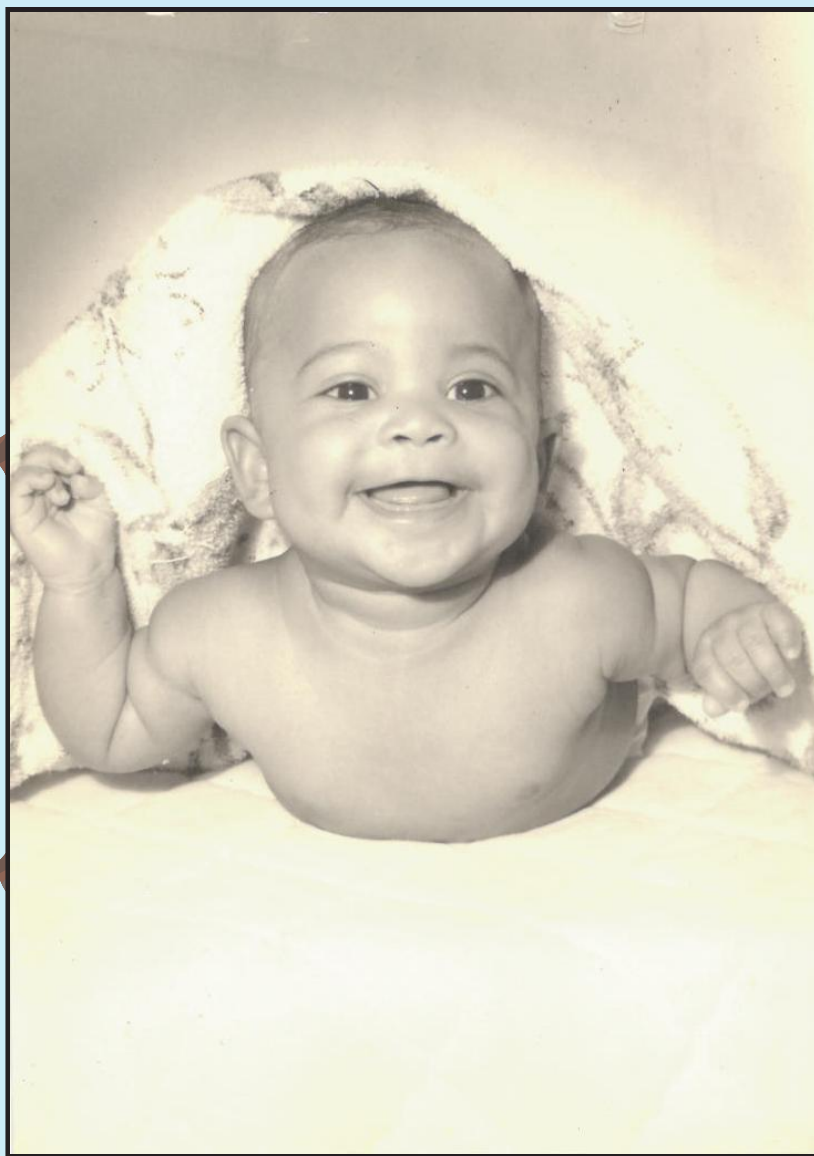


2008 Thoughts from God's Favorite Child





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Year One

Contents

Why I chose this name for my blog...	8
Memorials and Tributes	8
Gossip v. Communication	9
"I am not my hair"	10
OMG! I'm pregnant!	11
"Clothed in my right mind..."	12
Comments to this blog	12
...a few days later...	13
Out of Touch...temporarily	13
Random Thoughts for a Friday	14
A quote.	15
Monday morning thoughts	15
Blooming Magnolia	16
Don't get it twisted...	16
"a great cloud of witnesses" / The Fern and the Bamboo	18
Finally....Friday!	20
Happy Secretaries, I mean, Administrative Professionals Day	21
Mountains High, Valleys Low	21
It's late in the day...	22
W.A.W.! (What a weekend!)	23
Discernment and Wisdom	24
The Candy Dish	26
Scheduling some time...	27
Confirmation / All we need is love...	28

Some "clean up" issues	29
Honor thy mother...	29
Disobedience has a price...	31
The power of the written word...	32
A testimony: Always on time	33
Midweek Meanderings	34
Making a Choice	35
Doubting Thomas	35
Saying Goodbye...	36
Public displays of affection...	37
Under attack...again!	39
Celebrations and gatherings....	39
Six degrees of separation	40
Why (not) me?	41
Fill 'er up!	42
On being Adventist...	43
Be careful what you ask for...	44
Torn between two lovers...	46
Father's Day...again.	47
I dream of a place...	49
Patience is...	50
Hoop Dreams	51
Photographic memories...	52
Count your blessings...	53
A place for all my stuff	54
Don't love me that much....	55

I.S.S.U.E.(s)	56
Just for me...	57
...holding pattern....	58
Routines	59
He's a rock star!	60
Social Networking...	61
Being polite...	62
Don't you remember...?	63
I hear you...	64
Packrats Untie!	65
Best Girlfriends in the World...	66
Small miracles	68
"Stay-cations"	68
"Give us this day...	70
Hate on me...	70
Roof repairs, rollercoasters and rain delays	72
Motives and agendas...	73
Too much information?	74
Happy Anniversary!	75
Forgiveness ain't about "them"	75
It's the weekend, baby...	76
Relax, relate, release...	77
Under His Wings...	78
It's the pattern, not the incident, that counts...	79
Membership has its privileges...	80
Home ownership ain't for sissies...	81

Appearances can be deceiving...	82
If I could turn back time...	83
I just LOVE her!	84
Thank you Bill and Hilary!	85
I'm not taupe, I'm Black	86
When the towers fell...	88
They take a beating...	89
The Lord's Calf	90
If you worry, why pray?	91
It's been a while...	92
Standing on the promises...	93
Smorgasbord...	95
Validation...	96
Less than a week...	97
Girls Night Out...	99
It's Halloween...again	99
The longest day EVER!	101
Experience the Joy...of Grace	101
This one is for...	102
Transformation...	104
Amazing Grace...	105
Unused blessings...	106
Reunited...	107
Reaching a milestone...blog #100	108
Taking a bite..out of the Big Apple	109
A brief tribute...	110

God is all around us...	111
Vacations are necessary....	112
Living Single...	113
What a way to spend the day...	115
I don't do Christmas...anymore...	116
Remodeled...	117
Resolution: C.A.R.E.	118
"Ma'am"? Do I look like a "ma'am" to you?...	119
"I have prepared a place for you"....	120
Introspective Retrospective...	121
"the plans I have for you..."	122

Why I chose this name for my blog...

Thursday, March 27, 2008

A few years ago, I started referring to myself as "God's Favorite Child". My family knows this. My co-workers know this. My church members know this. EVERYONE knows this. It all came about from a random conversation I had with a friend as we were driving back from lunch one day. We were talking about the goodness of God and how He blesses us with wonderful, marvelous things - in spite of ourselves. And I made the comment that His blessings were always specific to me and how I wished I had a t-shirt that said "I am my Heavenly Father's Favorite Child". That November, for my birthday, she presented me with my T-shirt - personalized with my name on the front! I took it and RAN with it!

Now, I know you are probably sitting there thinking, "Ok, she's crazy, because I am His favorite." You can think that, but do you have the T-shirt to prove it? Probably not. (hahaha)

But the wonderful thing about the God I know, love and strive to serve: we ALL are His favorites...He made us each individually for a specific, precise reason. And He blesses us in the specific ways that we need to be blessed. It is my desire that this blog will be a way for me to bring glory to Him - even as I vent about things that impact, affect, and trip me up.

And I'll try not to brag too much when He shows up and shows out for me (which He does often) because after all,...I am His favorite!

Be blessed!

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 03:07PM (-04:00)

Memorials and Tributes

Friday, March 28, 2008

Yesterday, I attended a retirement gathering for a co-worker of mine. As her attorneys and fellow secretaries lauded her for her achievements during her 21 year tenure at our firm, I wondered, "What will people say about me when I leave...or when I die?" I think we all go through this whenever we attend such events: retirement parties, funerals, or any other event where you are honoring a person. I know I often have this question whenever I go to a funeral and hear people praise the person who is now asleep in the Lord. I mean, no one ever gets up front and says, "(insert name here) was horrible...always mean, never smiled and I, for one, am glad that he / she is no longer here." No one ever says that!

But lately, I have been to a few events where people have talked about someone and I sat there thinking, "Wow! I really wish I had gotten to know that person before they died (or retired or whatever the event was...)" Or in the case of my friend and classmate, John Walker, who passed suddenly last October, I sat at his memorial service and thought, "Wow, I wish I had spent more time with him when I had the chance because I missed out on so many things." (like his cooking and hospitality).

So, where do I go from here? I think the only way that you can have people say nice things about you when you're gone is to do nice things while you are alive. And, I am

blessed in that I get validation from people frequently about how something I did or said or wrote impacted their lives in a positive way (and praise God for that!). But I am sure that there are also people out there who could stand up and testify that I was not always the nicest person they've ever met either. And that makes me sad. I want the footprint that I leave in people's lives and souls to be a positive one.

It is my goal to shift the balance so that the majority of people will say positive things about me when I am "gone" from their lives...what about you?

Be blessed!

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:54AM (-04:00)

Gossip v. Communication

Sunday, March 30, 2008

I have a confession: I love being the facilitator of information...I love "being in the know" and passing on the news - whether it is information on a new restaurant I discovered, or a place I visited on my many vacations to locales exotic and new, or a movie/DVD I watched, or a new artist (whether musical or theatrical), or...well, you get the picture. I am signed up for (it seems like) hundreds of email blasts so I can always know what is going on where and when and how...and that usually is a good thing. My friends and co-workers and family often call upon me when they are trying to plan social events around town or making plans to travel to a new location. But there is a downside, I have found as well...

At what point does "sharing information" become gossip? When do you cross the line between the two? This is a question that I have been confronted with more than once this year. Sometimes I have shared information that I thought needed to be shared (for example, I was requesting prayers for a certain situation - and I was "reprimanded" for putting someone's "business" out without their permission...go figure!); or, at a recent gathering of friends, I was called out for the number of emails I sent out relaying information about a variety of things. Amazingly, those same people who chastised me in one instance have reached out to me in other situations to "pass the word along..." So, again, the question becomes when is it "gossip" and when is it "communication"? I don't know.

However, the Bible gives this admonition in Proverbs 16:28: "A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends..." so I'm thinking - like with many spiritual things - it all comes down to motive. Since this is something that I have been struggling with since the start of the year, I have been very aware when my conversations, emails, writings have been "malicious" and when they have not been. It is funny - when you ask God to show you something about your character, you better be prepared to deal with whatever He shows you!

I am still going to be a facilitator of information - it is one of my talents. But I am also going to be very aware of what my underlying motives are whenever I am called upon for

information.

Be blessed!

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:10PM (-04:00)

"I am not my hair"

Monday, March 31, 2008

Lyrics: "I am not my hair, I am not this skin, I am not your expectations, no..." - India.Arie

My brother Kevin first hipped me to this song a few years ago. I heard it one time and immediately downloaded the tune (and the video) to my iPod! If you ever listen to the lyrics of the song, I'm telling you, India.Arie lived in my skin. We have the same "hair history". (hahaha)

Five years ago in November, 2002, I began the journey of locking my hair. And let me tell you, calling it a "journey" is not a joke. Let's start at the beginning - I was a bald-headed baby...and I mean, BALD! No fuzzy down, no cute single curl, call me "cue ball" and keep moving. In fact, there is a family myth/story that has been passed down through the generations about my mother calling my grandparents to say, "I finally got a bow in her hair!", only for them to drive from Connecticut to Illinois to discover that my mother had TAPED THE BOW TO MY SCALP!!! In her defense, she said she was tired of explaining that the "cute little boy" in the buggy was a girl.

