

**THE 7 HARDEST  
THINGS GOD ASKS  
A WOMAN TO DO**

**BY**

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# Preface

It's funny how things "happen."

About seven years ago, my mother and I were sitting on the floor of her Atlanta home, playing with my then one-year-old son. Over the squeaks and rattles of my son's toys, we talked about our desire to write a book together. We looked for ways to connect the necessary dots to do so. We brainstormed over topics and discussed philosophies for nearly an hour. Frustrated over how it was not coming together, we jotted down a few notes and closed the notebook. We never picked it back up again.

Fast forward five years. My mother called to tell me about a book idea she had. She was going to submit a proposal for *The Hardest Things God Asks a Woman to Do* to a few publishing houses to see if anyone would be interested. With three books under her belt, she already had relationships with some publishers. When she told me what the book would be about, it immediately struck a chord. Actually it was more like a lightning bolt. Looking back I know God was trying to tell me something but I was unaware of it at the time. I told Mom it was a super idea and I would pray about the future of it, if there were to be one.

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Some months later, my mother informed me that the proposal had been rejected. She looked at it as a closed door and a closed issue. I told her I loved the idea and thought the information in it would be helpful to women, but that is the only thought I had about it that day.

Soon afterwards, my church's women's ministry director, a good friend, asked me if I would be interested in teaching an eight-week Bible study on Wednesday nights. I hesitated; I had no prepared material. Suddenly, a name and an idea popped into my head: *The hardest things God asks a woman to do*. Since my mother and I had taught together in the past, I knew this would be a great opportunity to do something together again. After some cajoling and convincing, my gracious mother agreed to do the class with me.

We laugh now at our naivety in saying yes. At that time we had no content, only titles and ideas. We jotted down the top seven hardest things, with the intent to teach seven classes and leave room for one extra session, should we need one. With only a couple of months to go before the study started, my busy teacher-mother and this mom of three young children set out to write something worthy of a woman's time in the midst of a chaotic week. It was a wonderful yet daunting task.

The class began with seventy-one women. Each week my mother and I took turns discussing "hardest things," feeling amazed at how it had all come together. Admittedly, we both were nervous on the weeks that did not belong to us, trusting that the other would show up with something to say. And by the awesome grace of God, he showed up—and taught through us. God had been the One doing the planning all along.

At the end, we breathed a huge collective sigh of relief and praised God for the incredible blessing we had received from the privilege of sharing our thoughts with others. Long-winded as we both are, we uncovered another blessing: we had enough material for a book on the subject. Hence, this book was born.

As a mother and daughter functioning as a team, our passion for this book comes from our deep desire to see women realize the

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liberating truths written in God's Word about some of the hardest things God asks a woman to do. While these "hardest things" appear to be in contradiction to each other, they are both applicable and integral to our lives as Christian women. They coincide while remaining essentially independent of one another. Our hope and prayer is that by identifying them and dealing with them in a straightforward manner, we will come to a better understanding of the freedom that comes with knowing what is required of us—and the empowerment of the Lord who guides, strengthens, and enables us to do what he asks.

On a personal note, one of the greatest blessings in writing this book was the fantastic privilege of doing it together. When people ask me about how the book evolved, I tell them that my mother was its birth mother and I was its adoptive mother. It's no real wonder that our planning session on my mother's floor seven years ago didn't work out; I believe it is because this project was not yet ready to be born. I see a great deal of irony in that fact, and I believe it was his plan all along for us to write this book together.

While you may notice some distinct differences in our writing style and content, you need to know that the differences don't stop there. We are two different women with very different personalities; this allows us to cover issues from different seasons of life and varying temperament-types that are universal to all Christian women.

That's really what this book is all about. It doesn't matter what your age is, what your socioeconomic status is, how many children you do or don't have, or where you are in your Christian walk. The hardest things God asks a woman to do are hard for everyone, everywhere, everyday. But in the end they are the most rewarding and fulfilling.

Thank you for the honor and joy of sharing them with you.

