



Priscilla Hochhalter

I once heard spiritual sharing should be based on areas where the sharer is still growing. If so, this week's topic fits the bill. It's one of my worst things: submission.

Submission is saying yes to God, and agreeing to go his way even if it's hard. It's based on trust—another hard thing for me. I don't trust easily and it's taken me years to think of God as trustworthy. But as we come to understand that he is truly good, we can trust him and submit to him. And as you'll see in this week's stories about Daniel, Esther, Martha, and others, I believe there is great reward if we do.

This is a recent photo of me (at right) with a friend, Tiana.

BIBLE READING: Genesis 4:1-8

Adam, Eve, and Cain all sin, and God makes a way to restore them (Genesis 3:1–4:15). No sin is reported of Abel; Jesus and the writer of Hebrews call him righteous (Matthew 23:35; Hebrews 11:4). Yet even he must sacrifice to God. When we sin, “without shedding of blood there is no forgiveness” (Hebrews 9:22). Why is blood required? I don’t know exactly; it just is. Abel meets this requirement but Cain defies it; he seems to think: “If Abel offers his work product, I’ll offer mine.” He offers what is convenient—not what is required—and then is enraged at God’s rejection.

Cain has to learn that offerings are based not on one’s vocation or on what others do, but on what God says.

God is holy. He does not conform to our viewpoint; we conform to his. Offerings are done his way, not ours.

Sometimes we think God is too picky, even unfair. Why must everything be his way? Why can’t we just do what we want? I don’t always understand why, but he is God. Our part is not to understand everything but to accept his authority—especially in our offering of worship, which is our lives.

Which area is hardest for you to offer in sacrifice to God? Name it aloud and tell him you want to submit to him.

Cain offered rebellion; Abel offered submission. Only an offering of submission is acceptable to God.

SONG: Holy, Holy, Holy

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, you are God; I'm not.
Help me submit to you, and do things your way.*

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BIBLE READING: Daniel 6:3-16

Today's song is "Dare to Be a Daniel," not "Dare to Be a Door-mat." Daniel was able to submit and thrive as a captive of ungodly regimes (Babylonia and Persia), without obeying their ungodly ways. The Persians made his prayers a capital offense (talk about bias! U.S. Christians have never faced a law like that). But he didn't resist; he just kept praying and accepted his death sentence. And God blessed his respectful submission by saving his life (6:21-22).

Even as a captive, Daniel could have rebelled against being unjustly targeted. Today he might try taking his case to the media, or the courts. But I doubt he would; his way was to do right and face the penalty, without complaint. His actions said: "Lord, I can't change my captivity right now, but I can trust and honor you by honoring my captors."

Quakers have a history of respectful submission, even to ungodly authority; at times they've used respectful civil disobedience to great effect. I'd like to see us personalize it by showing respectful submission to everyone, especially the ungodly as Daniel did, because in so doing we imitate Christ and honor God (1 Peter 2:11-25).

If you are captive to ungodly authority you can't escape (say, under a harsh boss in a job you truly need), I pray God makes you like Daniel—until you are fully delivered at last.

SONG: Dare to Be a Daniel

PRA YER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to show respect even toward ungodly authority, as Daniel did.

—Priscilla Hochhalter

BIBLE READING: Esther 3:8-11; 4:15-16

Oh, those ancient Persians! They love to trick their kings into executing their personal vendettas. In Daniel's case they go after *one* Jew; in Esther's case, the plot is to kill *all* Jews.

Mordecai, Queen Esther's cousin and father figure, asks her to appeal to the king. Doing so could get her killed—but he says the need is critical (Esther 4:1-14). So Esther plans a strategic intervention. She visits the king, and—whew!—he receives her. Wisely, over dinner, she reveals she herself as a Jew and persuades him to let the Jews defend themselves from Haman's murderous plot (Esther 5, 7).

Like Daniel, Esther rises to prominence even in captivity and is threatened by enemies. I'm sure she never expected to face death on two fronts: from a risky visit to the king, and from Haman's plot. Yet she dares it all to save her people.

How does she prevail? First, she submits to Mordecai's urgent request to try. Then she combines spiritual support from others (4:16) with wise strategy (Esther 5, 7). And she gains epic success (Esther 6-10).

Maybe someone you love needs rescuing, but it's risky. Maybe the risk is not to your life, but to the relationship. If you are called to intervene, be brave. Esther submitted to the call with prayerful wisdom, and it paid off.

SONG: Rescue the Perishing

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, there is a time to risk strategic rescue. If I'm being called to do so, give me the courage to obey and the wisdom to succeed.

—Priscilla Hochhalter

BIBLE READING: John 11:18-27; 35-44

Martha often gets a bum rap because in Luke 10:38-42 (KJV), Jesus chides her for being distracted with “much serving.” But here in John, she shows great faith by submitting to him amid the grief of death.