Fast forward to age 6/7/8 - my mother reveled in the fact that I had hair down my back and she could put it up in Shirley Temple curls or three ponytails (women: you remember, two in the front, one in the back) or any myriad of hairstyles she could think of - but, I was tender headed and with all the thick hair I was "blessed" with, it was always an ordeal to get my hair "fried, dyed and laid to the side"....remember that blue Afro Sheen grease that our mommas would use to "straighten" our hair? I still cringe at the sizzle at the back of my neck and my momma saying (after she burned me), "well, if you hadn't flinched, you wouldn't have gotten burned!" Man, I tell you child services could have had a field day back in the late 60s and early 70s with Black mommas...and their daughters' hair.

Age 12: For whatever reason, my mother decided to stop fighting with me and my hair and gave me "control" of my hair. So what did I do? CUT IT OFF! (Of course, damage from relaxers may have helped with my quest, but my love of shorter hair was born.) You mean, I can still look cute and not have all the hassles of dealing with hair? Oh, the freedom! And so began a cycle that lasted until my mid-30s of growing it out (usually for some man who said "I really love long hair on women") to cutting it off (usually when I got mad at that same man!). Until one evening, I had an appointment at the hairdresser. Now, at this time, my hair was pretty short and I wore a texturizer in it - so, we are talking 30 mins top to shampoo, "relax" and style my hair....yet, it took over 3 hours! And this was with an appointment! To make matters worse, I live in "HotLanta" and it was humid and rainy...3 hours later, \$80 bucks poorer and an hour ride home and my hair had reverted back to its natural state. I was so angry, I went to the barber shop the next day and cut it all off! For three years, I had a standing appointment at Tony's Barber Shop in downtown Atlanta - every Thursday morning at 8:00a, he'd shape up my "fade" and I would head to work.

Somewhere in the midst of this, I embraced the idea that I wanted to "lock" my hair. However, I'd just started a job at a new law firm - one where I was definitely among the minority, if you get my drift. I decided that in order not to "rock the boat", I need to wait a minute before coming into the office with such a drastically different hairstyle. So, for two years, I bid my time until November 2002, when I started the journey of locs. (Sidebar: And I firmly call them "locs", not dreads, not dreadlocks - just locs. Personal preference) I was AMAZED at people's reactions - from my mother who would not say ANYTHING unless someone else denouncing them said something and then she would chime in. (Although, that all turned around when they started getting longer and once again, I could pull off all kinds of different hairstyles and hairdos and once again, her daughter had "hair on her head".); to friends and acquaintances from the islands who wanted to declare to me the history of locking and why I needed to "cut that mess" out of my head right now; to the random stranger in the bank who told me "you should never cover your locs so that you can embrace the sun and the spirits and..."; and my favorite, my good friend at church (he knows who he is) who every Sabbath threatens to cut my hair in the lobby of our church because I am unwittingly being a bad example to the young people in our church...WHATEVER! It's just hair, people! - and, "I am not my hair..." (hahaha)

All that to say, aren't you glad that God looks at our hearts and not our "outward appearance"? (1 Samuel 16:7) Yes, we should always be nice and neat and modest in our appearance, but the most important thing to Him (and should be to us) is our hearts...and how we treat one another. Just something to think about...

Be blessed!

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:56AM (-04:00)

OMG! I'm pregnant!

Tuesday, April 01, 2008

April's Fools! hahaha. Surely, you didn't think that I was about to announce a pregnancy, did you? Shame on you!

As a child, I dreaded April's Fools Day and being caught looking foolish because of some prank. I would determine early in the morning on April 1st - "you will NOT fall for any foolish pranks, you will NOT, you will NOT" - and inevitably, "ooo, watch out! you have a bug crawling in your hair" would have me running across the school playground with everyone laughing at me. Because you see, the best pranks always have some element of believe-ability or truth in them.

Picture the Garden of Eden, when Eve went for a walk without her husband and the serpent said to her, "Hey Eve! Can't you eat of EVERY tree in the garden? What? Not this one? Why not? The fruit is good and sweet and tasty and nothing will happen to you if you eat it...nothing happened to me...it just made me "better"...I mean, I can talk! You should try it...who knows what you will be able to do if you just try it..." It was all just a prank by the enemy...and we are still paying for it.

But I digress (slightly). There is an element of truth to the title of today's blog as well. See, I am "pregnant"...pregnant with ideas - not only for this blog, but for my life. For a long time, I have been stagnant - sitting /hoarding / underutilizing the talents that God instilled in me - but now is the time to nurture them so that "in due season", I will give birth to what God truly wants me to be and do and achieve. Hope you will stay around for the journey.

I trust it will be VERY INTERESTING...

Be blessed!

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:17AM (-04:00)

"Clothed in my right mind..."

Thursday, April 03, 2008

All my life I heard people pray, "and thank you Lord for waking me up 'clothed in my right mind'", but it is only as I have become an adult that I have realized how powerful a request that truly is. We take for granted each night when we lay down to sleep and rest that, not only will we wake up in the morning, but that when we do, we will be aware and cognizant of what is going on, where we are, who we are - and most importantly, Who God is.

How amazing is it that God takes the time to breathe the breath of life into our nostrils each morning - and while doing so, makes sure that we have whatever we need to get through the day ahead - including good mental faculties.

Now, some of my friends (and especially my relatives) might disagree that I am ever "in my right mind", but what do they know? They are entitled to their opinions, no matter how erroneous they may be...but I praise God each morning that I wake up and am aware:

- aware that every blessing I receive is from Him;
- aware that it is not just happenstance that I made it through the night without incident - no phone calls to come to the hospital or mortuary, no invasions of my home and property;
- aware that He is God and that He loves me...in spite of myself most of the time.

What an awesome, amazing, fabulous thing to recognize each and every morning.

I pray that you are "clothed in your right mind" as you read this...and as you go through this day...and every day of your life.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:28AM (-04:00)

Comments to this blog

Thursday, April 03, 2008

Thanks for all the comments I have received to date on this new venture. If you include your email address in your comments, I promise to make a direct email response to you. Not all comments will be posted to be viewed by the public (because everyone doesn't need to know how "crazy" some of my friends are! - hahaha), but if you especially don't want something you wrote posted, just let me know.

And to ANONYMOUS who asked who the father of my "child" was (see April 1, 2008 blog), I pray it is my Heavenly Father...(wink).

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:41AM (-04:00)

...a few days later...

Wednesday, April 09, 2008

My godsister Linda recently asked me "where do you find the time to try and do a daily blog?" and I assured her that I had it all under control...and then, I couldn't find time to write for almost a week. Sometimes, we think we "know" what's going on - only to be hit with the realities of life.

Change is a good thing, right? That's what people keep telling me. I'm finding out that sometimes, in the midst of all the changes, you just have to roll with the punches. Since the last time I wrote, there have been shakeups in my life: personally, socially, professionally - you name it, it's been shook! But in the midst of it all, some things have remained consistent - primarily, my Heavenly Father's love, care, concern and ministry to my life.

Some times in the midst of change, we can forget that. We can forget that He is consistent, unchanging, and always looking out for our best interests. I have some friends right now dealing with the sudden, unexpected loss of a loved one due to a car accident. It can be difficult when you are going through a change like this to remember that God is in control, that He is never changing, that His love is sustaining. Hard to remember, but how else can you survive the trials and pressures put upon you by loss, the world, the economy, your family, your friends...need I go on?

All I know is this: Change is inevitable. Lyrics to one of my favorite songs state "Everything must change. Nothing stays the same."...except the sustaining, loving Hands of the Creator.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 11:25AM (-04:00)

Out of Touch...temporarily

Thursday, April 10, 2008

God has a funny sense of humor. On Tuesday evening, I was at a meeting where I was asked the question: If given a choice, which modern convenience would you chose if you could have only one: your cell phone, your vehicle, or your computer with Internet access? Something to think about, huh?

Well, I chose my cell phone. Since I have a BlackBerry which gives me computer/Internet access, and I share a vehicle with my mother right now (long story) and I am blessed to live in a city where there is a good public transportation system, I stated that my cell phone is my one "necessary, cannot live without it, modern convenience." This morning I woke up and my cell phone was flashing "SIM Card Rejected." ARGH!!! Like I said, my Heavenly Father loves making me laugh...even when I am not so sure that I appreciate His sense of humor.

So, today I have to act like I acted before I had a cell phone - and definitely before I had a BlackBerry. Wow! Will that even be possible? I mean, all my contacts and information are stored in that little device that I keep on my hip and/or in my purse. Through it, I keep in contact with family, relatives, friends. And right now, due to an ongoing medical crisis, it is a vital link of communication between me and my retired, stay at home mother who is under doctor's orders not to speak...by the way, text messaging is a wonderful thing when you don't have a voice. How will I ever survive?

My early morning phone call to my cellular carrier netted no good, immediate results. They told me that some time today, I need to leave my job, go find one of their stores and (1) test my SIM card in another phone; and then (2) if it is indeed an issue with the SIM card, they will replace it (at no cost to me), but it will take approximately two hours for the card to be up, functioning and active. AND THEN, I still have to restore all my information back to the SIM card from my computer. [They didn't even tell me what I might have to go through if the issue is not really the SIM card...let's not even think about THAT scenario!]

This is enough to frustrate even the calmest person...and I have never claimed to be that. I am continually praying for patience...CONSTANTLY! However, as I rode to work this morning [without listening to my audiobook because that is loaded onto my BlackBerry through Audible.com - I'm telling you, my BlackBerry is an addiction, but that's a thought for another blog on another day], I had this thought: Aren't you glad that God's "SIM card" is always working and available? That, no matter the time of day (or night), He is always there for me...and for you. Can you imagine the world of hurt we would be in if, when we tried to reach Him we got a busy signal - or, as is happening with my cell phone right now, our messages went straight to voice mail? I am glad that He is God and that He is always available to us.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:47AM (-04:00)

Random Thoughts for a Friday

Friday, April 11, 2008

First, I am connected again! Praise God. A quick ten minute trip to my cell phone carrier's office during my lunch hour put me back in touch with friends, family and relatives - at no charge to me! What a relief.

The forecast here in the Southeastern portion of the United States is for rain later today. (right around rush hour, of course.) I am not complaining - after all, we just experienced a record drought and we are still under water restrictions - but why does the "severe" weather always move in on the weekend or during the commute home? Just a question to ask my Heavenly Father one day. [Back in the Garden of Eden, the earth was watered overnight from underneath! Now THAT is the way to do it!] And for the record, I like the rain - I just like it better when I am home, cozy in my flannel pjs (or sheets), reading a book or listening to some jazz. Driving in it is for the birds!

I have a full weekend ahead - starting with family worship tonight, a visit with my father and stepmom (who are flying in from Houston TX) on tomorrow, and a baby shower for my cousin on Sunday. Whew! I'm tired just thinking about it. My heart will be my friends who will be funeralizing a loved one in New York. Whatever your plans for the weekend, I pray you are blessed and that you find time to make some memories with loved ones,

friends and maybe even a stranger who crosses your path.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:08AM (-04:00)

A quote.

Friday, April 11, 2008

We spend precious hours fearing the inevitable. It would be wise to use that time adoring our families, cherishing our friends, and living our lives.

Maya Angelou

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:54AM (-04:00)

Monday morning thoughts

Monday, April 14, 2008

It is 6:45a and I am sitting in the still quiet of my office waiting for another busy work day (and week) to begin and as I reflect on the weekend just past, I realize AGAIN how blessed I am to have family, friends and loved ones to spend time with and continually make new memories. As a rule, I only make one resolution at the beginning of the year and this year, I don't remember EXACTLY how I phrased my resolution (it's always something deep and profound and evidently forgettable), but it had something to do with embracing the memories. Too often in the hustle and bustle and busy-ness of life, we forget to celebrate the small moments - the conversations with lifetime friends, the phone calls in the middle of the night, the celebrations of events in our lives. And because we don't take time to memorialize them (in pictures or words or thank yous), in time, the memories fade and blur and are forgotten.

