

CHRISTIAN OUTREACH DEPARTMENT
Co-Directors: Rev. Gena Torres and Rev. June Ballard

Rev. Gena Torres lives in Toronto, Ontario, Canada. She is the President of the District of Toronto WCTU and Second Vice President of the Canadian WCTU.

Gena is an ordained minister in the Church of the Nazarene, pastoring both the Toronto Grace English and Grace of God Spanish Nazarene Churches. She is the Director of The Sharing Place, a compassionate ministry providing food and clothing to the less fortunate. She is a widow, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

Rev. June Ballard lives in Chadron, Nebraska, USA. She has served seven years as the U.S. National WCTU Christian Outreach Director. Previously, she was Nebraska State WCTU President for 15 years and is again serving in that office.

She is a retired ordained minister in the Church of the Nazarene. She continues to serve in Care Center ministry and local community service, including Closer to Home which serves weekday lunches for those in need. She is a widow, mother, grandmother and great-grandmother.

LIVING TO PLEASE GOD

(Each segment can be used as a devotional)

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INTRODUCTION

“As for other matters, brothers and sisters, we instructed you how to live in order to please God, as in fact you are living. Now we ask you and urge you in the Lord Jesus to do this more and more. For you know what instructions we gave you by the authority of the Lord Jesus.” 1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 (NIV)

Paul is talking about more than just instructions. It is an urgent call, not only to hear, but to live a life of holiness. To walk depicts action, a going forward. Walking in Christ daily requires determination and total commitment, resisting the distractions of worldly temptations. Walking as He walked means choosing the narrow way of sacrifice that we may share in His glory.

Paul wrote to Titus that he should teach the older women to be an example for the younger women by the way they lived, not just with words. A man from Ireland testified that his father was a drinker and often left the house, leaving the family at home. One night when his father went out, the young boy put on his boots and followed him, without telling his mother, to a bar around the corner. His father asked how his son knew where he was. The boy answered, “I followed your footprints in the snow.” A short time later, the father gave his life to Jesus. He realized the path he was leading his son on would not bring him to a good end.

May the influence of our lives be a path that others will follow to open their hearts to the Lord.

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FAITH

“And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.”

Hebrews 11:6 (NIV)

Unbelievable as it is, the Creator of the Universe wants a relationship with each person He has literally brought into being. He did not create us as robots who have mobility only at His command but in His own likeness, with the freedom to love and hate, think and plan, make our own decisions, choose our own paths. His desire is that we choose His ways, responding to His love with our love.

Adam and Eve did not pass the test, but yielded to the temptation Satan set before them. That changed everything. Sin is in the picture and there is a great divide between us and the holy God who created us. Through Christ’s sacrifice on the cross, God has made it possible for each of us to have a relationship with Him

Hebrews 11 is known as the Faith Chapter. Verse 6 makes it clear that faith in God begins when we accept His existence and seek Him and His truth. We seek Him in His word, in His creation, in His sanctuary. He becomes our Savior, our Shepherd, our Guide, and Comforter. Our response should be a growing desire to live to please Him.

LIVING to PLEASE GOD

TRUST AND OBEY

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me.” John 14:1 (NIV)

Trusting God is more than believing. Trusting is acting on what you believe. You may believe that a chair will hold you up, but you trust what you believe when you sit on the chair. There are many examples of this in the Bible.

In the ninth chapter of John, we have the story of a man who was born blind. Jesus spat on the ground and made some mud which he then put on the man's eyes, instructing him to go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The man washed as he was told and his blindness was healed. But if he had not trusted Jesus, he would not have obeyed and known the blessing of sight.

Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, James and John: “Follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” They followed. There were struggles and hardships, fearful times and persecution, and even martyrdom, but oh, the blessings of walking and living with the Master and the assurance of a place in Heaven prepared for them.

*When we walk with the Lord in the light of His Word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will, He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

John H. Sammis, 1887

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GOD'S WORD IN OUR LIVES

Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path.” Psalm 119:105 (NIV)

Throughout the Old Testament as well as the New Testament, we are impressed with the importance of God's Word in our lives. The Ten Commandments give us guidelines for living to please God and also for our own protection and wellbeing. The Psalmist in Psalm 119 not only tells us that God's Word is a light to show us the path, but in verse 11 advises that His Word in our hearts can keep us from sin. In the New Testament we have the account of Jesus' 40-day temptation in the wilderness where Jesus refutes Satan with scripture (Matthew 4:1-11).

Paul exhorts Timothy to study the word so he can correctly handle the word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) and pronounces that all scripture is inspired by God and important in the spiritual development of His servants (2 Timothy 3:16).

It is essential to recognize the authority of God in His Word. Without that the Bible would hold no power, no sin to account for, no repentance, no redemption, no need of a Savior, no hell, and no heaven. We must know what the Bible teaches. That knowledge enables us to recognize false teaching when we hear it. There is a "heaven to gain and a hell to shun." Jesus makes this clear in the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man (Luke 16:19-31).

"Beautiful words, wonderful words, Wonderful words of life!"

