

Using our Gifts / Women Following Jesus

Katharine: The day was cold and rainy. Feeling a bit sad, I remembered how cozy the house felt with bread baking in the oven. So I found an old recipe I used when the children were small, because it makes six loaves. Measuring out yeast, milk and oil, I thought about a neighbor who recently had a stroke. He can't work any more, so he and his wife are having to get used to a different lifestyle.

Maybe they would enjoy a hot, sweet-smelling loaf on this bleak, cold day.

A lady up the street has been having trouble with her legs, and isn't able to stand at the stove and cook like she used to. I mentally put her name on another loaf.

The house began to smell good as the dough was rising in its bowl near the stove. I kneaded the soft, elastic mixture and set it in pans.

As the loaves were baking, a dear friend knocked at my door. As we chatted I found that she had friends coming to visit and wondered what she could serve them with her usual pot of tea.

"How about warm bread, right out of the oven?" I suggested.

Giving away the loaves brightened my day, as I was greeted with warm smiles of gratitude. I remembered that in God's Word, the Bible, Jesus said whatever we do for someone in need, it's like we're doing it for Him. (Matthew 25:40).

Carol: Welcome to *Women of Hope*. I'm Carol and Tammy's here too.

Tammy: I am!...and I can almost smell that lovely, fresh, hot bread. Can you?... Thanks Katharine!

Carol: We've invited a few different women today to tell us about what they love to do to help other people.

Tammy: We all have different *jobs* don't we? Some of us plant gardens and tend them to supply food for the family; others buy the food, and cook the meals. Some of us have paid jobs. But it seems that women everywhere provide for the family's needs, and look after the children.

Carol: In some countries, the village women often carry loads almost as heavy as themselves on their backs. They weave bags and use them to carry huge loads of wood, or root vegetables, or even a young child.

Many of us have the very important job of keeping the family home running smoothly. For some of us this work began when we were just young children ourselves. But quite often we women do not feel important, or appreciated despite all we do to help the family. Do you feel that your work is not valuable?

Tammy: We all have different *gifts* too...things that we're good at, and things we love doing. And did you notice what Katharine said, as she gave away her loaves of bread, it made her *own* day brighter? I wonder what you're good at that might help someone else?

Carol: Let's hear from Tita who had an opportunity to give something very different from Katharine.

Tita: One day I was at the hospital waiting for my turn to see the doctor. The woman sitting next to me was having a very difficult time. The nurse had asked her a question in English and she could not answer. Both the nurse and this lady were getting very frustrated because she was trying to answer in a mixture of English and Spanish. She needed help!

I speak several different languages so I began chatting to her in Spanish. We soon found that we had many things in common: we both were pregnant with our first child, we both spoke Spanish but were now living in a country where most people spoke English, We were in this country because of our husband's jobs and did not have our families near us. So, I offered to go with her to all her doctors' appointments. As the weeks went on we became good friends and I even attended the birth of her baby boy.

I was glad to be able to help her because having your first child is scary...you don't know what to expect do you? Can you imagine how much more scary that would be if you could not communicate or understand what is going on around you? I was so pleased to be able to give friendship to my new friend!

Carol: Can you imagine how relieved that woman was ...and happy to have someone to help her understand what was happening that day...and later, when she had her first baby in a new country!

Tammy: Here on *Women of Hope* today we're sharing some thoughts on using our gifts to help others. Sonya uses another different gift to brighten up other people's lives...

Sondy: Gardening is one of my passions! I believe that gardening is a gift from God to me. I find it very rewarding, and I feel humble as I stay connected to the earth, touching the ground and getting my hands dirty. I learn a lot about life that way too – like how to nurture...that too much of any one thing is not good...that every living thing needs water, air, sunshine and food...that pruning is necessary for growth and that it's always worth being persistent, and never giving up.

Best of all I love growing things that end up being gifts for my friends. Whether it's fruit, vegetables, dried herbs and spices, a potted plant or even just flowers...the people I give these to always appreciate them. But it doesn't stop there! I can dry and press some flowers or leaves and use them in craftwork, like making cards or decorating soap. I can paint pictures of the flowers or photograph them to remember how beautiful they were. I love to give my friends cuttings and bulbs to put in their own garden to share the joy.

