PROCESS: A MATURE BELIEVER STAYS IN THE RACE



GROWING UP MEANS NOT GIVING UP. WE JUST KEEP GOING.

“Let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.” (Hebrews 12:1b-2, NIV).

Once, while in training for a half-marathon alongside a group of middle-aged ladies, our coach said bluntly, “I hate to burst your bubble, but none of us are actually going to win this race!” Ha! Of course, we weren’t going to win. We were just happy to get out of bed early on a Saturday morning and try not to pull a hamstring.

“Your goal,” she told us, “is not to win, but to finish.” That was a goal I could live with, no matter how hard the daily workout.

In our spiritual race, God doesn’t care about our end time, or how fast we run. He just wants us in the race—to finish and finish well.

Like infants meandering along the path, we may get distracted from time to time, but we need to stay the course, “fixing our eyes on Jesus” (Hebrews 12:2). Only then can we finish the race. Growing up means not giving up. We just keep going.

“Lord, help me keep my eyes on you. Some days I want to give up. Give me the strength to stay in the race and not worry about my time or about how others are running. Thank you and amen.”





GROWTH IS A PARTNERSHIP

GROWTH IS A PARTNERSHIP: A MATURE BELIEVER IS DEPENDENT ON GOD

Is it possible to grow into God's idea of a strong, mature woman in my own strength? Of course not. God has high and purpose-filled expectations for me, but on my own, I'm weak, frail, and given to fits of petulance, self-pity, and pride—usually all in one day. In order to grow into His likeness—to be truly sanctified—the mature believer recognizes the need for partnership—a holy alliance with God and His community of believers.

And the more we mature, the sooner we recognize that truth.

As Paul writes in Philippians 2:12-13 “Therefore, my dear friends... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose” (NIV).

My daily workout this side of heaven is ‘working out’ a perfect congruence between what I believe and how I behave. It takes effort, desire, and most of all, an awareness that I need God and other believers every step of the way.



Thankfully, it is God who instills in me that desire, passion, and will to obey—and the awareness that I have a lot of work left to do before I am fully mature.

When our eldest daughter Bonnie attended a leadership camp with several hundred other girls on the subject of state politics, it was a humbling experience. “These girls know so much more than I do,” she shared in our mid-week call. “I may be smart, but I’m learning I don’t know as much as I thought!”

Knowing her limits revealed a glimpse of her maturity. As mature believers, we too need the humility to recognize that we can’t do it alone.

Yet our helplessness is not a cause for despair or frustration. As a wise person once said, “Ministry is spillage.” We are connected to the Vine—the more connected we are, the more fruit our lives produce. Instead of trying to ride the do-it-all-ourselves bandwagon, God continually shows us our need for Him. He reminds us that we cannot become like Jesus without His supernatural empowerment—we must lean on Him. “Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5b).

He reminds us that we cannot become like Jesus without His supernatural empowerment—we must lean on Him.

Praise God, the road to sanctification is not one we have to travel alone—and a mature believer learns to lean heavily on her companion.

“Lord, I’m desperate for you. Remind me I can’t live this Christian life by myself. Please provide community to encourage me along the way. I want to do all things by your strength and power. Thank you and amen.”





GROWTH IS A PRIVILEGE: A MATURE BELIEVER VALUES HER FAMILY TIES

Once we become part of God's family, there should be a family likeness we grow into— that is, those closest to us should start to see some resemblance to Christ.

My sister and I are the only redheads in our family. Yet despite not looking physically like my parents, anyone who knew them knows I'm much more of a Moore (my maiden name), than a Donaldson. There is a strong family likeness.

Spiritual growth is developing a family likeness to Christ. Some may not care to have a resemblance to their earthly family, but once you choose to follow Jesus, there begins a lifetime process to become more like our Father. And it started with God coming after us. John Ortberg wrote: "God relentlessly pursued us because all he ever wanted was to be with us."

I'm loved. I belong. The more I realize that the more I want to become like Jesus. It's not a duty thing, it's a glory thing.

Yet so often I can view my maturing process as something laborious and difficult, trudging along like a beast of burden instead of soaring on eagle's wings.

Ephesians 4:30 in The Message paraphrase reads: "Don't grieve God. Don't break His heart. His Holy Spirit, moving and breathing in you, is the most intimate part of your life, making you fit for Himself. Don't take such a gift for granted."

Growing up is something we take for granted until we see that it's not always possible. Friends of ours had a baby boy born with a rare syndrome: Cornelia De Lang. As a result of his condition, their son will never grow up the way his rambunctious little brother is growing.

Becoming children of God comes with great privilege—the opportunity to follow God, grow into the likeness of His Son, and become filled with the Holy Spirit. What an incredible gift.

