

My Silk Dress

"Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . .
But as for me and my household, we will serve the LORD."

—Joshua 24:15, NIV


Years ago, I wanted to have a silk dress but didn't have money for the expensive fabric. Much later, I bought soft, shiny, silver-gray material for the beautiful dress that I wore to my wedding. It felt like a second skin on my body—elegant, light, and *so* good! This was a dress for only special occasions, so I rarely wore it and washed it only one or two times. One day, deciding to wear it to the wedding celebration of a close friend, I took my silk dress from the closet to put on. But I could not zip it up. I held my breath, tucked my tummy, and let my husband struggle with the zipper. It didn't look nice on me any more, so I had to say goodbye to it. The dress had not changed size, but I had. It was painful to have to give it away—a sad ending to my silk dress story.

Yet this happens elsewhere, does it not? A table we keep only for special occasions. A keepsake book that never gets read. A visit we postpone until it's too late. Or we suffer from the past, fear for the future, but forget to live for, and enjoy, the present. What we have saved can lose its value over time. So, at the start of this new year, we need to think about the word *now*.

"*Now* is the appointed time." The Israelites had to decide whether to go back to what they knew and disliked or to go forward into the unknown. And they needed to decide *now*.

In John 12:3–9 we read the story of Mary Magdalene, who in the past had felt dirty, abused, denied, and unworthy. But she did what her heart, impressed by God's Spirit, told her to do *now*—anoint the feet of Jesus with expensive oil. Though criticized by the men, she gave her *now* to Jesus. *Now* was her time—and it was also His time to give her back her God-given worth.

We women can do things that men cannot; men can do things that women cannot do. Let us recognize our true God-given worth and do what He asks us to do. Let us change our habits *now*. So let us not wait until the dress doesn't fit any more or until it is too late for that visit. Let us not wait until the marriage is in pieces. Let us not wait until we have forgotten what we liked—or until we have lost ourselves. Let us be salt and light! Let us remember the past and count our present blessings. Let's be courageous. Now!



January 2

The Year I Will Never Forget

Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.

—1 Peter 5:7, NIV

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD,
"plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future."

—Jeremiah 29:11, NIV

Have you ever had a really rough year? A year when everything seemed to go wrong?

In the wee hours of January 1, the sound of exploding fireworks filled the air. Residents and visitors alike filled the streets to celebrate the incoming new year. As I listened to the merriment, my thoughts drifted back to events that had happened the previous year.

Oh, Lord, I prayed, thank You for sparing my life to see this new year, but, oh, what a year the last one was!

Have you ever had one of those years when your challenges assailed your family from all sides? Was it the difficulty you faced meeting your financial demands? Could it have been that terrible car accident that has left you paralyzed? Oh, it must have been that medical diagnosis—a diagnosis that included many tests, many doctors, and few answers. A diagnosis that had you wondering where the Great Physician was in all of this; then you watched the medical bills pile up and grasped for solutions that could bring about relief and healing.

But every so often you began to find some comfort in God and His words and in the words of those who love you. These words, in hours of despair, reminded you not to be fearful because, as with the wayward Samson, God is still involved in your life.

Whatever it is that might have happened in your life this past year, no matter how challenging, remember that our heavenly Father asks us to cast all our cares on Him.

He reminds us that He will never leave us nor forsake us.

As we begin this new year, let's remember that our heavenly Father loves and cares for us.

Let's ask God to give us the strength we need to face whatever challenges come our way. No matter how difficult life may be, He has our backs.

Won't you allow Him to lead you along the path of trust and righteousness as you commence this year? He will be glad to walk it with you.

Taniesha Robertson-Brown

Brighten Your Corner

"Before they call I will answer."

—Isaiah 65:24, NIV


It was time to leave for Wednesday night prayer meeting. Miguel, my husband, rushed me out of the house because he'd promised to pick up a neighbor on the way. I suggested that we take my van because I needed to fill up the gas tank. I'd gone to the gas station after work, but there had been a line of cars waiting, so I'd come on home. Miguel quietly grumbled that I always wait until the gas tank indicator light on the dashboard goes on before I fill up, so I agreed to get gas on the way to church.