This weekend, every day had something worth holding onto for the memory banks: from family worship with my aunt, uncle, cousins and mother on Friday evening; sitting in church with a dear friend on Sabbath morning and enjoying a spirit filled message that made me think about the type of Christian I truly am; hanging out with my "parental units" who were in town visiting from Houston on Saturday evening; spending time with my 88 year old grandmother for our weekly phone conversation; having brunch on Sunday morning with my brother and mother; talking to my other brother on a coast-to-coast telephone call on Sunday morning; my cousin Dominique's baby shower on Sunday that was full of laughter, food, fellowship and well wishes for her and her growing family. All this stuff may seem minute, mundane, unimportant, and inconsequential. But when I am 70/80 years old, sitting in my rocking chair at the assisted living home, waiting for the next round of BINGO to start - these are the memories that will make me smile and laugh and maybe even cry, but that will be a good thing.

I pray that you will live your life in such a way that you too will cherish your memories. But to cherish them, you gotta make them. So get out there! Go to brunch with a childhood friend. Call up that person who has made an impact in your life. Tell your parents, your siblings, your friends you love them while you still have a chance. I promise you, you will be glad that you did.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:45AM (-04:00)

Blooming Magnolia

Tuesday, April 15, 2008



Last March, my mother retired from working (Lucky, sorry BLESSED, woman...) and in commemoration of the event, I purchased a Japanese Magnolia tree for our yard. That poor tree! It sat in its pot, in our garage, for over a month as I waited for my brother to come over and dig the hole for it to be planted and then, the southeastern region of the country where I live suffered a MAJOR drought last year and due to watering restrictions, I truly thought the tree would not make it. I am sure my neighbors wondered why every bit of liquid I could find was doused on this little tree. I mean, coffee, tea, watered down juice - if it was left in a glass or bottle as I headed out the door, it got dumped on this tree. Then the winter came and it was BITTERLY cold. Hey, this is my first tree - I didn't put

mulch around the base or cover it up or anything...it was totally on its own. I was thinking, "Good thing Home Depot has a one year guarantee on its plants - now, where did I put that receipt?"

So imagine my surprise when my mother said to me one day, "did you see the buds on the magnolia tree?" I went outside and looked and sure enough - green leaves were forming all over the tree. Amazing. And then last week, a bloom appeared. I had to take a picture - and share it with you! Despite the lack of proper nutrition and care, the tree appears to be flourishing. Amen to that.

But it makes me think: I am like that magnolia tree - I have been bumped around, been dumped on, left in a pot in the garage (not literally, but you know what I mean) - and even when others would look at me and think that I'm done, God still had, sorry - still HAS a spark of life growing within me below the surface. I am blooming...watch me!

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:52AM (-04:00)

Don't get it twisted...

Wednesday, April 16, 2008



I was re-reading some of my recent postings and anyone who didn't know me would think, "Man, that girl has got it all together. She has her Christian walk secure and set and she and Jesus are 'tight'..." Yeah well: those who know me well, know that is hardly the case. I still straddle the fence (on a daily basis) and I am sure I cause my Heavenly Father to shake His Heavenly Head in amazement and wonder as I continue to blunder, falter and fall.

My pastor preached a sermon on Sabbath about the Laodecian church found in Revelation 3, and how God condemns the church members for being "lukewarm" in their relationship with Him. How He would much rather we be "hot" or "cold" about how we feel and interact with Him. In another life, I wrote the following thought about this very subject:

I may be giving away too much information here, but I am a morning shower girl as opposed to an evening bath person...I enjoy standing under the pounding spray of hot water each morning - it totally revives me and gets me ready for the day ahead. Did you note that I said HOT water? This morning, my shower was just LUKEWARM - it was horrible! No matter how I adjusted the water - more hot, less cold, more cold, less hot - NOTHING worked! Except my little pea brain which finally understood why God tells us in Revelations 3:16 that He would rather that we be HOT or COLD when it comes to our relationships with Him, as opposed to the tepidness of LUKEWARM. But the other thing I realized this morning, because He is gracious and loves us beyond measure, He doesn't just "turn off the water and stomp away in disgust" [as I wanted to do this morning, believe me when I tell you!]. He sits there and "fiddles" with us to try to warm us up to His grace and mercy and love for us...isn't that wonderful!? I am constantly amazed at the patience that He shows me on a daily basis as I waffle between "hot", "cold" and "lukewarm" temperatures in my relationship with Him. If He can be that patient with me, doesn't it behoove me to be that patient with my family, my friends, my co-workers - and yes, believe it or not, even my enemies?

That was written in October 2005 and yet, for me, it still applies today. And I am still amazed at His patience with me as I straddle the fence in my relationship with Him and waffle between giving into my lusts, temptations, passions, and every day struggles. There is a valid reason why David is my favorite Biblical character. He and I have a LOT in common (and I look forward to having some in-depth conversations with him when we get to heaven), but what always encourages me when I think about David and his faults

and failings - EVEN WITH THAT, God called him a "man after My own heart." [Now, if I could just get the "repent, turn away and never do that same sin again" part down like David did, I'd be straight.] Proverbs 24:16 admonishes us that 'though a "righteous man" [so, not your average Joe who ain't even TRYING to do right, but the "righteous", church going, striving to do right most of the time] will fall seven times, he rises again.' In his song, WE FALL DOWN, Donnie McClurkin puts it this way: We fall down, but we get up. For a saint is just a sinner who fell down, and got up....

Anyway, all that to say, God is still working with me to perfect me and make me the woman He desires me to be...just as He is still working with and in you. So, when you fall down, get up!

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:53AM (-04:00)

"a great cloud of witnesses" / The Fern and the Bamboo

Thursday, April 17, 2008

This is a two-part message:

Part One:

Last night I attended mid-week prayer service at my church. First, I have to make a confession: I had NO desire to be there. I just wanted to go home after a LONG day at work, put on my red flannel pjs, crawl into my bed and either sleep or continue reading my book - anything besides going out to church. But my mother, who is still recovering from her medical crisis and who had been cooped up in the house since Sunday, really wanted to go, so I put aside my desire for comfort and rest and off we went. AND WHAT A BLESSING it was to be in the House of the Lord for that 90 minutes! Our service starts with song service, followed by testimonies and prayer requests, and then a short sermonette/lesson by either our pastor or one of the elders. I know our pastor did not know when he was preparing last night's message taken from Hebrews 12: 1-6 that his message would be preceded by the testimonies of the saints that testified of God's goodness in their lives: from the couple that, in the midst of hardships and trials, found a resting place and tangible support from fellow believers in Christ when they visited our church; to God's blessing on a car that was having mechanical difficulties, but made it safely from Atlanta, GA to St. Augustine, FL without incident - only to break down during a 1/2 mile drive to a WalMart; to two stories of medical miracles that happened years ago (one 13 years ago and one 38 years ago) and which are still reaping blessings in the lives of those who experienced those miracles. God is AMAZING...if you don't know that, you betta ask somebody!



Anyway, after all these POWERFUL testimonies from the saints, our pastor taught about the "great cloud of witnesses" listed in Hebrews 11, aka "The Chapter of Faith". He taught

that whenever we feel overwhelmed, burdened, downtrodden (and who doesn't feel that way occasionally? I know I do), we can look to this list of witnesses to the goodness of the Lord. We can look to people who have gone before us on this Christian walk and be encouraged by the fact that if God could bring them through their hard times and struggles, HE IS FAITHFUL TO DO THE SAME FOR YOU...AND ME. Can I get an "Amen" or "Hallelujah"?! (smile)

Which brings me to an email I received yesterday (and Part Two of today's blog). God has a way of bringing it all together, just as I need it, when I need it. Be encouraged by the following:

DON'T GIVE UP

I quit my job, my relationship, my spirituality... I wanted to quit my life. I went to the woods to have one last talk with God. 'God', I asked, 'Can you give me one good reason not to quit?' His answer surprised me...'Look around', He said. 'Do you see the fern and the bamboo?' 'Yes', I replied.

'When I planted the fern and the bamboo seeds, I took very good care of them. I gave them light. I gave them water. The fern quickly grew from the earth. Its brilliant green covered the floor. Yet nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo. In the second year the Fern grew more vibrant and plentiful. And again, nothing came from the bamboo seed. But I did not quit on the bamboo. He said. 'In year three there was still nothing from the bamboo seed. But I would not quit. In year four, again, there was nothing from the bamboo seed. I would not quit.' He said.

'Then in the fifth year a tiny sprout emerged from the earth. Compared to the fern it was seemingly small and insignificant...But just 6 months later the bamboo rose to over 100 feet tall. It had spent the five years growing roots. Those roots made it strong and gave it what it needed to survive. I would not give any of my creations a challenge it could not handle.'

He asked me. 'Did you know, my child, that all this time you have been struggling, you have actually been growing roots? I would not quit on the bamboo. I will never quit on you. Don't compare yourself to others.' He said. 'The bamboo had a different Purpose than the fern. Yet they both make the forest beautiful.'

'Your time will come', God said to me. 'You will rise high' 'How high should I rise?' I asked. 'How high will the bamboo rise?' He asked in return. 'As high as it can?' I questioned. 'Yes.' He said, 'Give me glory by rising as high as you can.'

I left the forest and brought back this story. I hope these words can help you see that God will never give up on you.

Never, Never, Never Give up.

Be blessed

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 08:04AM (-04:00)

Finally....Friday!

Friday, April 18, 2008

What a week! I could focus on the struggles and trials of the week (and believe me...more than one foolish thing happened!), but I would rather [and I am sure my Heavenly Father would agree with this] focus on the blessings instead....so, here we go:

1. for waking me up every morning "clothed in my right mind" (see earlier blog, if you miss that reference) - I say, thank you.
2. for friends and family who love and support me, in spite of my foolishness. (shout out to: Julie J, Ginny B, Jacquie T, and always always always, Linda A. - there are others, but these ladies were on their game this week!)
3. for the safe delivery of my newest baby cousin: Christopher Mark Vaughn McCrary - AMEN!!!
4. for unexpected financial blessings.
5. for confirmation of ministry.
6. for being able to pay my taxes and still meet my monthly responsibilities financially! AMEN!
7. for safe travel on the busy highways and byways of a busy metropolitan city
8. for a job that I love (most days) and that seemingly loves me (hey, they keep paying me to show up - AMEN!)
9. for my brother still being employed.
10. for reconnecting with old friends who I'd lost touch with over the course of life.
11. for intriguing new relationships...(yeah, let's keep that in prayer!)
12. for healing in my mother's throat. It is not fully manifested yet, but God is faithful and His will is going to be done, even there.
13. for spiritual and spirit-filled messages that come to me - often unexpectedly, but always on time.
14. for an awareness every day that it is not by my power or strength that I am able to do ANYTHING, but only through the grace of God and His mercy towards me am I able to shine as He wants me to.

I could go on and on and on, but I stopped at 14 'cause that's a special number to me. There's a song I used to sing as a child, "Count your blessings, name them one by one..." I think I need to do that a little more often. What about you?

Have a FABULOUS weekend.

Spend time with friends, family, loved ones.

Make some memories for the days ahead.

Cherish yourself.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:51AM (-04:00)

Happy Secretaries, I mean, Administrative Professionals Day

Wednesday, April 23, 2008

Another Hallmark holiday, if you ask me. Today is the day when bosses are supposed to express their appreciation to their employees. In the old days, when the holiday was first implemented, it was called Secretaries Day...over time, and with the invention of "political correctness" (and that's a subject for another blog at another time!), the name changed to Administrative Assistant Day to the current Administrative Professionals Day. WHATEVER!