Philip P. Bliss, 1874

LIVING to PLEASE GOD

WITNESSES

“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Acts 1:8 (NIV)

This power in the original Greek is *dunamis*. The word dynamite also comes from this word. It is the power that comes from the Spirit of God, the same power that raised Christ from the dead, that opened the eyes of the blind, and that made the lame to walk. It is the same power that healed the woman with the issue of blood and parted the Red Sea. This power comes from the Holy Spirit. This power was promised to all who waited in the upper room. But some became impatient and left, missing out on this tremendous experience. Do we miss out when we do not wait upon God?

The greatest miracle is a changed life, when the heart of stone becomes a heart of flesh, when it is no longer “I” who lives, but Christ who lives in me. We are to be witnesses, bringing the Good News to men. This is only possible through the power of the Holy Spirit who convicts men of sin and who removes the scales from their eyes that they might see Jesus.

This is the Great Commission: ***“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”*** Matthew 28:18-20 (NIV)

Do you want to do great things for God? To speak the word, share the Gospel, and be salt and the light?

“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.” Matthew 10:32 (NIV)

*“We’ve a story to tell to the nations;
That shall turn their hearts to the right,
A story of truth and mercy,
A story of peace and light,
A story of peace and light.
Refrain: For the darkness shall turn to dawning,
And the dawning to noonday bright;
And Christ’s great kingdom shall come to earth—
The kingdom of love and light.”*

H. E. Nichol, 1896

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COMPASSION FOR OTHERS

“Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.” James 1:27 (NIV)

“Then the righteous will answer him, Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you? The King will reply, I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.” Matthew 25:37-40 (NIV)

There is much more in this passage from Matthew 25 than we have repeated here, but we all know the story well. You may want to read the whole scripture from verse 31 to 46. The compassionate Jesus wants His followers to be compassionate and caring, too. The Lord makes it very clear that when we minister to the needs of others, we are showing our love for Him.

“Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? James 2:15-16 (NIV)

But the Lord’s compassion reached beyond feeding the hungry and clothing the naked. He was concerned for each person’s dignity and worth as a human being. The woman at Jacob’s well in Sychar was just as important as Zacchaeus in the sycamore fig tree. The woman taken in adultery was just as important as those who would condemn her. In fact, the way Jesus treated women is a subject we should explore with appreciation. The woman who broke her alabaster jar to anoint him, tears streaming down her face, was taunted by those who thought it a waste of money. What did Jesus say? ***“She has done a beautiful thing for me....wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.” Matthew 26:6-13 (NIV)***

We seldom recognize the hurting hearts of the people we see around us every day. How can we? Only by the grace of the Holy Spirit. May the Lord fill our mouths with words of encouragement and make us a blessing to those we meet day by day.

*Out in the highways and byways of life,
Many are weary and sad;
Carry the sunshine where darkness is rife,
Making the sorrowing glad.*

*Make me a blessing; make me a blessing.
Out of my life may Jesus shine.
Make me a blessing, O Savior, I pray.
Make me a blessing to someone today.*

Words: Ira B. Wilson, 1909; Music: George s. Schuler, 1924

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PRAYER

“The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective.” James 5:16 (NIV)

One of the most quoted verses about prayer is this verse from the book of James. The context of this verse makes it very clear that whatever the problem, you should pray. Some express concern that they don't know how to pray. In Luke 11 we have the model prayer that Jesus gave to the disciples. We call it the Lord's Prayer. The Psalms give us wonderful prayer examples. Praying should not be difficult—it is simply opening our hearts to our Heavenly Father and telling how we feel and asking for the help we seek. It is conversational and helps us build a relationship with the God of the universe. It is devotional. But there is also intercessory prayer, when we intercede for the needs of others.

LIVING to PLEASE GOD

PRAYER AND FASTING

“When you fast,” Jesus said in the Sermon on the Mount, not “if.”

Matthew 6:16 (NIV)

“Paul and Barnabas appointed elders for them in each church and, with prayer and fasting, committed them to the Lord in whom they had put their trust.”

Acts 14:23 (NIV)

Fasting was a normal part of the life of a follower of Jesus. In all important decisions, such as the appointing of elders, the sending of missionaries, prayer with fasting was in order. In fasting, we are humbling ourselves before God and denying ourselves cravings of the flesh, which is evidence to Him of how earnest we are in the need we bring to Him.

In the story of Esther, fearful to approach the King for the safety of her people, she called for three days of prayer and fasting. In the book of Jonah, the Assyrian King decreed all of Nineveh to fast, hoping to change God’s mind about destruction there. Jesus himself fasted for 40 days after His baptism and before beginning His earthly ministry. If there was ever a time when prayer with fasting was needed, it is today, especially for our young people,

Fasting can be for one meal, or a day. It can be for all food and drink, or permit water and juice. It can also be helpful for the health of our bodies.

Sweet hour of prayer! Sweet hour of prayer!

That calls me from a world of care,

And bids me at my Father’s throne

Make all my wants and wishes known.

In seasons of distress and grief

.My soul has often found relief

And oft escaped the tempter’s snare

By thy return, sweet hour of prayer!

W. Bradbury, 1851