— Lisa Whittle  
*Charlotte, N.C.,  
September 2006*



THE *First*  
HARDEST THING

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## *Single-Focus/Multi-Task*

*Kathie*

*Q*uite often my husband of nearly forty years and I have some version of the following conversation, sometimes gently spoken, but usually with a bit, or a lot, of emotion in our voices. The conversation invariably occurs when we have a limited amount of time and several things to get done.

For instance, I suggest something like this as we're parking the car at the strip mall: "Honey, why don't you go to the bank next door while I run in and mail this and make a copy of this—and we'll meet back here at the grocery store in ten minutes."

Sounds like a perfectly good plan to me. But he says, "No, dear. Let's do one thing at a time. You come with me to the bank and then I'll go with you to the post office and the store."

My husband is a single-focus man, and I'm a multi-tasking woman. After all these years we should know that and function accordingly.

But our dilemma is, basically, irresolvable. It can't be fixed, unless I single-focus *with* him, while my internal multi-tasking engine idles at full speed and I'm thinking, *We could get this all done so much faster and more efficiently.*

## **Single-Focus Versus Multi-Tasking**

While single-focusing is a very good thing, for most women (and some men) multi-tasking is the only real option we live with.

Like a juggler, we bounce a baby, or grandbaby on one hip while mixing cookie ingredients as we stir the Hamburger Helper on the stove, with a cell phone tucked under our ear just as the UPS man knocks at the door, right before having to scold the preschooler at our side for interrupting yet again and tattling on his brother who allegedly called him a really bad name like "fuzzyhead." All during a five-minute interval in a fairly unstressed ordinary day.

Women who work outside the home face similar challenges. The boss says, "Get this report on my desk in three minutes," and plops it on top of the assignments already impatiently calling your name. Meanwhile, perpetual in-coming calls must be instantaneously analyzed and routed just as the computer dies and your co-worker in the next cubicle calls out in a depressed voice, "Are you busy right now?"—right before the babysitter phones to report that the baby won't stop crying and your kindergartener's school says he is sick and must be picked up *right away*.

When do women *ever* get to single-focus? Never. Never, ever, ever. Multi-tasking is a way of daily life for us. Doing only one thing at a time is a luxury saved for birthdays or anniversaries when some kind-hearted somebody allows you a long, luxurious bath without a child playing in the bathroom beside you, dumping non-water-resistant objects into your bath or knocking wildly at the door, crying, "Can I come in, Mommy?"

Nevertheless, in its always relevant and truthful way, the Bible talks about the value of having a single focus *and* being able to spiritually multi-task at the same time. The way my husband operates isn't the only right way. But neither is mine. *We both* must do *both*.

Remember those 3D posters of dots and tiny shapes and colors that were trendy for a while? They were called Magic Eye stereogram pictures and they started showing up in the early 1990s everywhere, in storefront windows and at swap meets. To see a pattern you were supposed to focus at the center and not look away for a second. A little crowd would gather, with people making comments like, "I don't see anything, do you?" I've done it myself, feeling a little silly, since I couldn't see anything but a bunch of dots, but I felt a need to act as if I could.

Finally, after several long minutes of single-focusing, someone would triumphantly shout, "I see it! Look. There's the face of Elvis." Or George Washington, or the Statue of Liberty, or whatever had magically appeared. The rest of us would give up, or maybe smile and nod, mortified by the fact that we seemed to be the only person in the world who never saw a single picture from among the multitude of dots.

What does God say about our single-focus? Should we have just one? What should it be? You mean my husband was right, after all?

## **God Calls Women to Focus**

It turns out that the Bible emphasizes over and over again the need to have a single focus.

*A single focus in our faith.* "There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to one hope when you were called—one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all" (Ephesians 4:4–6 NIV).

***A single focus in our convictions.*** “One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see.” (John 9:25 NIV).

***A single focus in our mind-set, thoughts, and choices.*** “He who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind. . . . He is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does” (James 1:6, 8).