Miguel did not take our usual route. I squinted in the sunset glare across the windshield and couldn't help but comment that "we" had made a mistake going down Yellowhead Trail. Traffic was backed up, with only one lane moving. As we inched along, we realized that there'd been an accident ahead. We could see an ambulance, a fire truck, and several cars pulled over on the shoulder of the road. Suddenly I recognized a couple from our church standing beside the road. *And* beside their smashed truck! Unfortunately, they had rear-ended another vehicle that, in turn, had hit a third vehicle. Miguel quickly pulled over. We jumped out of the van and ran toward our friends.

These church members, a senior couple, were visibly shaken by the accident but not hurt. First responders placed a woman from one of the involved vehicles into a neck brace and then onto a stretcher. "She doesn't have life-threatening injuries," they assured us. The third driver, after exchanging contact information, drove off, praise God! I could not bring myself to continue on to church and leave our friends waiting alone for a tow truck. So I phoned the church and informed someone about what had happened and received their assurance of prayer.

Since we could not go to church, we did the next best thing. The Bible says to give thanks in all things (1 Thessalonians 5:18). So, right there, we began singing and praising God for His watch care over everyone involved in the accident. We recited Psalm 100 and shared stories about God's goodness until the tow truck arrived. In the process, we witnessed to the ambulance attendants, tow truck driver, and police officers who were still on the scene.

Brighten whatever dark corner in which you find yourself.



January 4

Much More Than What We Asked or Dreamed

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD,
“plans to prosper you and not to harm you,
plans to give you hope and a future.”

—Jeremiah 29:11, NIV

Some time ago, my husband and I decided to submit applications for job openings in a small town. We decided to pray about it and asked God to show us where we should go. We agreed to take the qualifying exams. If one of us passed the exam and was offered a position, we would sell our house and move to that town.

The prospective employer informed me I was selected as the top applicant. I took the job. God had worked out everything. There was only one problem: The houses in the new town were much more expensive than where we had previously lived. Even with money from the sale of our home, it would be impossible for us to afford a house there. We prayed to God about this problem.

We looked at several houses during this time. Everything seemed to go wrong. I began to claim the promises of our heavenly Father; after all, we believed our move was His will. My husband told me about a house he had seen along a dirt road, but I was not interested. At night, before I went to bed, I prayed to God.

That night I dreamed that I had arrived at a house resembling one that our friends lived in. In my dream, the front door was on the opposite side from our friends' actual home. In the dream, I asked my friend why she had moved the door. She had smiled and said, “This isn't my house. It's yours.”

The next day we went house hunting. As we neared the house that my husband had already seen, I said I'd be willing to take a look at it. To my surprise, it looked the same as the house in my dream! “This is our house,” I said to my husband. He looked at me, scared. I explained that I believed God had shown me this very house in my dream the night before.

We called the real estate agent and closed the deal that had been made possible only by the grace of God.

To this day, I am touched every time I remember how God can give us so much more than we ask for or dream. *Thank you, Lord.*

Nilva de F. Oliveira da Boa Morte

I Will Save Your Children

Shall the prey be taken from the mighty,
or the captives of the righteous be delivered? But thus says the LORD:

"Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away,
and the prey of the terrible be delivered; for I will contend with him
who contends with you, and I will save your children."

—Isaiah 49:24, 25, NKJV

The sun had barely set Friday evening as I eagerly ushered my four children to their beds. My heart was heavy. Too heavy to enjoy their noise and activity a moment longer!

As quiet descended, I plunked myself down on the couch and burst into tears. My husband was away on a seven-week trip, and parenting without his help had taken its toll on me. As the end of week six rolled around, discouragement settled on me like a heavy blanket. All I could see were my kids' faults—fighting, crying, teasing each other, and not obeying quickly—they were so naughty! Now, with tears rolling down my face, I begged God to talk to me.


Look at my kids, Lord! They'll never go to heaven like this! They're hopeless! And I am too! Look at me! I'm a failure of a mother, and I can't even save myself, much less my children!

I hugged my Bible for dear life. *You have to talk to me! Please, talk to me! We're all hopeless, and I need to hear Your voice!*

I opened the Bible, looking for . . . I don't know what. But my eyes fell immediately on these words: "Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, or the captives of the righteous be delivered? But thus says the LORD: 'Even the captives of the mighty shall be taken away, and the prey of the terrible shall be delivered; for I will contend with him that contends with you, and I will save your children' " (Isaiah 49:24, 25, NKJV).