My garden produce sometimes becomes a gift served on a plate. It's very exciting to see things start as a tiny seed, grow up and get harvested. Then they change as they are blended with other food and served up as a warm meal or a delicious dessert. Some of my favourites are quince and almond cake; baked artichokes stuffed with breadcrumbs; garlic, cheese and lemon juice; or ripe red tomatoes and crisp lettuce in a fresh garden salad; or broad beans in an olive oil, bay leaf and rosemary sauce. Yum yum!

Tammy: Mmm...wouldn't you love to receive a gift from Sondy's garden!?

Carol: My, it all sounds so good. If you have a garden you might decide that *you too* can give something attractive, like a card made from pressed flowers, or a delicious meal that you've cooked with ingredients that you've grown yourself. Thank you Sondy!

Tammy: And Esther loves to cook too...and to share her gift of home cooked food with many different people. This is what she said: 'I take food to new neighbors...when my friends return from a trip out of town...when someone is sick, or when there is a death in a family. And sometimes during festivals and other special times I give food to all my neighbors and friends...to helpers...maids...the watchman...sweepers in my neighborhood...and street children begging at the traffic lights.'

You're listening to *Women of Hope* and today we're sharing some ideas on how we can use our gifts to help other people. You know, everyone has gifts – things that they're good at. You may not think

that what you do is valuable, but it is. We all need to know that our work and our abilities are valued by other people...,and we ourselves need to value them too.

Now let's hear from Kim. She's a teacher, who had a rather different opportunity to share her gift...

Kim: One night on my way home from work I went to visit my neighbor. She was glad to see me but she was obviously very stressed. She was trying to prepare dinner while her daughter was sitting at the table crying over her homework. Her older son was unwell and wanted her attention. The younger son was playing loudly on the floor, banging and crashing his blocks happily. It was one of those crazy afternoons at her house.

This neighbor was a close friend of mine and we often spent a lot of time together. So I asked if I could take her unhappy daughter and her noisy son home with me until dinner-time, to help her out. She very happily agreed!

I spent the time doing homework with her daughter...and her son happily drew pictures at my table. I have no children of my own yet, so I enjoyed every moment with these kids, we even shared a snack and read a story before dinner. It was a fun afternoon. I gave my friend a precious gift of my time as I was willing to help her out. She was so thankful...and I had fun!

Tammy: I can just imagine how much that mother enjoyed the gift that Kim was able to give her - some peace and quiet as she prepared dinner.

Carol: Now that my children are grown up I sometimes miss the noise and would love to have them small again! But as we get older we can look around us and see if there are younger mothers who would be glad for us to give them some moments of peace by taking care of their children for a while.

We've talked a lot about how we women can give gifts to those around us – our time, our help, even food that we can share.

It reminds me of something I read in God's word, the Bible recently about a group of women who also had different gifts to share (Luke Ch 8:1-4). Jesus had been traveling around the country healing and teaching. His followers went with him. And Jesus had just forgiven a woman who was sorry for the things she'd done wrong. This is what God's word says:

“Not long after this Jesus began a tour of the nearby cities and villages. Everywhere he went he taught the Good News about the Kingdom of God. He took his twelve special followers with him.

But there were some women with him also. Some of them were women he had cured from various diseases. Some of them had been tortured by evil spirits, and Jesus had made the spirits go away. Among them were Mary Magdalene; he had thrown out seven demons from her. Another was Joanna, the wife of Chuza, King Herod’s business manager. One was called Susanna; and there were many others. They were using their own money and skills to feed and help Jesus and his followers.”

Tammy: I noticed that that some of the women who traveled with Jesus, had suffered from diseases and evil spirits. Do you know what that would be like? ...Some could have had years of having fits, frothing at the mouth, falling down and hurting themselves, and people would have been frightened of them. The evil spirits could have made them say and do really bad things. But how had their lives been changed? ... Yes, Jesus had healed them and set them free...physically, and spiritually. So these women wanted to do something to thank Jesus for healing them. They wanted to show their gratitude...so they shared their gifts – their money...their time...their food. They joined Jesus and the twelve men whom he was training and traveled with them from one town or village to another. Let’s imagine what that would be like...