***A single focus in our actions.*** “But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:13–14 NIV).

As believers, we’ll never be politically correct. We’ll never be able to say that Allah or Buddha or whatever other god is worshiped is as true as the triune God of the Bible. Our single focus can only be on Jesus, because he alone deserves to be the focal point for everything we *are*, all that we *do*, and our single driving motivation behind it all, everyday. As he said, “I am *the Way, the Truth, the Life*—no one comes to the Father but by me” (John 14:6). The old hymn says: “Turn your eyes upon Jesus / Look full in His wonderful face / and the things of earth will grow strangely dim / in the light of His glory and grace.” It’s true. Psalm 16:5 tells us, “Lord, you *alone* are my inheritance, my cup of blessing.”

## **Focusing on Jesus Amid Chaos**

Focal points in life are important. When we drive at night facing oncoming traffic in the opposite lane, it is important not to look directly at the lights coming our way, but to focus on our own lane. A juggler has to have a point of focus that allows him not to be distracted by the flurry of balls going around. While experiencing the intensity of childbirth, a mother is encouraged to focus on one spot in the room to endure all that is happening around and within her.

For the Christian, the most critical, foundational thing that God asks us to do or to focus on, is Jesus Christ. At the same time, he

knows that the assignment will be hard. The call of the immediate, the urgent, the necessary, and the unexpected will constantly resound in our ears and grab at our attention. We won't find it possible to mute life's raucous clamor—or to change the dial on “reality radio” to a more environmentally-soothing station. Our single focus on Jesus Christ must exist amid the chaos of life.

The requirement that our central focus be on Jesus Christ accompanies an elemental truth regarding fallen human nature. God knows that unless Jesus is our number one focus, we invariably will be focused on *our* life, *our* family, *our* ideas, *our* plans, *our* needs, *our* wants, and *our* resulting frustration because all of life's loose ends will just keep on flapping. Peace, joy and fulfillment will continue to elude us. Without a central focus on Jesus, all of our well-meaning spiritual multi-tasking will only amount to a random frenzy of pointless, misdirected energy and activity. As we frantically try to “juggle” life's demands, some going this way, others going that way, going up, coming down, at times eluding our grasp, we will inevitably be left spiritually and physically exhausted. While trying to gather all that we've dropped, we wonder, *If this is God's plan for a productive spiritual life, I'd trade it all for one day of peace and joy and some plain old R & R.*

If Jesus is just one of our many points of focus, compartmentalized and relegated to the “religious” side of our lives, but not at the center of it, our life will be much like trying to look into a kaleidoscope with both eyes open. We won't be able to focus well. Life's color wheel will appear as a bunch of random shapes and colors, and we'll constantly be distracted by everything going on around us because of double vision. Only as we focus on Jesus, will all of life come together into a picture of unity, beauty, and purpose.

### *Focusing Our Affections on Jesus*

When I was a little girl, we had something very antiquated called “records.” When a record was placed on the little post that was designed

to fit in the hole in the middle of the record, the record would spin around and around smoothly, like a big, black CD. But if the record were put on the player just a little off center, it wobbled, shook and played distorted music—like a CD that’s off track. The same is true in our lives when Jesus isn’t our central, single focus. So how do we fix that?

Colossians 3:2 (KJV) says, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” [meaning to fall deeply in love with Jesus, and things of eternal value]. We have the ability and the responsibility to set our affection and attention on Jesus, on what really matters, and what will last forever and ever.

God asks a woman to do something hard, not impossible. He never asks the impossible—never, ever—because he provides the “can do” part of the assignment and promises to make sure all expectations are met.

### *Refocusing on Jesus*

However, even after we have set our minds on eternally valuable things, we may have to refocus often, to frequently spray spiritual window cleaner on the lens of our heart to keep a clear focus. We may have to press the reset button of our mind many times during the day as life pulls, shouts, and clamors for our attention, and our focus becomes blurry and distorted.