And now, at my firm, it has become a week long celebration - full of wonderful treats, surprises and gifts. I realize that I am blessed to work in an environment that I love and that I have bosses who treat me well on a daily basis. I realize that is not always the case for people in today's working environment. (Believe me, I have worked places where "abuse" was the norm.) BUT even though it is my testimony that I am treated well, if my attorneys treated me shabbily 364 days out of the year, it would not matter to me if they were only nice to me on the 4th Wednesday of April of each year just because that has become the "thing to do".

Aren't you glad that God doesn't bless us only on Hallmark holidays? That His love for us is consistent 24/7/365 - even when our service, love and devotion to Him is not? I know I am. Just something to think about as you go through your day today.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:55AM (-04:00)

Mountains High, Valleys Low

Thursday, April 24, 2008

Have you ever noticed that a "mountain high" experience is usually followed by a "valley low" encounter? Have you ever noticed that you cannot have a "testimony" without having a "test" first? It is amazing how that works.

All of us know the story of the prophet Elijah and how he stood against all the priests of Baal at Mount Carmel and allowed God to use him to show the mightiness of the Lord before King Ahab and his queen, Jezebel. (If you aren't familiar with the story, check out 1 Kings 18 and 19) In verse 36 of 1 Kings 18, Elijah prays a prayer that was so powerful, when it was over, God rained down fire from heaven to "prove" that He was God and basically, that Elijah was His prophet. And yet, a mere 12 verses later, (1 Kings 19:3), the

Bible says, "Elijah was afraid and ran for his life.", because he heard that Jezebel was out to get him and had threatened his life. Now, come on, Elijah! You just saw the manifestation of the Lord in a powerful way and yet, you are running away because of the words of a woman! What's up with that?

And yet, how many of us have experienced the same "Mount Carmel /run from the enemy" experience in our own lives? How many times has God manifested Himself to us - shown us His love, His mercy, His grace in our lives - and we recognize it, praise Him for it - only to turn around and run when the enemy shows up with a new test, a new trial, a new situation. I am going through a trial at work, and even as I see the enemy trying to trip me up, make me stumble, make me curse (and not "veggie curses" either!) - I am reminded over and over again that the enemy is NOT the one in control of this situation. GOD IS! (Can I get an "AMEN"?!) In the midst of this trial, I am striving to remember my favorite Bible promise, which is found in Jeremiah 29:11: FOR I KNOW THE PLANS THAT I HAVE FOR YOU, SAITH THE LORD, PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE YOU HOPE AND A FUTURE.

So, while the enemy may be camping round about me, slinging arrow and darts and boulders, God has it all under control. HIS plan for my life is for me to prosper and not be harmed - even when it seems like that is happening. As my pastor admonished last night in mid-week prayer service, we have to change our focus. When the battle seems tough, praise God. Shout now, in the midst of the trial, knowing that deliverance is around the corner. And you know what: even if it takes longer than you expect to be delivered...it's still all good because God's ultimate plan is to "prosper you and not to harm you." AMEN! AMEN!

Another point that my pastor made was this: A delay (in an answer to a prayer) is not necessarily a denial (from God). I may ask God, sincerely and earnestly, for deliverance from the situation I am currently undergoing at work - and it may seem like God is not listening, not answering, not hearing my plea...it may SEEM that way...but my time is not always in line with God's time. There may be a witness that I am supposed to make here at work based on how I deal with the trial. There may be someone who is watching me, as the "Christian" on the floor, to see how I handle what is being thrown my way. There may be something in my character that God needs to work out and that is why He is allowing me to go through this trial at this time in this way. I don't know. But He does and I trust Him to work it all out...not only for my good, but for His glory.

I solicit your prayers. And I ask you to join me as I "shout now" even in the midst of this trial. 'Cause greater is He that is in me than he that is in the world. AMEN! (I'm getting happy here at my desk as I type this! smile) No matter the valley ahead, God has a mountain top experience waiting for me when this is all over.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:22AM (-04:00)

It's late in the day...

Friday, April 25, 2008

I usually write this blog first thing in the morning when my brain is fresh and I haven't been burdened down by the stresses of the day. (You can be a lot more positive when you haven't been "beat down" yet...) But this morning, that just didn't happen and as a

result, whatever thoughts I had at 6:30 this morning have been burned away by the heat of the day.

We have been celebrating Staff Appreciation all week at my office. The Human Resources Department has done a phenomenal job of acknowledging the staff for their contribution to the firm. Every day, a different event was planned for the staff, ranging from a breakfast to a chocolate fountain extravaganza to free lunch today..and it has all been very nice. I overheard a co-worker remark, "you know, one of these events would have been sufficient and nice enough, but to do a whole week of events is amazing." When I heard this remark on yesterday, I agreed and thought, 'you know, she's right - this is amazing. There are many firms that are not even acknowledging their employees at all. I am blessed to work for such a fine company.' But the thought just hit me (and I do mean, "just" - as I was typing this even...): how often do we stop our blessings because we think they are "too much"?

I know that seems like a crazy concept, but hear me out (and I hope I can express what I mean)...why wasn't the comment just: "this week of events has been amazing and I have enjoyed every one of them"? Why would you even want to limit the recognition to one single event? If the firm is willing and able to expend the time, energy, and money - why not just accept all the blessings of the week? And taking it to a spiritual realm, if Christ was willing to come down to earth and sacrifice His life for you, why not just accept the salvation offered?

I've heard it told that one of the things that will happen when Jesus returns to this earth and then takes us back to heaven with Him is that we will be shown all the blessings we COULD HAVE HAD here on earth if we would have just asked...and received. I figure, why block my blessings? Matthew 7:7 states, "Ask and it will be given unto you..." So, that means God is willing to give us the desires of our hearts, we just ain't asking for them! And if you don't ask, you cannot receive. Hmmm...

Just something to think about over the weekend. I pray that yours is blessed - whatever your plans.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 01:34PM (-04:00)

W.A.W.! (What a weekend!)

Monday, April 28, 2008

It's a rainy Monday morning in the Southeastern region of the United States - gloomy and overcast and the kind of day where you just want to stay curled up in bed under the covers. But, you need the rain in order to have the flowers, so I am not going to complain. I pray that you had a great weekend full of wonderful blessings. I know that I did! God is so good. After a week of trials and tribulation, He knew what I needed this weekend. Even though it rained every day, He allowed the sun to shine through when I needed it. Let me tell you about my weekend:

On Friday evening, I had a conversation with a dear friend who told me that he didn't see the point in going to church anymore. He gave me a list of percentages and reasons why people went to church - either out of habit, or being forced by their parents, or for the social interaction with friends, or because they are scared of God and hell's fire, etc. He asked me why did I go to church every week...and I was STUMPED. I couldn't come up with an adequate, coherent, honest answer for him...and that bothered me.

My mother and I got up EARLY (4:00 a.m.!) Sabbath morning and participated in the feeding program at our church. [For 20 years, our church has ministered to the homeless population of our city by feeding them a good hot meal on Saturday mornings.] After a quick nap, we went to church and were blessed by song and the ministry of a guest speaker, Pastor Gary James, who spoke about THE POWER OF A WITNESS. All I can say is, it was a wake-up call to me and a spiritual kick in the butt about my personal witness: at home, at work, wherever I am. After a nutritious meal and a power nap, we returned to church for a concert and were blessed by the music of up-and-coming gospel artist, Jasmine Brann (you should check her out on <http://www.itunes.com/>). What a blessing to hear a young woman who is dedicating her life to the Lord and sharing her testimony through song.

Yesterday, my mother and I attended a production of the play, GODSPELL - and as I sat in the audience and watched the re-enactment of Christ's ministry here on earth portrayed through song and drama, I was moved to tears at the sacrifice He made for sinful, unworthy, wretched me. But I am so glad that He looked down through the annals of time, saw me in 2008, and said to His Father, "Yes, she is worth it...I will go." AMEN!

When the weekend was over and I was laying in my bed last night, I realized that I just MIGHT have an answer for my friend as to why I go to church / why I serve the Lord. And it's really very simple: Because serving Him renews me and gives me the strength I need to handle just one more day. Because the gathering with the saints (and yes, even the devils found in church) encourages my soul. It gives me hope that I am not alone in the struggle to serve Him. That when things are dark, the song THIS TOO SHALL PASS speaks truth into my heart and soul (thank you, Sarita Brantley, for your ministry this past Sabbath!). It is a journey...every Sabbath doesn't inspire the same feelings. Every church service doesn't fill your spirit and soul as it should. BUT when it does, AMEN! AMEN! AMEN!

I don't know what your weekend held for you. I pray that you saw the goodness of the Lord moving in your life, in the lives of those you love and hold dear. I pray that, somehow, some way this weekend you felt God's presence, reassuring you and upholding you and loving you. I pray you heard His still small voice telling you that He loves you beyond measure. Because He does. As Jasmine sang on Sabbath, He loved you (and me) with a cross...No matter what the enemy tries to tell you, you are loved and valued beyond measure.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:52AM (-04:00)

Discernment and Wisdom

Tuesday, April 29, 2008

Have you ever been caught in a situation where you feel beat up, pressed upon, unjustly accused and vilified? Have you ever wanted to "fight back" because you know "right" is on your side? Have you had friends - some Christian, some not - giving you advice, telling you what to do and how you should handle the situation? Then you know how I feel.

Have you ever felt "called" to do something? Some ministry. Some witness. You know

you are supposed to do - all the tools are laid before you, placed in your hand - and yet, you waver. You make up excuses why you should not move forward. You have friends - some Christian, some not - giving you advice, telling you what to do and how you should handle the "call". Again, then you know how I feel.

This morning, in our prayer group, the devotional was about being able to distinguish the voice of God amidst the voices of distraction from the world, the flesh and the enemy. The devotional spoke to so many of my prayer partners who are struggling with ministries and calls that have been laid upon their hearts...and I am right there with them. And I know of other of my friends (some of whom I hope are reading this blog - and who I will not put on BLAST, but you know who you are) who are in the same predicament - they KNOW where God is leading them, and yet, they will not move. "I don't have the time." "I don't have the money" "I need to do this or that before I can..." Excuses, excuses, excuses. One of my calendars had this quote earlier this month (and I paraphrase): Why keep asking God to bless what you are doing. Get involved in what God is doing - it is already blessed!

Too often, we stymie ourselves from doing what God wants us to do, has called us to do - because we start looking at the situation through our human eyes, instead of through spiritual eyes. [Don't feel bad - the servant to the prophet Elisha had the same problem - read 2 Kings 6:15-17] We listen to the voices (some of them well intentioned) of our friends, instead of listening to the still small voice of the Lord. But I am encouraged today by the story of Solomon. When his father David died and he was passed the mantle of leadership [a ministry, if you will] and God asked him what he, Solomon, desired, he asked for wisdom and discernment [1 Kings 3:7-14] and God granted it to him. He will do the same for me (and you) if we honestly seek it.

Quick testimony: last week was a trying week for me at work. As a result, I needed to have a conversation with another secretary on my floor on yesterday. In my mind, I had it all worked out. I was going to write her a letter and then have a conversation with her and I would be covered because everything would be in writing...right? My mother advised me against that course of action and frankly, it was my plan to ignore her advice. Then our prayer group got together and I requested prayer for "wisdom and discernment" in the situation. A Christian co-worker, in a later conversation, also advised me not to put anything in writing - just approach the person in love. Well, I am a firm believer that God affirms and confirms His instructions/desires for us with witnesses - and two people told me, "this is NOT the way, don't walk in it!" - and for once, I heeded their advice. And can I tell you, God worked it out! There was some initial resistance - tense body language, silence as I was speaking - but when it was all said and done, there was an apology, an acknowledgment of selfishness, and the conversation ended with a re-affirmation of friendship and a hug. God is good, all the time!