My sisters and I felt Mary and Martha’s grief when our brother, Craig, died young. Dad, then 82, believed he’d see Craig in heaven soon but felt bad that we girls would likely have many more years without him. Sure enough, Dad’s with Craig now and we’re still here, missing them both.

Why did Jesus raise Lazarus but not billions of others who’ve died? Why couldn’t he keep everyone alive until his return and take us all to heaven at once, without the pain of separation? I don’t know why, but like Martha, we can submit this pain to him because he *cares*. He felt it deeply, wept over it, and overcame it by conquering death (vv. 35-44).

What if we’ve lost loved ones who may not be with the Lord? Where are they? Will we see them again? These are mysteries beyond our comprehension. But even these things can be entrusted to God, who is loving, caring, and just.

If you’ve lost a loved one to death, take heart. Jesus, the Son of God, has overcome this final enemy; he reigns as the sovereign Lord over all (1 Corinthians 15:20-28).

SONG: Does Jesus Care?

PRAYER SUGGESTION: God, we do feel the grief of separation, loss, and death. Thank you that you care, and have conquered them all forever. Hallelujah!

—Priscilla Hochhalter

BIBLE READING: Mark 12:41-44

Any unexpected event can threaten our security, or the illusion of it. But some events have greater ramifications than others. They are game-changers.

The widow in today's passage has had a game-changer: her husband has died. Was he kind? Were there children? Did she have money once? We don't know, but now she has little—yet she submits it all (v. 44), leaving none for the future.

In “little,” she is more submitted to God than the rich people around her. In insecurity, she is secure. Her faith and love toward God are so great that even Jesus takes note.

And I take note also. Faith through life's uncertainties has never been my strong suit.

I once told my dad I sometimes missed childhood—feeling safe, cared for, shielded from adult worries. He replied that he did too! At some point, we all must trust that we are God's children and he will take care of us, no matter what game-changers our lives may hold.

Maybe you've had a game-changer. Maybe you've lost a job, home, or nest egg. Maybe you've lost abilities to work or to live on your own. Such losses can leave us with “little.”

But like the widow, we can submit our “little” to God, knowing he loves us, cares for us, and will provide for us. She was sure of this, and God wants us to be sure, too.

SONG: Blessed Assurance

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, even in “little,” help me to know that trusting you is the most secure place to be.

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BIBLE READING: Luke 1:26-38

It's said that all Jewish girls dreamed of bearing the Messiah; but if they'd known the price I doubt they'd have volunteered. I believe God chooses Mary for her willingness to pay that price. She has much to carry, and much to submit.

First, she's unwed and pregnant—a shocking and rare event in her culture, bringing scorn from fellow Jews and shame to loved ones (parents, grandparents, in-laws, even Jesus' later siblings). Excuse the words, but I'm sure I can hear the unjust curses of “cuckold,” “whore,” and “bastard” applied to Joseph, Mary, and Jesus throughout their lives.

This burden is “much” to submit to God.

Later, Mary pays even more. Her son is called everything from a charlatan to a demoniac, then shoved through a kangaroo court, mocked and tortured, and killed. These events are a challenge to her dreams (no loving mother would desire such horrors) and her understanding (imagine her struggle to comprehend why these things had to be).

Her costly submission to God (Luke 1:46-55) covers “much.” Much turmoil and heartache in her mind, will, and emotions. Much pain and injustice borne by her son.

Yet by submitting much, Mary becomes useable for much. She has the joy of living a life with meaning, and playing a key role in God's amazing plan of salvation.

SONG: Have Thine Own Way, Lord

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord God, I submit to you.
Let me, like Mary, be useable and trust you with “much.”*

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BIBLE READING: Philippians 2:1-11

I almost titled this writing about Jesus “Submission in Everything” because he did submit to God in all things. But in this Scripture, I note that the extension of submission to God is submission to others. Paul exhorts us to imitate Christ in our “relationships with one another” (v. 5), “being like-minded” and “one in spirit” (v. 2). He urges us to “value others above” ourselves, looking not to our own interests but “to the interests of others” (vv. 3-4).

Often, pleasing and submitting to God seems like a lofty, abstract aim. But here we see that one specific way to do it is to submit to *others*—putting them first in love and service. And not just believers, but even enemies (Matthew 5:39-48). Though Jesus was Lord, that is what he did.

These are convicting words. We are called to submit in love at home, at work, and in public. To forgive faults and meet needs. To repay evil with good. To serve everyone from family members to strangers, even if they hate us.

Obeying this requirement is easier said than done, but it is the way of Jesus. In showing submission to God by submitting to others, even to death (v. 8), Jesus became “the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him” (Hebrews 5:7-10). He gained victory by “going down to go up.”

To whom can I submit today?

SONG: More Like the Master

PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, teach me to obey you and submit to others by loving, serving, and forgiving them.

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