A friend of mine, a young mother named Hilary, moved with her husband and baby girl into a beautiful new house near a lake. As Hilary worked at planting flowers around the front of their home, she often noticed a duck “couple” waddling through her yard. One day the spectacular drake and his rather plain “wife” selected the bush beside her front stairway as their spot-of-choice to take up house-keeping. The next day Hilary saw that an impressive nest had been constructed. The female duck was now perched upon it, seemingly oblivious to everything around her.

A yard crew came. They cut, edged, and blew with their ominous-looking equipment, inches away from the momma-to-be. Delivery men came and went, neighborhood children ran squealing through the yard every afternoon, car brakes screeched on the nearby street, the family dog barked and lunged at the sitting duck time and time again. Nothing rattled Mrs. Duck's resolve.

Without a glitch in her concentration, a fluff of a feather, or the slightest indication of apprehension, the mother duck remained immovable on the nest, focused totally on her task-at-hand, producing ducklings. Fuzzy, quacking babies. At the appointed time, out popped the fruit of her labor, and mother and ducklings headed for the lake. (By the way, where was dad all this time?)

We need to constantly remind ourselves to refocus intently on Jesus as we move through daily life. Maybe for you that would mean posting an artist's rendering of His kind eyes in a strategic spot, or turning off your car radio and experiencing some solitude. Maybe it would help to place a Scripture verse, or just the word *focus* on your refrigerator, or leave your Bible open on the kitchen counter to a place that God's Spirit has made meaningful for you.

I became convicted recently that I was a news junky. I was too often checking to see if anything new was happening on the news channel and filling too much of my day with meaningless chatter and unnecessary background noise. I became aware that even informative, educational "lures" had the tendency to move my focus away from Jesus' presence in my life. I began to wonder how loudly Jesus had been shouting to my heart, just to try to carry on a conversation with me. I had been as deaf to his still, soft voice as I would have been if my spiritual hearing had been damaged by auditory overload.

My wonderful mother lived with us for the last five years of her life. During one of the last trips we took running errands around town, we passed through the industrial district of the city, replete with factories, car graveyards, and deserted storefronts. Mother and

I hadn't spoken for several minutes when she broke the silence with the excited exclamation, "Oh, just look at that *beautiful* tree."

Outside her window I saw only a junkyard full of rusty metal objects and discarded trash. Then, to my amazement, I saw the tree. The fall foliage that adorned it was truly breathtaking. But even more awe-inspiring to me, even now as I think of it, was the knowledge that my dear mother had the blessed ability to see past all the junk to the beauty beyond. That one sentence expressed the heart of who she was and always had been: a lovely lady who lived each day in the constant awareness of the Lord's presence and his magnificent handiwork all around her.

Sometimes we need to focus on Jesus because of the stormy, threatening, frightening times we face. At other times we need our eyes to be fixed on the beauty of Jesus because of all the debris in our lives, all the junk, all the "stuff" that commands our attention.

### ***He Is Focused on Us***

We need to remember that even when *we* don't focus on Jesus, he is always, constantly focused on us. Consider Psalm 16:7-9: "I will bless the Lord who guides me. Even at night my heart instructs me. I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is filled with joy."

I grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles, where my family lived in a large apartment complex near my father's work and the kindergarten class I attended. In those "gentler and kinder" times, I walked the couple of blocks to school in the morning and back home each afternoon by myself. My parents instructed me not to talk to strangers, but since abductions of children were not commonplace, I usually felt safe. However, it was the time of the Cold War, and since an enemy attack was regarded as a possibility, every week a warning siren would sound so that families could practice what they would do if such a scenario should actually occur.

One day on my walk home, the ominous scream of the air-raid siren suddenly split the silence around me and fear gripped my heart. I ran into a nearby stairwell and assumed the prescribed position: crouched, face-down, hands-covering-head as I had been instructed to do in case of an actual attack. Almost instantly, I heard my mother's sweet voice, reassuring me, coming quickly closer and closer until I felt her arms around me, lifting me up to hold me close.