Carol: It would not have been easy... They would often have been hot and dirty, and they wouldn’t know where they were going to sleep that night. They may have had a quick wash if they came across a stream or a well...no public toilets on the way! They would have to keep their eyes open for food that they could buy...

Tammy: ...and work out how to cook it when they were far from their own nice clean kitchens. And they probably needed to mend and wash clothes as they went. I guess they fetched water, and cooked on little fires they made by the roadside.

Carol: It sounds to me like camping for weeks on end. Not very comfortable and not very glamorous!

Tammy: No...but when you think about it, those women would have been wonderful helpers for Jesus and his 12 disciples. They were clever at running their households and helping their families,

and they used these gifts to help Jesus and his disciples as well. It would have been so much harder for these men if they didn't have the women's help, wouldn't it? I think Jesus would have been very grateful to them.

Carol: And remember who was paying for the food and things they needed? ...

Tammy: The Bible tells us they paid for things with their own money. So it sounds as though some of them were not poor women, and not used to a rough life.

Carol: So Tammy, why do you think they did it?

Tammy: Well, we said they wanted to show how thankful they were. They probably wanted to look after Jesus and his followers because they loved God and wanted to serve him.

Carol: I agree. That's a good lesson for us too... We can serve God by serving others, and it can be our way of showing God how thankful we are. Thankful that he has blessed us, forgiven us and set us free in our spirits to worship him.

Tammy: But you know, I think they may also have just been glad for a reason to stay near to Jesus, to hear his teaching and feel his love and his presence. In those days women were not really allowed to learn from religious teachers, but Jesus invited women and children to learn from him, just as much as he invited the men.

Carol: Tammy, wouldn't you love to have had the chance to be part of that circle of travelers... listening to Jesus as he taught the people... and helping in whatever way you could?

Tammy: Yes, I sure would! And you know, these women became important members of the early Christian community. They shared what they had learned with others as well...because they had seen and heard Jesus' teaching, first hand.

Carol: Here on *Women of Hope* we've been talking about some of the women who followed Jesus and helped him as he taught the people. We are told the names of some of these women... I think that's important...it shows that they were valued members of the group. ...There was Mary Magdalene...Susanna...and Joanna...

Tammy: ...yes, the Bible tells us that she was the wife of Chuza, who was the manager of King Herod's household. How amazing! Herod and his family were well-known for their cruelty. So Chuza was a very important man with great responsibility. Chuza's wife, Joanna, may have been ill for some time. Perhaps when she heard about Jesus, she searched for him...and he had healed her. She must have been so happy, and now she was well enough to walk long distances over rough roads following... and helping Jesus wherever he went.

Carol: She was a brave woman...I imagine Herod would not have been very happy if he'd found out that the wife of his important servant was following Jesus and helping him!

Tammy: Yes, that's for sure. But Joanna was so grateful, that she was willing to risk Herod finding out. She left her safe, comfortable life in the palace and walked the stony roads with Jesus and his followers.

Carol: And Mary Magdalene... She had a special role later on – she was the first person to see Jesus when he came alive again after he was killed. Jesus gave her the first job of telling his followers the good news that he was alive. That was an honour, and he gave it to a woman who had already served him faithfully.

Tammy: My friend, perhaps sometimes you feel hurt, unloved and not appreciated. Jesus loves every person – man, woman and child. Women were able to serve him...and we still can. Women were able to learn from him...and we still can. He made you just as you are and he cares deeply about you. He really values what you do for him, and for others. When you are lonely and hurt, turn to him and tell him all about it.

Carol: And we can serve God for the same reason as these women...because we are grateful. We can all share our gifts in some way...and we can do it out of love for God, even if others do not always appreciate what we do.

Tammy: It's been good to share some ideas together today about how we can share our gifts with others, and serve God at the same time.

Carol: We pray that as you share your gifts and abilities it will bring *you* great pleasure too just as it did for Katharine when she gave away her bread...giving to others made her own day brighter!

Tammy: We look forward to being with you again soon...Good bye, and God bless you . . .

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