Ephesians 4:1 in The Living Bible reads: "I beg you to live and act in a way worthy of those who have been chosen for such wonderful blessings as these."

"Lord, thank you that you came after me so that I could be in your family. What a privilege to become like you! Please forgive me for taking you for granted. May I actively pursue what pleases you most. Thank you and amen."

Growing more like Jesus is a lifelong process this side of heaven, but thankfully, we are never in it alone.

TRUST THE LORD
WITH ALL YOUR
heart



Proverbs 3:5

LOVE THE LORD
YOUR GOD
WITH ALL YOUR
heart



Luke 10:27

LOVE THE LORD
YOUR GOD
WITH ALL YOUR



Luke 10:27



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RED VELVET COOKIES

Red Velvet Sandwich Cookies

They are sweet and red and a perfect little treat to give on the 14th. And even better, they are super-easy!

All you need is:

1 Box red velvet cake mix*
1/2 Cup butter, softened to room temperature
2 Eggs

- Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
- Mix ingredients until combined.
- Drop spoonfuls of cookie batter onto baking sheet about two inches apart.
- Bake for 10-12 minutes.
- Cool.

Cream Cheese Filling

1/2 Cup butter, softened to room temperature
1 8 oz. Package cream cheese, softened to room temperature
1 1lb. Box of confectioner's sugar
1 tsp Vanilla

- In a mixer, cream butter, cream cheese and vanilla.
- Gradually add sugar and mix until smooth.

•
Makes about 24 cookies or 12 cookie sandwiches

* Any cake mix should work.



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what is grace?

patti
jensen

I discovered my favorite
Bible verse in a bathroom
in a downtown Seattle
condo



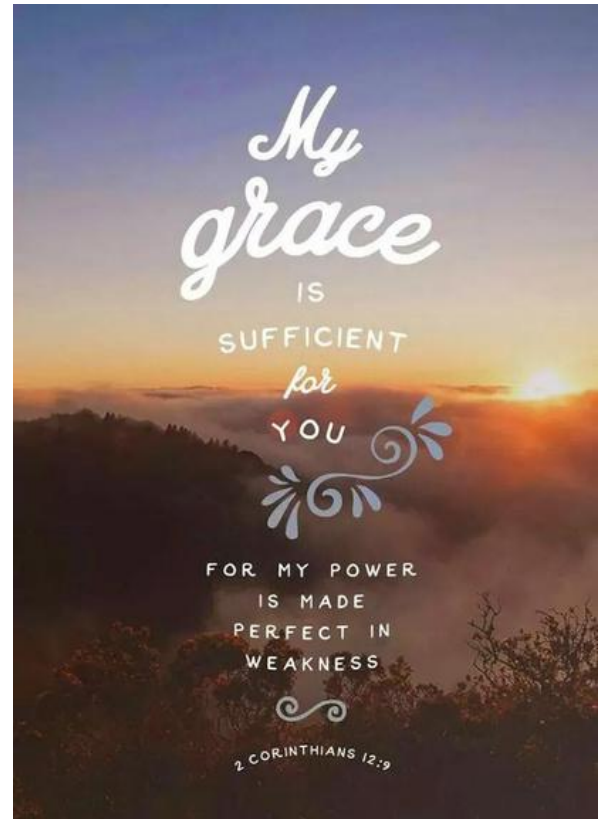
GRATEFUL GIRL

patti jensen

what is grace?

@GirlfriendsIn God posted this photo recently and since it is one of my favorites, I had to share. This verse became such a soft place to land when we were in Seattle for Jack's bone marrow transplant for leukemia. There I was, 2,000 miles away from home, with my sick husband, our two children ages 4 and 7, and my mother and father in law. I felt pretty alone and helpless.

I can vividly remember going into the bathroom in our rented apartment in downtown Seattle and flipping open my Bible. Jack was to enter the hospital the next day to begin his radiation and chemo prior to the transplant. He was given a 30% chance of survival. We were trying to keep things "normal" for our kids, trying to keep my positive face on for everyone around me. But I was struggling not to fall apart right when we were going into the heat of the battle.



“

—

There I was, 2,000 miles away from home, with my sick husband, our two children ages 4 and 7, and my mother and father in law. I felt pretty alone and helpless.

—

We lived through that time to be here today to tell you that He is Faithful.



I flipped open my Bible in the bathroom (I know ...it's the bathroom...but it was the only place to be alone) and this scripture flipped open.

Isn't God amazing how he just meets us wherever we are, even the bathroom in a rented apartment thousands of miles away from home, and gives us what we need?