As calm replaced fear, I asked how she had known where I was, since I always made my homeward trek alone and thought I was completely hidden from sight. She said, "Honey, I always watch you all the way home from the time you leave the school. And Jesus is with you—you're *never* alone." Jesus, our loving heavenly parent, is always there for us. In Isaiah 43:4 the Lord assures us, "You are precious to me. You are honored, and I love you."

The popular Christian music group Caedmon's Call inspires us with these incredible words of truth from their 2002 song, "Before There Was Time":

Before there was time  
You counted the hairs on my head  
You knew all the words that I've said  
And You purchased me back from the dead  
Before I was made  
You searched me and knew my ways  
You numbered all my days  
And You set forth the steps I would take<sup>1</sup>

If Jesus focuses on us with such love, how can we ignore his gaze and carelessly look away to all the trivial distractions around us? Remember the words of the classic hymn, "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus":

O Soul, are you weary and troubled?  
No light in the darkness you see?  
There's light for a look at the Savior  
And life more abundant and free.

So, turn your eyes upon Jesus.  
Look full in His wonderful face,  
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim  
In the light of His glory and grace. <sup>2</sup>

## **God Asks Women to Multi-Task**

When we think of multi-tasking, we might say to ourselves, “Oh, I know what that is. I’m an experienced multi-tasker. I do it in my sleep!”

Even our bodies are multi-taskers. Just think about all the amazing jobs your physical body is doing right this minute: breathing, heart beating, blood flowing, cells multiplying, eyes blinking, tears forming, tonight’s dinner turning into fat (straight from our mouth to our thighs), our mind going a hundred miles an hour. We are multi-tasking machines every single minute we live.

If you’re a mom or grandmom of little children, have you noticed how many cartoon characters have more than two arms or legs so they can get more done with more power? Sometimes they are the good guys like Inspector Gadget (who has extra handy-dandy arms and gadgets in his hat and shoes) or Doc Ock in Spiderman, (the bad guy with four sinister arms). It would be helpful at times to actually have more arms, more hands, more than just a left and right side to our brain so we could get more done, more efficiently, in less time.

When we think of spiritual multi-tasking, we tend to extend our perception to “doing” things for God, volunteering at our church, saying, “Sure, I’ll do it” every time a need is mentioned. Every spare minute is filled with serving on multiple committees, engaging in projects for non-profit causes, and on and on, until, honestly, our tongue is hanging out, our heartbeat has become irregular, our blood-pressure’s sky-high, and we’re snapping at everybody, like an alligator in jeans, a gray sweat shirt and a baseball cap.

Why do we let ourselves get into that pitiable, wiped-out condition? Most of the time we spiritually multi-task because we love God, and we want, some day, to present him with a long list of good things we did for him. We think that if more squares on our calendar are filled with spiritual activities, and our name appears on the list of people involved in organizing church events, the happier he is with us and the closer we are to becoming highly regarded “spiritual giants.”

And, then, to make matters worse, if we’re not careful, we do all those good things *in our own strength*, which is completely energy-depleting and unfulfilling. Besides that, all our efforts will one day burn up, because “without him we can do nothing.”

We look in the mirror at a burned-out, empty-hearted lady when we had hoped that our reflection would be one of the Holy Spirit living through us. Multi-tasking is hard, especially when we do it the wrong way.

The Bible describes many wonderful people who were busy doing things in the name of Jesus and for his glory: Martha, the disciples passing out food, believers ministering to the sick, the poor and the widows. We are to be *his* hands and feet with human hearts. We are the “pipeline” through which he can bless others.

But, as important as being involved in service for him truly is, God’s multi-tasking “to do” list is much more about who we *are* than what we *do*.

Our spiritual multi-tasking list is really a “to be” list.