All that to say, I don't know what you are struggling with - what God may have laid on your heart - but trust Him and trust His Heart towards you. Listen to HIS voice. Ignore the cacophony of the voices of distraction. Move when He tells you to move. I guarantee you - you will be glad that you did.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:10AM (-04:00)

The Candy Dish

Wednesday, April 30, 2008

Years ago, I had a candy dish on my desk. Each week, I would fill it with a variety of candies - usually found at the dollar store - place it on my desk, and watch the feeding frenzy for the week begin. I eventually stopped bringing candy in and refused to keep candy on my desk for over a year. I changed my mind when a good friend of mine asked me to start it again. And I am quickly remembering why I stopped in the first place. First, you have to understand the people who are stopping to get candy every day:

THE DIGGERS: These are the people who will stand at the bowl of candy and root through it to find that "perfect" piece of candy. They are the ones who will examine almost every piece of candy in the bowl, churning the candy over and over and over again and either exclaim with joy when they find the last Tootsie Roll at the very bottom - or walk away in disgust muttering, "there's no good candy in the bowl today."

THE GRABBERS: These are the people who grab a handful of candy whenever they walk by the bowl and take the candy back to their desk and hoard it for later enjoyment. They are only concerned about what's in the bowl for them and have no concern about the other co-workers who might want a piece of candy as well.

THE COMPLAINERS: These are the people who, no matter if the candy bowl is full of chocolate and chocolate only, will complain that there are no peppermints in the bowl. "Why didn't you bring in (whatever their candy of choice might be that day) ...? That's the candy I like best. You never bring that candy in. I don't like chocolate." (Yeah, there actually are people out there that don't like chocolate...imagine that!)

THE HEAD SHAKERS: These are the people (usually the skinny, don't weigh more than 100 pounds women) who walk by without getting any candy from the dish and comment as they walk by, looking at the candy dish longingly: "I just don't see how you do it. All this candy on your desk and you don't eat ANY of it. I just don't understand." (Maybe being diabetic has something to do with that...also, I deliberately don't buy candy that would tempt me...)

And then finally, **THE SNEAKY TAKERS:** These are the people who will walk by my desk and not take a piece of candy while I am sitting at my computer, but somehow miraculously, have candy at their desk or the wrappers in their trash whenever I leave my desk to attend a meeting, or go to lunch, or go home for the evening.

Did I mention that the candy in the dish is FREE? There is no piggy bank for money, no solicitation for contributions to pay for the candy...(except for the month of October when I donate any cash collected to our United Way campaign) ... it is a free and clear gift. Just like salvation is a free gift from God. And just like the candy dish, how we view and accept the gift of salvation - or how we manifest or show our relationship with Christ - is similar to how my co-workers treat the bowl sitting on my desk.

There are people who "dig" around in the Bible, picking and choosing what texts/precepts they want to live by. "Ok, being blessed works for me - returning a faithful tithe and offering, not so much." There are the "grabbers" - those who want to keep the Good News of what the Lord has done for them to themselves and not share it with others in need who are all around them, starving for just a morsel of the sweetness found in the

Lord. I don't even need to go into the "complainers", do I? We all know one (or two or three or a hundred). Just as we know the "head shakers" who sit back, never participate, yet watch and tsk tsk whatever effort someone else may be putting forth to do the right thing. And there are those who don't want to be upfront and honest with their relationship with Christ, but some times the evidence betrays them.

There is another group of people (and likewise, another group of Christians): THE APPRECIATIVE. There are people who every time I refill the candy dish express their appreciation - especially if I provide a candy that I know they specifically enjoy. [And I must admit, I will go the extra mile to get Atomic Fireballs for one and DOTS for another just because every time I do, they are so grateful that I thought about them specifically.] And I think God does the same for us. For example, I love rainbows - every time I see one, I stop and thank God for His special "just for me" blessing of the rainbow. And I know, I feel within my soul, that because I express my appreciation for it, I have seen some amazing rainbows when seeing a rainbow is the last thing I would expect to see. How God must feel when we thank Him for specific blessings that He grants to us. [Think of the story of the ten lepers...all were healed, only one returned to say "Thanks".]

I don't know which group you saw yourself in as you read this blog, but I pray that if it is not the last group, you will ask God to give you whatever it is you need in order to move from where you are to where He wants and desires you to be.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:11AM (-04:00)

Scheduling some time...

Thursday, May 01, 2008

I LOVE CALENDARS! Ok, anyone who knows me knows this. I LIVE for September when the 16 month calendars for the new year come out. I go to Dollar Tree and Michaels and Party City and I stock up. Certain friends of mine know that, in September, they are getting a calendar from me. I don't do holiday gift giving any more, but if you have a birthday in September - March, you can believe that you are probably getting a calendar as a gift - or as part of your gift. Throughout my house - in the den, in the kitchen, in the bedrooms and bathrooms - calendars abound! And I don't get generic calendars - I get travel and big grid and scenery and flowers and quotes/sayings and page-a-day and ... ok, you get the picture.

And then there are the electronic versions: my Outlook, my BlackBerry, my electronic versions of my page-a-day calendars. The calendars that have the 30 minute increments where I can place the minutiae of life in its place - doctors appointments, lunch engagements, theatre outings, vacations, girls-day out with my sistafriends, etc. etc. And with some of them, there are even little reminders that pop up - "so & so's birthday is next week", "don't forget to pay this bill", and one of my favorites that shows up every 6 weeks: "time for a mini-vacation, don't you think?"

So, you would think I'd have it all covered, right? With all those calendars, all those reminders, I should be (as my godsister calls me) the most "together" sista on the planet...right? Well, I'm pretty good. I remember MOST things. But sometimes an item will get put on the Outlook calendar, but not the BlackBerry - or on the BlackBerry calendar, but not the master calendar that is posted on the kitchen wall so my mother can keep up

with where I am (or at least, where I am supposed to be) at any given time. I drop the ball occasionally. (Praise God it is not very often, but hey, I ain't perfect!)

Aren't you glad that God is ... perfect, that is. He NEVER forgets an appointment. He NEVER has to be reminded. He NEVER drops the ball. And He doesn't "schedule" us into His busy-ness...He is always there, no matter the hour/day/season/year...ALWAYS. WE are the ones who are too busy for Him. I mean, other than my reminder to join my prayer group at 6:00a every weekday morning and my reminder for Prayer Meeting on Wednesday nights, I am ashamed to say, I don't have any reminders popping up telling me to "go spend some time with your Father." I don't have the note on the calendar, "spend some time in the Word." I'm not saying that I don't do those things, but I am aware that I don't do them as often as I should. [Y'all pray for me!]

There is a book on stewardship that I am slowly re-reading called OVER AND OVER AGAIN. This is a compilation of personal testimonies of how God blesses when we are faithful in our stewardship. Now, most of the time when you hear Christians talk about "stewardship", the assumption is that they are talking about tithing and money. But this book brings out that we are to be faithful stewards of ALL THINGS: including our time, talents, ministry...the list goes on and on. There is a story in the book of how one man's Christian walk was enhanced when he decided to return a "tithe" on his time. For 10% of his day (roughly 2.5 hours), he was going to devote his time to reading the Word and communing one on one with God. [I know, you're like me...thinking..."2.5 hours! Where am I supposed to find 2.5 hours in my day!?"] Well, he made the commitment and his story is amazing. I ain't quite there yet, but as I get older and as I grow in my relationship with Christ, I recognize that I have to do better. My 30 minutes on the phone each morning, communing and praying with fellow believers has blessed me in ways untold and it is the perfect start to the morning. But sometimes, in the busy-ness of the day, that 30 minutes of blessing is gone before lunchtime.

I encourage you today...make time in your busy schedule to commune with YOUR Heavenly Father. Start off slow...5 minutes in prayer in the morning, 5 minutes at lunch, 5 minutes before you go to bed. I am willing to challenge you that as you do it, 5 minutes will become 10, 10 will become 15, and that will (eventually) become 2.5 hours (or more) over the course of the day. See how it changes your life and how you react to the situations that are placed in your way. I bet you (and I) will be blessed...above more than you can ever imagine.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:20AM (-04:00)

Confirmation / All we need is love...

Friday, May 02, 2008

"What then shall I do this morning? How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives. What we do with this hour, and that one, is what we are doing. A schedule defends from chaos and whim. It is a net for catching days."

—ANNIE DILLARD

Yesterday, I wrote about calendars and scheduling. When I checked my online calendar (WOMEN WHO DO TOO MUCH), the above quote was the message for yesterday. God works in amazing ways sometimes and it is my opinion that the above quote just serves

as confirmation that we need to be faithful stewards of our time.

ALL WE NEED IS LOVE: A popular song made famous by the Beatles is also a Biblical principle. When asked what the greatest commandment given to man was, Jesus responded, LOVE - first, love for God and then, love of each other. [Matthew 22:34-40] Our devotional this morning in my prayer group was about this topic. How, because God loves us, we are commanded to 'repay the debt of love He showed to us, by loving each other'. And He ain't talking about loving those who are "easy" to love - our family, our friends, the person who smiles at you every day...we are commanded to love the "unlovable". And, believe me, that ain't always easy.

But isn't that the point? The Bible teaches that if you only love those who love you, you are no better than the heathens. [Matthew 5:46; Luke 6:32] It takes NO effort on your part to love someone who is nice to you, who blesses you, who smiles at you. It is the co-worker who snarls at you each morning, or the rude driver that cuts you off, or the family member who works your first, middle AND last nerve! That is who God commands you to love...love them as you love yourself. [And you know you LOVE yourself!]

As God loves us, we are to love one another. John 3:16 is probably one of the most familiar texts in the Bible: For God so LOVED the world that He gave His only begotten Son...He loved, He gave. We can do no less.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:09AM (-04:00)

Some "clean up" issues

Friday, May 02, 2008

Hi. I will be on vacation and away from the computer until Thursday, May 8. Please pray for safe traveling mercies for me and my mother as we travel. I hope to join you on Thursday morning with another posting.

Also, I have been asked a few times, "how do I leave a comment?" If you read the day's entry, at the very bottom of the post, there is a link that says, POST A COMMENT. It is kind of small, but it's there below the line at the bottom of the post.

Have a great weekend and be blessed!

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:24AM (-04:00)

Honor thy mother...

Friday, May 09, 2008

Ok, so this should be a "no-brainer" since Sunday is Mother's Day. The day where everyone honors the woman who pushed them out into the world and gave them life..."I went through 42 hours of HARD LABOR to get you here and THIS is the thanks I get..." (smile) So, here is my tribute to mothers everywhere:

To my mother - who endured the said 42 hours to birth me (and 28 hours to birth my brother); who had brain surgery when I was 6 years old and prayed to God that if

someone else could raise her children better to take her life, but if it was her job to raise us, to spare her; who suffered years in an abusive marriage and became a better, stronger person because of it; who always supported any crazy idea my brother and I ever had; who still tries to dress me at age 43; who is always proud of me and is my staunchest supporter; who loves me unconditionally. Thank you for being the perfect mother for imperfect me.

To my godmother - who loves me as her own; who is a willing sound board when my mother gets on my last nerve and I cannot take it anymore! - (inside joke); who "oh, honey"s me when I need to be "oh honey"ed.; who loves me unconditionally. Thanks Momma Anne.

To my paternal grandmother - who I speak with every Sunday morning from 7:00a until she stops talking; who has learned over the years to say "I love you the best way I know how" (and she does); who is learning to listen when I need to talk; who reminds me that my ultimate goal is heaven and whatever I have to go through here on earth is only temporary; who taught me the importance of independence, even in old age. To Miss T. Love you!