I had just prayed...Lord I don't know what to do. I don't know what is going to happen. Help me be strong. And then He sends this scripture.

He says...I am sufficient...I am enough...I am all you need. And if that isn't good enough...My awesome power is make PERFECT in weakness. Bible scholars may argue that what I took from this isn't what was intended. But what it meant for me wasPatti I know you are at your weakest. You have never been in a more scary or vulnerable place. And now I AM AT MY BEST....MY POWER IS MADE PERFECT. Lean into me.

And I did. From that day on I just simply said, Lord your power is perfect today. We can do today. One Day At A Time became my motto.

On New Year's Eve, we marked 26 years since the bone marrow transplant. 26 years since that moment in the bathroom where I simply flipped open His Word and said Help Me. He is faithful friends.

We lived through that time to be here today to tell you that He is Faithful. We lived through it to tell that when you are at your bottom, He is at the top. He showcases His Perfect Power when you are at your weakest point and cry out and say Help Me. He will be there. I promise.

IT'S RED VELVET PANCAKES WITH BUTTERMILK SYRUP!



Ingredients

- 1 1/2 C. Buttermilk
- 4 Eggs
- 4 Tbsp. Butter, melted
- 1 tsp. Vanilla
- 2 Tbsp. Red Food Coloring
- 2 C. Flour
- 2 Tbsp. Cocoa
- 1/3 cup Sugar
- 2 tsp. Baking Powder
- 1/2 tsp. Baking Soda
- 1 tsp. Salt

Buttermilk Syrup

- 1 C Butter
- 1 C Buttermilk
- 2 C Sugar
- 2 Tbsp. Vanilla
- 1 tsp. Baking Soda

Directions

Mix together dry ingredients and set aside

Melt butter in separate bowl, then add buttermilk, eggs, vanilla, and food coloring. Blend well. Pour in dry mixture and beat until smooth.

Pour 1/2 cup worth of the whipped batter on a greased skillet. Pan fry on medium heat until browned. Flip over and brown again. Top with desired toppings and serve warm.

Syrup Directions

Bring the first three ingredients to a boil and boil for one minute, stirring constantly. Remove from heat and add vanilla and baking soda. Stir and Serve.

Notes

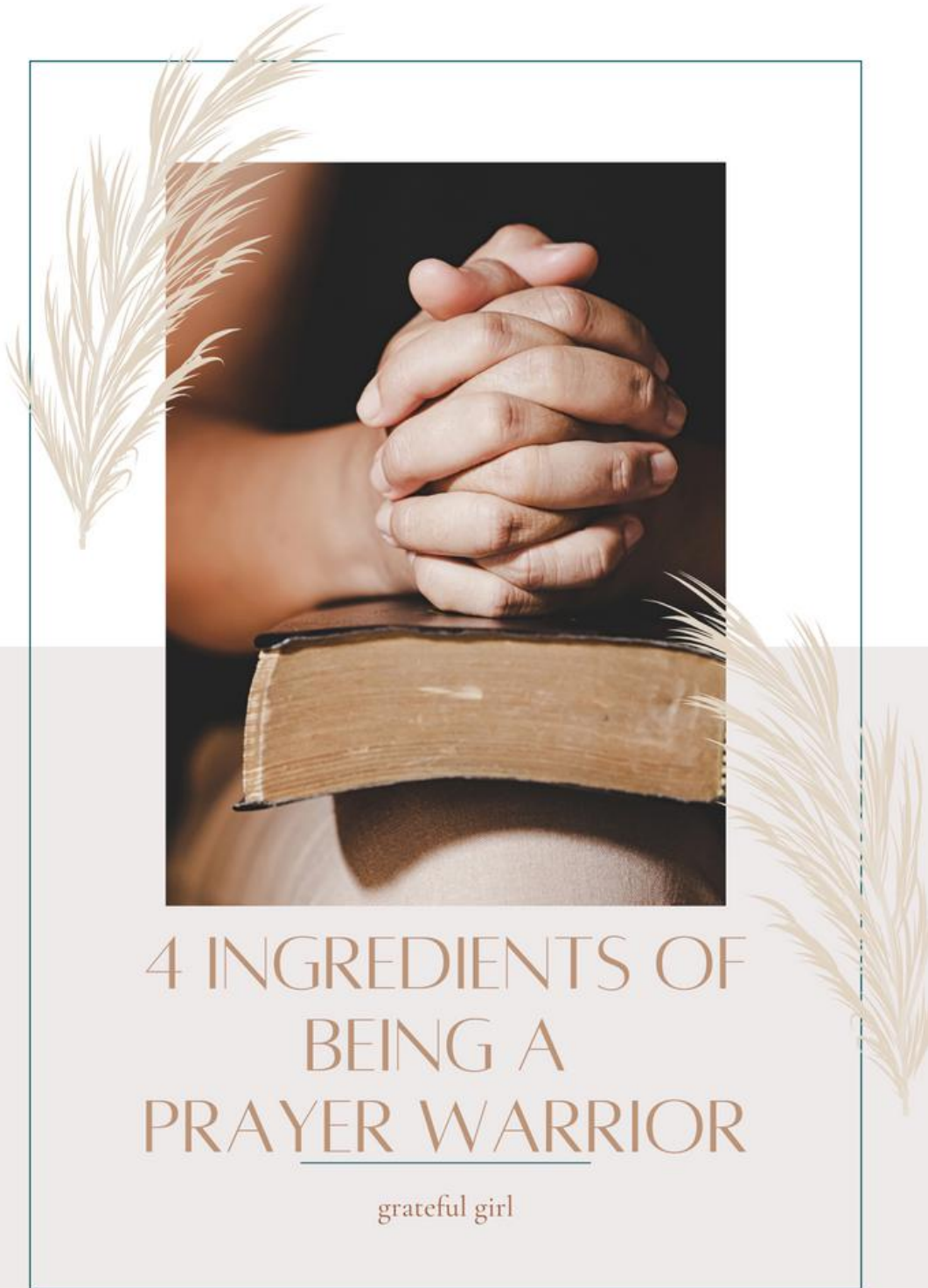
{To make a heart shaped pancake (optional) place a heart shaped cookie cutter on the skillet, and pour batter into the cookie cutter. Remove form before flipping.}