We could take that list from almost anywhere in the Bible. We could be the wonder woman in Proverbs 31. We could be the armor-clad spiritual warrior in Ephesians. We could be the lady looking in a mirror and seeing herself for who she really is in the book of James. We could be the person in Matthew 7, juggling spiritual balls and remembering not to worry, not to judge, to be sure to keep on praying, to do good things for others, to beware of false teachers, to be genuine, to produce good spiritual fruit. We could be glad for trouble,

as we ask for wisdom—as we are patient, as we are quick to listen, slow to speak, slow to get mad—as we avoid evil, obey God, control our tongue, and give to orphans and widows. We could choose any important list we want from the Bible, and all those things are spiritual characteristics that we are to demonstrate simultaneously every day. Whoever said that believers are weak people?

So, let's look at some key “multi-tasks,” some examples of spiritual doing and being that Jesus will perform in and through us, as we let him. They are part of the package Jesus promised when he said, “I am come that they might have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly” or “My purpose is to give life in all its fullness” (John 10:10 NKJV and NLT).

The divinely practical principles that lead to all the abundance God has promised—the tasks that Jesus asks us to perform because of who he enables us to be—may be very familiar. But, remember, they may be hard.

We've already seen that God wants us to be focused people. He also has some additional things in mind for us to do and be—some spiritual “balls” to juggle for his glory and for our great benefit.

### ***First: Be Grateful***

God asks us to be grateful. In 1 Thessalonians 5:18, the apostle Paul says, “in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus” (NASB). We might as well start with the tough task of dissecting this verse. The first word God gives us in this Scripture is the little, innocent-sounding word, *in*. No big deal, just *in*. But this *in* means right in the middle of situations that we face, good and bad—not when they're over, not after they have played out to the finish, not after we've seen why they happened, not after we've avoided them, but *in* them.

Here's an even bigger whammy. *Everything*. Everything? Bad things, accidents, sickness, death, messes, unfulfilled expectations, entanglements that somebody's sin has caused? In the middle of

those things? Give what? Thanks? Yes. Why? How? James says, “Dear brothers and sisters, whenever trouble comes your way, let it be an opportunity for joy.” Think of trouble as a blessing. Wow! That is hard.

I have two wonderful friends, Mary and Becky. They will probably never meet until they recognize each other in heaven, but they have traveled similar earthly paths. Both have had an immeasurable impact upon my life and the lives of many others. Both are God’s precious “angels” and his special personal “gifts” to me. Though they live miles apart, their lives are parallel in many aspects. Both ladies have faced unbelievable betrayal by the men they had every reason to believe would be godly, loving husbands. The false face of each man was eventually removed through events out of his wife’s control. When they were, the corruption and hypocrisy, the double-lives, were vividly and excruciatingly revealed.

The real lives of Becky and Mary and their families include years of coping with abuse in a myriad of ways. On one terrible occasion, Mary’s husband picked her up and threw her against the wall, fracturing her hip and shattering her spirit into a thousand tiny pieces. For years, Becky’s beautiful life was just as deeply wounded and splintered because of indescribable addictions in her husband’s life and it seemed as if she would never again experience peace and joy.

These two beautiful women suffered the pain of infidelity over and over. Even well-meaning friends did not always understand their terrible plight and as a result, unknowingly, inflicted greater pain upon them.

Compounding their hurt was the pain dealt to their children. Both Mary and Becky were two-in-a-million moms in their selfless devotion to their children, for whom they made every imaginable maternal sacrifice to provide a stable home in a completely volatile situation. They provided music lessons, opportunities to play on sports teams, and other advantages for their children that required their own personal sacrifice. (Many of you know—you’re there right now.)

The list of tragedies goes on and on . . . serious illness, loneliness, tremendous loss. Again and again these precious ladies have pondered the dreams they had as starry-eyed brides; visions of a loving marriage and happy, blessed children, enjoying the life that God designed. But, in every situation, each lady has a simple statement that expresses the beauty and sincerity of her heart. She simply smiles her lovely smile and says, quietly, “God is good.” Because he is.

“In everything give thanks, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus.” Was it the will of God for the husbands of Mary and Becky to injure and abandon them? Was the abuse inflicted upon them and their children God’s will? Did he want two committed believers to have to struggle and raise their children alone? Those things were the will of God? God’s will was for them to grow to be like Christ, to shine like stars, to give him glory, and to *give thanks* even in the middle of all of it. And they did.