To my "other mother" who married my father; who challenges me to think for myself about what I need and should ask for from others; who, since we haven't always had a perfect relationship, continues to strive with me for a mutually acceptable middle ground of existence. It is not a perfect relationship, but it is getting better and I am happy for that.

To all my aunts, cousins and other family members who are mothers. Ok, I have a LARGE family, so I ain't even gonna try to name everyone here. You know who you are! Happy Mother's Day.

To my "play moms" who all play different roles in my life - or played them at different times in my life, but who also love me without judging, who support me with smiles, phone calls when I'm down, letters and cards that just say, "I was thinking about and praying for you." - to Jane B., Dr. Sis. Juanita B., Eliza S., Dolores K., and Leah M.

To my friends who constantly amaze me with their love, compassion, caring and support of their children as they struggle to raise them to be caring, compassionate, responsible people who love the Lord and their fellow men and women. Some are single and doing it all alone and my hat goes off to them especially. Some are married and juggle home, work, children and whatever else they have on their plates. Some are separated or divorced and dealing with those stresses while raising their children. And sadly, some are widows who find themselves alone at a time when they expected that their mate would be here to help raise their children to adulthood. So here's to: Linda A., Julie J., Jacquie T., Shana T., Deborah M., Vonda H., Metha C., Vicki M., Marecha B., Lisa S., Sue K., Sonya S., Tracey S., Laura H., Randi C., Pat C., Kendall T., Marion C., Brenda M., Robin W., Jackie Q., and countless others.

And finally, to the unsung women (like me) who have never birthed a child and yet, still "mother" others by caring for them or by mentoring them or by encouraging them. It takes a special woman to take on the cares, joys and sorrows of others when there is no "obligation" to do so. This tribute is to Ginny B., Carol M., Lisa A., Cheryl V., Alice H., Dorothy J., Tamika W., Cameron C. and others I am blessed to know.

[I am sure I am missing someone - I pray you will charge it to my head, not my heart]

To mothers - women - everywhere....be blessed and have a happy happy Mother's Day.
Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:05PM (-04:00)

Disobedience has a price...

Friday, May 09, 2008

About three months ago, my mother lost her voice. Since my mother and I live together, a lot of my friends teased me that this was a blessing in disguise. But after two months of living with whispering and repeated "what did you say?"s, my mother finally went to a series of doctors and got tested. We found out that she had severe bleeding underneath the lining of her vocal cords and she was placed on two weeks TOTAL VOICE REST! No talking, no singing, no whispering, nothing. Now, you might think this would be bliss, but you ain't never seen my mother trying to charade her way through an explanation of something...Lawd, hav mercy!

Well, we made it through the two weeks and my mom goes back to the doctor and is told, "you can talk on a LIMITED basis - you still need to rest your voice." So what does my mother do? Starts talking and laughing and talking and...you get the picture. I mean, it was so bad that I had people at church telling on my mother..."your momma is in there talking again"...and one sister even threatened to bring duct tape to the church to tape my mother's mouth. Needless to say, when my mom when back to the doctor this week, she was told NO TALKING again! So, we are back to charades, text messaging, erase boards at the dinner table and other creative forms of communicating - as well as a minimum of seven weeks of speech therapy and treatment - and beyond that, we have no idea when she will be able to talk, sing, or laugh without causing additional damage to her voice chords. ALL BECAUSE SHE COULD NOT BE OBEDIENT!

I can complain about it, but I'm really no different. God gave us instructions on how we are to care for ourselves, our bodies, our lives - and yet, daily I am disobedient. Two years ago, I was diagnosed with diabetes and placed on oral medications. I was told then, "you need to change your diet and exercise more", but have I done it? Uh...no. The Bible gives instruction on chastity and purity and modesty - yeah, I struggle with those issues on a daily...make that hourly basis! In the Bible, we are given principles about stewardship, diet, relationships - with God and with our fellow man - and yet, I am disobedient - I reach for the key lime pie instead of the apple - and consistently reap the consequences of that disobedience - larger sized clothing, wider hips, you get the picture.

And believe me, there are ALWAYS consequences. The enemy knew that when he tempted Eve in the garden. But he does not want to suffer the consequences of sin alone, so he tempts each of us every day to fall into his trap and suffer with him. I pray that each of us will think about how our actions impact us and what the true consequence of our disobedience can be as we go through each day.

The good news is we don't have to suffer the consequences. We can make a choice to do the right thing, follow the principles laid forth for us, and reap the benefits of obedience. IF my mother does what the doctors tell her, I am confident that she will be restored to full voice...but that will be the subject of another blog!

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:55PM (-04:00)

The power of the written word...

Monday, May 12, 2008

I love writing this blog, but I especially love getting feedback. What a powerful thing to be able to impact people with your thoughts and words. So I love when my friends reach out to tell me that a blog touched them or moved them or otherwise impacted their life, if only for a moment. Some comments have been tear-producing (in a positive way)- although, as one friend of mine told me recently, that doesn't take much these days. In fact, she has started calling me "Jeremiah's sister" after the weeping prophet of the Old Testament. (Am I really that bad? Don't answer that!)

Some comments have made me laugh. Like my friend, Erroll, who told me this weekend: "I really like your blog, but boy, you sure have a lot to say!" hahaha. He doesn't know the half of it. I have a notebook where I am jotting down ideas for future blogs. But since I only want to post one a day - I am sure there were several thoughts that will go unpublished.

Some comments have blown me away. Like when people write me to tell me, "your blog was JUST WHAT I NEEDED TODAY". How powerful is that?! That God would use ME!!! to bless someone in a significant way. I stand in awe every time that happens because I truly am aware of the wretchedness of myself. So, all praise and honor to Him when/if you are ever blessed by anything I sit down to write.

Some comments have been encouraging and uplifting - a special shout out to my godsister in Seattle; to my boss' wife, whose comment in response to HONOR THY MOTHER was so amazing, I had to post it; to my co-worker (JJ) who has set a "to-do" reminder on her calendar to check my blog every afternoon at 1:00p - and if I don't have something posted, I get an email saying, "where's the blog?"; to my best friend from college, who used one of the blog messages in her radio ministry this past weekend; and to my other co-worker (JT) who consistently prays with and for me as I send these messages out into cyberspace. And, any time someone tells me that they passed the blog contents along to someone else, I am amazed and encouraged and amazed and inspired to keep writing. [Did I mention, amazed?]

But on another level, I understand the power of the written word. Over 2000 years ago, men, as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, wrote down some words that told the story about a Man who walked this earth and lived among us and then died to restore us to the perfect creations we are intended to be. For 2000 years, evil men have tried to destroy these writings, to discount the writings as "good stories" or fables or fairy tales. They have tried to negate the belief that people have in them - to no avail. The Bible remains the #1 bestselling book of all time and I, for one, don't believe that is just happenstance. There is power in the Word of God. If you haven't ever read it, I encourage you to do so. And if you have, I encourage you to spend more time reading it. I know I need to. It is so easy to get distracted by all the other ... stuff ... that is out there to read, but just a few minutes a day (to start) reading the Word of God can make a world of difference...

Thank you to all of you who take time to read this little blog. I pray that God will continue to use me to be a blessing to everyone who chooses to read this.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:50PM (-04:00)

A testimony: Always on time

Thursday, May 15, 2008

"Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear." Isaiah 65:24 NIV

The month of May is always a stress financially - between my mother's birthday, Mother's Day, graduations and weddings - May is a "money depleting" month. You would think I would plan for it better, but I am always caught off guard by the amount of money I spend every May. To top it off, this year, I serve as Home & School Leader (similar to PTA Chair) at my church's junior academy and have been called upon to provide gifts for ~50 students graduating from Pre-K, Kindergarten and the 8th grade over the next week or so. (CONGRATS to all the kids!) But, can I just say it: A sista is broke! And then yesterday, I got an email from the school's secretary asking if I would provide the funds for the celebratory cake to be served at the kindergarten ceremonies next week - to the tune of \$60. (can you hear me sighing?) I agreed to do it, but truly was wondering where I would find the funds. And here's a small confession - I never prayed about the situation. Just said I would do it, figuring I save pennies, nickels, and dimes everyday for the school, so it would all work out.

Unbeknownst to me, God had a better/different plan.

I serve as team leader for the group of secretaries on the floor within the law firm where I work. Last month for Staff Appreciation Week, I pulled together small gift bags that included personalized coffee mugs filled with all kinds of goodies for each secretary. I was reimbursed from the firm and everyone said "Thank you" and trust me, that was sufficient for me. I figured it was just part of my job as team leader. But some of the secretaries took it upon themselves to say thanks in a more tangible way - and yesterday, presented me with a card that I thought contained \$60! (Well, when I counted again, it was \$80 - so God gave me a tip!) And it was RIGHT ON TIME!

But the story does not end there...I am not shy about testifying about the goodness of the Lord (you might have figured that out by now...) and so, as I was telling each of the secretaries a personal thank you, I also told them about how it was right on time and how God had blessed. Within 15 minutes, one of the secretaries handed me an envelope with \$60 in it marked "For your cause." When I called her to tell her that I would not accept the funds and that she had done enough already - she responded, "Only God can tell me when I have done enough - not you." Now, how you gonna argue with that kind of logic? Again, "Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear." Isaiah 65:24 NIV

I don't know what you may be going through today, but I implore you to remember - God is ALWAYS on time and will deliver you - exactly when you need to be delivered.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:39AM (-04:00)

Midweek Meanderings

Wednesday, May 21, 2008

It has been a while since I've written - and not because I have nothing to say, but because life has just been B-U-S-Y!! Between court filings at work and graduations at church and gathering with friends just for the sake of memory making, a sista has been overworked, underpaid and running in circles. I need a break! Thank God for the upcoming Memorial Day holiday. Three days of doing nothing. I have already put my mother on notice - I do not plan to get out of my pajamas on Monday no matter what....but surely, I am not the only one who feels that way.

Are you feeling bogged down and overwhelmed? Have financial concerns weighed you down recently? Has hearing about one disaster after another quickly followed by another made you question - what the heck is going on? Have the ever-increasing gas prices put a drain on your mental, emotional and financial bank accounts? Do you wonder "when will it ever end?" I know that I have felt that way (A LOT) recently. I get my CNN Breaking News updates and groan. I mean - who ever heard of a natural disaster taking out 50,000 people in one fell swoop? I get my WSB TV Headlines at Noon emails and sigh. Is there no good news anywhere? I watch the political race and even though I have picked my candidate and will vote in November, I tremble because I know NO MATTER WHO IS ELECTED, nothing is really going to change - and even if it does, the change will not be swift in coming. You cannot just stop the wheels of political wheeling and dealing overnight and reverse the momentum and effect change. The ONLY thing that keeps me sane (and I know I have friends reading this going - "she's sane?") - is that I know WHO is ultimately in control of what seems like foolishness to me.

We are living in an amazing time as believers. Biblical prophecies are being fulfilled right before our eyes. In Matthew 24:7, we are told "For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places." Uh, hello! Tornados have hit the metro Atlanta area where I live three times since March 2008! If that ain't "pestilences...in divers places...", I don't know what is! So, what do we do? Huddle under all the blankets and pillows we can find (as one of my friends admitted doing on her Facebook page earlier this week) in fear of what might happen - or, "lift up [our] eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh [our] help" and know that God is still in control of all the foolishness. (See Ps. 121:1 for that scriptural reference). I opt to look to the hills, but even as I type that, I know that I am still acting as if I am not living on borrowed time. I KNOW the issues God and I are struggling with...ok, maybe He's not struggling, but I sure am! Believe me, temptation comes in many shapes/forms/manifestations. [Pray for a sista, will ya?]