*Optional toppings include syrup, butter, whipping cream, and shaved chocolate.





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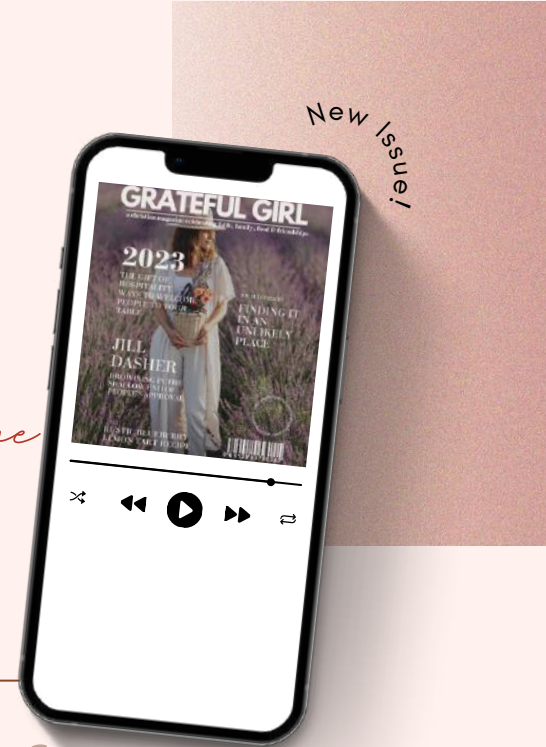
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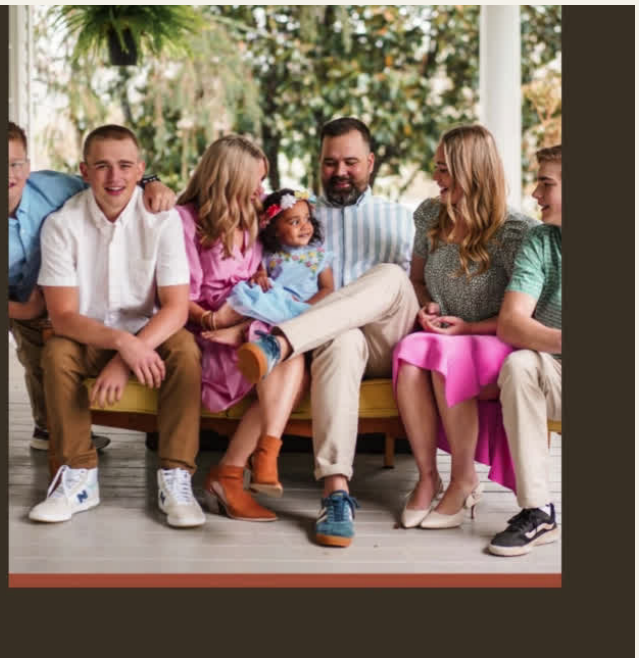
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The graphic features a pink silhouette of a castle on the left and a woman wearing a colorful bow on her head on the right. The background is a light pink with abstract shapes.

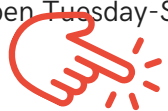
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