Some of you can top these stories. Many of us have faced things that make absolutely no sense to us, no matter how much we search the Scriptures and try to discern the mind of God. We have experienced events so excruciatingly difficult in our lives that what we faced still seems to have no reason, no redeeming quality, no purpose at all. And some of you are agonizingly there right now.

Some of the most difficult circumstances we experience are not just those that seem unfair and unnecessary. Equally hard to endure are all those situations and entanglements that we have had a part in creating for ourselves and others. We’ve done something foolish, irresponsible, unethical, immoral, or impulsive, and now we must face the ramifications of our own choices and behavior, and watch the effect those mistakes and sins have had on the people we care about most.

As beloved children, we experience the eternal Father’s sheltering, comforting, healing presence throughout our lives, but we don’t exist in a trouble-free bubble of ease. This is earth, not heaven.

Matthew Henry was a well-known and loved Bible commentator. One day he was robbed and later wrote about this experience in his personal diary. His journal entry revealed an important key to our being able to give thanks in everything. These were his words:

Let me be thankful—

First, because I was never robbed before.

Second, because although they took my wallet, they did not take my life.

Third, because although they took my all, it was not much.

And fourth, because it was I who was robbed, not I who robbed.

Incredibly, God asks us to give him thanks right in the middle of all kinds of bad circumstances, and that's not easy for us. But, we can remember and remind ourselves until it penetrates to the very heart of who we are, and how we think and act, that God is always good and always with us, and he will bring good and beauty from the ashes all around us. He is always gracious, always strong, always able, always faithful, always loving—and always present.

In 2 Corinthians 2:14, God promises that we will always triumph in Christ Jesus. As believers, when we're in the middle of things, we're in Christ Jesus. For that awesome truth we can always be grateful.

### ***Second: Be Content***

The second hard task God asks of us is to be content. Paul is very specific about this topic. He says “Godliness with contentment is great gain” (1 Timothy 6:6 NKJV) and “Do everything without complaining or arguing,” (Philippians 2:14 NIV). Contentment walks hand-in-hand with gratitude. The existence of both attributes depends on our single focus, our perspective, our priority, our perception of what is really important.

It's natural for us to ask a lot of God; we need him, we depend on him to take care of us, we cry to him when we get in a jam. We don't

hesitate for a minute to ask for really big things of him. Everything changes, however, when we think that God is asking a lot of us. We start to murmur and complain. Murmuring and complaining often show up as a dark attitude that we feed and pamper and carry around in our pocket all day. Discontentment appears as “dirty looks” we aim like daggers, a cold shoulder, or an icy response. Even if we don’t verbalize our complaints, we mull over them and become self-absorbed when we could be living life abundantly.

What do we complain about in the middle of everyday life’s multi-tasking? You probably can add to my inventory: Picking up our husband’s or kid’s clothes, a husband who’s away a lot or works late, muddy tracks on a clean floor or carpet, whining, temper tantrums, sibling warfare, interrupted sleep, an annoying coworker, a hard-to-tolerate mother-in-law, a difficult teenager, something we don’t like about ourselves, our financial situation.

There is a funny little children’s book entitled *It Could Be Worse*. In this story, on each new page, things do go from bad to worse. In our “real lives,” it’s not a bad idea to think about how our situation could really be worse than it is—because it always could be.

It may sound a little silly, but we can help raise our contentment level by voicing simple counter-thoughts to our complaints. Here are examples:

“Yes, I got a ticket, but I didn’t have an accident.”

“Yes, I have arthritis, but I’m not bound to a wheelchair.”

“Yes, my son has trouble being kind and obedient, but he’s good at math.”

“Yes, my daughter may never be called pretty, but she loves God and has a heart for people.”

“Yes, I’m single, but I have many wonderful friends.”

“Yes, my husband doesn’t know Christ, but he’s not hostile to Christianity.”

“Yes, my house is old and small, but it’s warm and secure and paid for.”