All that to say, things may look crazy. The sky above may be green and orange and every color but blue; the storms may be raging - physically, emotionally, spiritually, financially, in every which way you can think of...but remember the promise in Jeremiah 29:11 (my favorite promise in the Bible, by the way): "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..." No matter what you are going through, God's plan is for you to get through it triumphant and victorious. And that is my prayer for each of us...victory in Jesus.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:27PM (-04:00)

Making a Choice

Thursday, May 22, 2008

Have you ever made a decision that later impacted your life in such a way that you often/sometimes wonder what your life would be like if you'd made another decision at the time you were at the crossroads? It could be something major - like a romantic breakup (my high school boyfriend still reminds me that my life was "irrevocably changed" when we broke up over a stupid fashion statement dispute) or inconsequential, like picking that bright red with blonde streaks color job in the 80s. No matter what - decisions we make - sometimes impulsively - can have a prolonged impact on our lives. I mean, my last name could now be Lester, according to said ex-boyfriend - and there are some pictures of me and past hairstyles that truly need to be destroyed and never shown to the world again ... EVER!

Every morning at 6:00a, I join fellow believers on a morning conference call that starts with a devotional thought and ends with prayer. This morning, our devotional thought was about this very subject. The text was taken from Joshua 24:14, 15 where Joshua declares, "if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord." Serving the Lord is a conscious, one you have to make for yourself, DAILY choice. I am not a proponent of the "once saved, always saved" doctrine. I believe EVERY day you must recommit yourself anew to the Lord. You have to CHOOSE to serve Him. Now granted, hopefully your relationship with Christ grows to the point that making this choice comes as easily to you as it does for you to breathe - you do it without thinking...but you still have to make the choice. I have found that you cannot rest on your laurels when it comes to your relationship with Christ. I recently heard a quote that I am totally paraphrasing here - "past victories don't guarantee future results". You cannot say, "Oh well, I accepted Christ when I was just a wee lad (or lass)" and never do anything else from that point on and think that is sufficient for your growth as a believer and child of God. You have to grow/develop every day - and you cannot do that without making a choice to do so.

I wish you well as you go through this day. I pray that you will make choices that have long-lasting, positive impact on your life and the lives of those within your circle of influence. And I especially pray that, if you haven't done so already, you will make a choice to align your life with the One Who gave His life for you.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 10:05AM (-04:00)

Doubting Thomas

Friday, May 23, 2008

John 20:27: Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.

This past Sabbath my mother and I were watching a Christian DVD that was depicting the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ and there was a scene where the disciple Thomas was telling the others, "yeah, I know you all said that YOU saw the Master, but until I see Him, I will not believe that He is alive." Now, of course, every believer is familiar with this story. We grow up being told, "don't be a doubting Thomas - take it on

faith...just believe." [And that's when they throw the following verse in your face: "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." (John 20:29)

Ok, that's all well and good, but...

Is God really saying here that you are doomed if you don't just take things on blind faith? Shouldn't we be allowed to question Him if we have a doubt or a concern or just need an answer? I am not saying question EVERYTHING, but does it mean that I am not a "good Christian" if I have a question or two to ask my Father? I don't think so. I remember seven years ago when my paternal grandfather was dying from bone cancer. We just "happened" to be studying the story of Job at that time in church. I remember being encouraged by the fact that Job, who is often promoted as being the "perfect saint" - after all, even through horrible trials and tribulations, he was able to say, "even though He slay me, I will serve the Lord." - EVEN HE QUESTIONED GOD! And knowing that Job had questions helped me deal with the questions I was having seven years ago when my play father, Otis Taylor, died suddenly on the Friday after Thanksgiving, followed two months later by the death of my grandfather. I questioned why God would lay two great warriors for His kingdom to rest in such quick succession. I wondered why I was being deprived of two men in my life who'd always been supportive and spiritual compasses for me - gone, swiftly and suddenly.

But back to Thomas. What struck me about how Christ handled the situation is this: Christ knew that Thomas had a heart bent towards Him. That is exhibited by Thomas calling Christ "My Lord and My God" in verse 28 of the same chapter. He also knew that some of us occasionally need tangible proof of something before we believe it. Christ met Thomas where he was...a little lacking, but still willing to serve. Christ ALLOWED Thomas to do what he needed to do in order to believe. You need to touch my scarred hands, here they are. You need to touch my pierced side, here it is. What compassion, what love. Yes, there is a mild rebuke when Christ tells Thomas that are consequences to his lack of faith - Thomas missed out on a blessing for his disbelief, but that instance of faithlessness was not the end of Thomas' story - Praise God. Thomas went on to be a powerful witness of the gospel. I believe his story is included in the Bible for a reason. (and not just so it could be the subject of this blog.)

Have a happy, safe and blessed holiday weekend.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:46AM (-04:00)

Saying Goodbye...

Monday, May 26, 2008

"No more goodbyes...and no more sad partings. No more farewell, no more will we bid each other adieu...We'll meet again, where sorrows end, and life begins anew." The lyrics to this song are by a group called the Blendwrights - a group that I listened to consistently as a child growing up in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Goodbyes are hard. Whether they are expected or unexpected, they are hard. For example, a child graduating from high school and moving away to college. You know its coming, you have 17/18 years to prepare for it, and yet, every autumn, there is some

mother crying at a freshman dorm room as her "baby" leaves her to start the next phase of his/her life. [C'mon now, I KNOW my mother wasn't the only one!]. Or, the trip has been planned for months. You know (you pray) your loved one will return from the vacation safe, relaxed, refreshed and invigorated, but the parting at the airport is still difficult. [Sidebar: how many of you miss being able to go to the gate to either say goodbye or greet your family and friends as they arrived? I do. Meeting at baggage claim just ain't the same.] And let's not even talk about the pain of saying goodbye to someone when they die - whether suddenly after an accident or expectedly after a long illness. Goodbyes are hard.

This past weekend, I, along with my church family, had to say goodbye to our pastor, Godwin Mitchell, and his family - his wife, Gasie, and his daughters, Kiera and Kenya. After 8 years of service, they are being moved to another church - and the church is two states away, so it ain't like I can pop over for dinner one day and just see them because I want to. They are going away. And with gas prices topping \$4 a gallon, getting in my car and driving to Winston Salem, NC where they will be making their new home, isn't as easy (or economical) an endeavor as it would have been in the days of \$2.00 a gallon gas prices. [Do you remember fussing about gas being \$3 a gallon? I'll date myself and admit that I remember the horror of paying \$1.00 a gallon not too too long ago!] So, the reality might be that I will not see my friends on this side of heaven again [not likely, but life has a way of getting in the way]. Thank God for the technology of the Internet and email and cell phones as ways to keep in touch.

The Bible tells us of the day when there will be no more goodbyes. [Rev. 21:4] When we will join Our Savior in heaven to live eternally. When we will be reunited with loved ones who have fallen asleep in the Lord. When we will, for eternity, be able to spend time with loved ones and friends without fear that this might be the last time we ever see them. Where fellowship will continue forever. Can you imagine what a great time that will be? One big long family reunion without drama - and more than enough food for everyone. [AMEN! AMEN! AMEN!]

I don't know if you have recently had to say goodbye to someone. Or maybe you've had to say goodbye to something - which can also be traumatic -think chocolate. Whatever goodbye experience you have gone through, or are going through, I know God will give you the strength you need to get through it. He has done it in the past. He will do it now. Just trust in Him. When you cannot see His Hand, trust His Heart.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:27AM (-04:00)

Public displays of affection...

Tuesday, May 27, 2008

I pray that you and yours had a safe and enjoyable holiday weekend. On Sunday, I went to Stone Mountain Park with a friend to do the five mile hike around the base of the mountain. Ok, WHAT WAS I THINKING? It was hot and crowded and hot and sweaty and hot...you get the picture. But it was exercise and it actually was a nice relaxing time spent getting to know this young man who just returned from Korea where he spent a year as a teacher and missionary. You can learn a lot about a person when you spend two hours in nature, walking around a mountain. We talked about a variety of topics and spent time "people watching" (one of my favorite activities - people just fascinate me). My friend

greeted almost every person who passed us with a smile and, in most cases, with a hello. (And it there were a LOT of people in the park). One couple that fascinated me the most was this little old couple who were walking the path, holding hands. It was obvious that they had spent a lot of time together and were still affectionate towards each other, and were not ashamed to show their affection for each other in public.

My friend and I talked about public displays of affection during our walk. I have mixed feelings about it. Sometimes it's sweet, as in the display of the older couple. There is a sweetness to showing your connection with someone publicly - whether it is as simple as holding hands or stepping aside so one of you doesn't have to step off the path and into the street. But other times, my reaction was more along the lines of "get a room people". There was a young couple that was also walking around the park. They were all hugged up with no breathing room between them and my remark was, "it is way too hot out here for all of that!" AND besides, as my mother always admonished me when I was growing up, "always conduct yourself as a lady 'cause you never know who's watching you" (as I found out when I got to work this morning and our building security guard said to me, "I saw you walking at Stone Mountain this weekend.") Good thing I was behaving myself, huh?

So, all that got me to thinking. (surprise, surprise). How often are we on "public display" without knowing it? How many times have you seen someone doing something that you never expected them to be doing - and knew that they did not see you observing them? (You know - you see a teenager from church with a cigarette; or you see an elder/pastor from church coming out of an establishment where you probably think they don't belong) Would you act differently if you knew your mother was watching your EVERY move? Would knowing your children saw you do something you taught them was wrong stop you from your wrong behavior? If we knew our life was "on screen" for everyone to see, would we do all the things we do? Something to think about. But the reality is, there is Someone Who sees EVERYTHING you do...and I do mean, EVERYTHING! All the things you do in secret that you think no one knows about - He knows. I know He sometimes sits on His throne in heaven, looks at my foolish antics, shakes His head, sighs and says, "yeah, she's my favorite child, but I sure wish she would get it together." If I really was cognizant of the fact that He is watching everything I do, I probably wouldn't do most of the stuff I do - would you?

But switch it around. Does He ever publicly display His affection for us? ABSOLUTELY...ALL THE TIME! Have you ever seen a sunrise - or a sunset - or a rainbow? Have you ever been gently awakened by birdsong outside your window? Have you ever seen a full moon shine? Have you ever smelled a flower - or cut grass - or a gentle rain? Have you ever tasted a mango or strawberries or grapes? Have you ever touched cotton or the fur of an animal? He surely shows His affection for us every day when He wakes us up, but He shows it in other ways as well. We just have to stop, look around and see it.

I pray that today you can find time to see how God wants to publicly display His affection for you, and that you, in return, will do the same for Him. Your life should be a constant display of affection for Him.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:13AM (-04:00)

Under attack...again!

Wednesday, May 28, 2008

Today's text: Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. (Matthew 10:16)

Not so long ago, I alluded to a situation of attack that I found myself undergoing at work. I prayed about it, my prayer warriors went before the throne of grace about it, and I thought I had been delivered. Obviously, the enemy had another plan because on yesterday, the demons attacked again. I guess there is something in my character that God sees He needs to develop in me. I am not sure what it is, but I am seeking His face in this situation.

We are admonished in the text above that we should be "wise as serpents, and harmless as doves," but what does that REALLY mean in the scheme of things? For me, it means that I need to NOT get all up in my co-workers' faces and explode (as I wanted to do on yesterday when this all went down). It means that I need to pray - and pray hard - for the people behind the attack. I was focusing on the situation, I need to focus on the people. I need to document, cover my ... tracks, watch my back. Everyone who smiles in your face is not your friend. (I thought I'd learned that lesson before - guess I need to learn it again.) And I need to, no matter what is thrown my way, reflect the love and character of Christ.