I will save your children. The very words my heart most craved to hear! The answer to the heaviest burden on my heart! Peace stole over me. He will save my children! He promised! It's His job, not mine. It never was mine. Of course, I can't save my children, or myself. We're all completely dependent on Him, and He has promised to save us!

Joy filled my heart, and I wanted to shout, laugh, and sing! God had talked to me! He heard my cries! He answered me! He knows the anguish of my heart! He listened to me, and He replied! He really does love me, He really does. We can trust our children to Him.




January 6

Insight From a "Web Site"

"Behold, I make all things new."

—Revelation 21:5, NKJV



Of all the marvelous things I look forward to seeing in heaven, spiders are not on my list. I know there are people who are fascinated by them and the good they do. Each spider consumes about two thousand insects per year, and I applaud them for their part in keeping these bugs from taking over the world. It's all right with me if these arachnids live in my yard. I just don't like them camping out in my house.

In spite of my aversion to spiders, I must admit that God has a special purpose for them, as He does for all His creatures. In watching them I have learned something that has helped me through some difficult times—times when I just wanted to give up.

If you've ever seen a spider building a web, you can't help but notice the persistence it employs. It builds that piece of architecture as if its life depends on it—because it does; without that web, there is no dinner. With precision and patience, that little creature keeps at the task until it's finished.

If a heavy rain destroys the web, the spider waits out the storm. Then, no matter how tired it may be, it starts rebuilding.

Like most people, I've experienced storms in my life. When they are short, like thundershowers, I simply do the best I can and rearrange my day. But when the storm is more like a hurricane, it washes away my plans, my hopes, and my dreams. It's then I remember the lowly spider, waiting for the tempest to pass so it can begin to build its web again.

It's tempting to think that the spider can simply build a new web, while for me starting over is a lot more complicated. That may be true. The difference is that the spider doesn't give up. It never quits until it has a new web.

Have you had any storms lately? Whatever damage they have caused, God doesn't want you to give up either. He's always near. But He is especially close to us during the storms of life.

If the Lord can equip the lowly spider with the strength and motivation to rebuild after it has lost everything, just imagine what wonderful things He can do for you and me when a crisis overwhelms us like a flood. All we need to do is ask.

Marcia Mollenkopf

God Moves in a Mysterious Way

He leads me beside the still waters.

—Psalm 23:2, NKJV

I looked forward to joining my husband, who was serving as a missionary in Liberia. But the people he arranged for me to travel with left without informing me. As I waited for the Lord to work things out, I dreamt about flying to somewhere with rubber plantations. I also dreamt about having a son in a land with many flowers. At work I was asked to travel with other ladies to cook for our soldiers. I was impressed, “Do not accept.” So I declined. Upon arriving home that afternoon, a voice said to me, “Go fetch water.” I did. Again the voice said, “Lie down.” I lay down, and about an hour later, the voice told me, “Go take a bath.” Carrying the bucket of water toward the bathroom, I saw a man in the hallway with luggage. To my surprise, it was my husband, who had come from Liberia to get me so I could join him in mission service.

“The vehicle that dropped me at your house vanished after I got my luggage,” he told me. “It had traveled over four hundred miles without stopping.” My dad had mixed feelings about our leaving; however, he said he would pray for our safety. We boarded a vessel at the same seaport where the mystery vehicle had picked up my husband earlier.

While we were on the high seas, an enemy warship sighted us. Then suddenly, the tides made it impossible for the larger ship to overtake us. Our small vessel escaped and made it to the last seaport in Biafra. Passengers on the next boat to arrive told us that the warship that had missed us had caught them. Because of the many foreigners aboard the smaller vessel, however, the crew of the larger ship spared everyone on the overtaken boat. At our seaport stopover, the soldiers who searched our luggage gave us permission to sail away. Again, this was by God’s grace, for within two hours the same warship arrived at this very port!

We were able to board a plane in Douala, Cameroon. Then, arriving at Robertsfield Airport in Liberia, I saw rubber plantations looking like those in my earlier dream. In less than one year, we traveled to the United States of America. I loved the beautiful flowers there, and that is where my son was born. The Lord is faithful.

Do you have a mountain in your life? Just remember that God is able to remove it.