Will you pray for and with me to that end? Thanks.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 08:37AM (-04:00)

Celebrations and gatherings....

Friday, May 30, 2008

It is that time of year when people are gathering: for graduations, for weddings, for vacations. Even with the soaring gas prices (let's not even go THERE!) and rising airfares, I still hear people talking about trips that they have planned - or that they anticipate taking over the next few days and weeks. I, for one, have several trips planned in the near future that I am looking forward to, but there is one trip currently "on hold" because I cannot get a good airfare to take it. But I digress.

This weekend, my family is gathering to celebrate two momentous occasions: a high school graduation and a wedding. Congratulations to my cousins, Amber and Dominique (and soon to be cousin, Paul)! Each of these celebrations marks the end of one era, and the beginning of another in their lives. I have never been married (and that is another blog entry in and of itself!), but I remember the anticipation, the joy, the overwhelming feeling of accomplishment as I marched down my high school graduation aisle over 26 years ago. I remember thinking, "I'm grown now, nobody can tell me nothing!" Little did I know, life had many more experiences to teach me - and the longer I live, the more lessons I am learning. Hopefully, I am growing as I learn, but that is up for debate. These are joyful occasions and I look forward to seeing family members who live far away who have traveled here to take part in these two events.

However, not too far away from me in the town of Huntsville, Alabama, another gathering of a more somber nature is occurring. A young 19 year old male friend of a friend was gunned down last night, and his family is gathering to mourn his passing. (The decision was made to pull the plug earlier this morning). While all the details of what happened and how this occurred are still sketchy and unclear, the reality is this: there is a mother who has lost her baby, grandparents who have lost their grandson, and friends who have lost a companion who was "like a brother" to them. Even though I did not know this young man personally, my heart goes out to his family at this time. And I pray that, in his final moments of life, he was able to reach out to His Saviour who I know was reaching out to him.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 offers this assurance: "Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. ...the Lord Himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ shall rise first. After that, we who are still alive...will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore, encourage each other with these words."

There is a gathering coming when we will be joined with all of those who have preceded us in death who lived according to God's word, and a time is coming when there will be no more goodbyes and no more separation. I eagerly await that day, don't you?

Have a happy Sabbath and a blessed weekend. Be blessed and be a blessing.
Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 12:13PM (-04:00)

Six degrees of separation

Monday, June 02, 2008

There is a theory that everyone is connected to everyone else in the world by only six degrees of separation. Meaning, there are only six people standing between you and anyone else in the world - the problem is getting to know those six people at the right time. I was only two degrees away from Shemar Moore a few years ago. He was filming in Atlanta and one of the guys I would eventually work with in the future was on set as his body double. Now, if I'd only known Wesley while he was working as Shemar's body double, we could have met, he would have fallen madly in love with me (because, of course, who wouldn't?) and all of you would be jealous whenever you saw the pictures of how happy we were together in our Los Angeles/New York/Atlanta homes. (Hey! Sometimes a fantasy life is all a sista has...)

And this theory plays itself out in other aspects of my life as well. I attended a small college in Huntsville, AL for my freshman year of college over 25 years ago. Recently, some alumni created a social networking page just for the college's alumni, supporters, students and staff. One of the features available is the "connections" feature and when you view someone's profile in order to "connect" with someone, you are told how many degrees you are "separated" from this person. And depending on how you already have set up your connections, you can be directly connected or separated by various degrees. I love closing the connections though, so that I have "direct connections" with most people. I have reconnected with old friends - and made some new ones through this process.

But think about...only six people (or less) separates you from anyone in the world. I work with someone who is very involved in one of the Democratic candidates' campaigns - so, according to this theory, I am either two or three (or four if the Republican nominee wins) degrees away from the next President of the United States. How exciting is that - in theory. I just found out that one of my cousins, by virtue of an organization that she is involved with, has been invited to the inaugural festivities next year, so she's even closer than me...good thing I like her, otherwise, I might have to take her out so I can go in her stead. (Just kidding, Caron!)

Aren't you glad that there are NO degrees of separation between us and our Heavenly Father? We are always directly connected to Him - even when we feel far far away from His will and/or His presence in our life - He is right there. I am so glad about that. It is a wonderful promise that we can each hang onto as we face each day.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 11:43PM (-04:00)

Why (not) me?

Wednesday, June 04, 2008

Why is it that whenever we are going through something, the first thing we holla is "Lawd, have mercy - why me?" I would like to suggest that we need to change our paradigm - maybe we should question, "Why not me? What is it that God is trying to develop in my character that will be made manifest once I get through this?" Well, that is what I am pondering this morning as I sit at my desk...at work...but not working.

The worldwide church of which I am a member recently spent three months studying the subject of crucibles - what they are and how we, as Christians, should do to get through them. I will admit that I didn't study my lessons as I should have and now, with 20/20 hindsight, I am kicking myself in the butt, because God was trying to teach me something in preparation for the storm in which I currently find myself. (But you best believe, I will be pulling out my quarterly and going back to study - ain't it grand that we serve a God who gives us "second chances" for a myriad of things? AMEN!) I currently find myself in the midst of a crucible experience and I am sort of wondering..."why me? what did I do to deserve this?" And of course, there are the "friends" and "well wishers" who say, "Girl, you know I got your back. Who we need to get?" All that is well and good, but it is also distracting.

This morning, during our prayer call, as I asked for special prayer for me and my co-worker (who is also going through this experience with me), the pastor made an interesting statement that I had not considered: "Maybe you are going through a "Job" experience. Maybe God was bragging on you and turned to the enemy and said, 'Have you considered my servant, Kristina? There is no one on earth like her, she is blameless and upright, a woman who fears God and shuns evil.'" (paraphase of Job 1:8) [Ok, those of you who know me well can stop laughing now!] It could happen. God looks at our hearts when considering our characters, and He knows that, despite actions that may seem contrary, my heart is bent towards Him. I truly, desperately want to be like my favorite Bible character, David, and be called a "woman after God's own heart." He knows that and loves me accordingly.

Years ago, when my grandfather was dying from cancer, I attended a prayer meeting

service where I poured out my heart before the congregation about how I was feeling and requesting prayers for his healing. As we prayed, I left the sanctuary and went into the bathroom to cry. A friend of mine, Vonda, followed me into the bathroom and I will never forget what she told me: "Kristina, I don't know why I am saying this to you, but God has given you this trial because YOU ARE THE ONLY PERSON WHO CAN GO THROUGH IT." In essence, the trial of losing my grandfather was specific to me. The crucible that I am currently going through is specifically designed for me. There is a lesson I am to learn, there is some flaw in my character that needs to be changed, eradicated, removed. And it is all done for MY BENEFIT because God loves me and wants to save me.

So, the shift has happened and the question has become: "Why not me? Why should I be spared from this trial?" I shouldn't because it is within the will of God and He wants only the best for me. (Jeremiah 29:11). I end with this quote that I received in an email recently. I was going to revise it so as not to offend, but realized that it is perfectly stated as is: Live your life in such a way that when your feet hit the floor in the morning, Satan shudders and says, "Oh shit! She's awake!"

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 08:17AM (-04:00)

Fill 'er up!

Thursday, June 05, 2008

How insane are the gas prices in this country today? I cringe every time I go to the pump to fill up - and it doesn't matter if you are filling up at QuikTrip, Shell or Sam's Club - the prices are still ridiculous! [and I hear that internationally, it ain't no better!] When my mom retired last year, she "treated" herself by purchasing a new car. God blessed her (and indirectly, me and my brother) with an Infiniti I35, fully loaded - the car is SWEEEEET! But it also is a gas guzzler that demands a higher grade of gas than we were used to putting into the Honda that we drove before. So, where before it would take \$20 to fill the tank - this new car laughs (out loud and long) at the mere thought of \$20. Literally, \$20 puts 5 gallons of gas in an 18(?) gallon tank car. I don't know how many gallons our tank is because we have made it our practice not to let the gauge drop below half a tank. I cringe every time I pull up to a pump and see that the person before me spent \$50 or \$75 or even \$100 to put gas in their car. AND YET, you rarely drive by a gas station that doesn't have cars at the pumps, filling up - or at least putting enough gas in the tank to get to the next destination.

Last night, as I attended mid-week prayer service, our local elder made the analogy that mid-week prayer service was like a pit stop at the gas station as we "drive" down life's road. In today's world, it is difficult to go from Sabbath to Sabbath (or Sunday to Sunday) without taking some time out to "pull over and refuel" by studying God's Word - and it truly is better in the company of the saints who are like-minded in study, prayer and testimony. It is so easy to make excuses about why this communion during the middle of the week is not important: "I'm tired, I had a long day at work" or "Shoot, do you know how much gas I will use driving to church?" or any other myriad of excuses. I know, I've made them. There have been times that I have been "forced" to go to prayer meeting and was resentful during the whole drive to the church - only to be blessed beyond belief by a testimony or the lesson study or the smile on someone's face who greeted me at the church. [Sidebar: A special shout out to Sherry and Racquelle (I sure hope I am spelling this name correctly) who blessed me last night with their enthusiastic greetings of

welcome as I came into the church. You will never know the good it did my soul. Thank you for letting God use you to minister to my soul in that small, tangible way.]

Ok, where was I? Oh yeah...I invite you to take the time to stop and refuel with the Lord. Whether you find yourself in a church building at a meeting, or just at home in private study - don't go seven days without meeting with Him. He has blessings for you untold that are there just for the taking. And believe me, we all need blessings. And not only do we need to receive blessings - we need to be blessings to those we come in contact with. As Sherry and Racquelle blessed me with their greetings, and my prayer partner, Bridget, blessed me and my mother with her prayer for us - you can bless someone with a kind word, or a smile, or a hug. You never know what someone is going through and how that simple kindness can give them what they need to make it to the next step. Just something to think about.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:50AM (-04:00)

On being Adventist...

Friday, June 06, 2008

I have a confession to make. I am a third generation Seventh-day Adventist ("SDA") Christian, but I haven't always enjoyed or liked being one. My maternal grandfather was a minister, my paternal grandfather might as well have been one. Both of my grandmothers were very involved in ministry and the expectations of "the saints" for me as part of their lineage was always great. It seemed like, as a child, I was always in the spotlight: "We need special music, let's get her to do it." "This week's children's story will be brought to us by..." Whenever my brother and I would visit my grandparents, whether in Connecticut or Florida or wherever else my grandparents were living, I was pushed up front. Now, that is not necessarily a bad thing: it helped develop my character and gave me confidence, at a young age, that I could do any and everything I set my mind to do - or that I was asked to do. BUT, being "different" ["Why do you go to church on Saturday?" "Why don't you eat pork?" "Why don't you watch cartoons on Saturday morning?" "Why aren't your ears pierced?"] from my friends always made me uncomfortable. I didn't have the words or knowledge of what it all meant to explain it to my friends who were not Adventist.

As a young adult, I rebelled. Yeah, I was still going to church, still doing the welcome and children's story and singing in the choir - but I was also going to the clubs three or four nights out of the week (ah, to be that young again with THAT much energy!), putting clip-on earrings and pinching my earlobes to death!, and doing everything I thought I was big enough and bad enough to do. And while my spirit would be pricked sometimes, I didn't want anyone to tell me that I couldn't do what I wanted to do. After all, I was grown. I remember a New Years Eve weekend celebration where the plan for me and some of my friends was to "party all night" from Thursday night until Sunday night. Somehow, some way, we ended up at my best friend's parents' house for dinner and worship on Friday evening - you know, the start of the Sabbath - and the plan was to appease her parents by staying for worship, but we were hitting the club as soon as we left the house. Her father, a minister (of course!), prayed the LONGEST PRAYER I HAVE EVER HEARD IN MY LIFE! and called each of us by name and prayed for our souls and our salvation and ... well, you get the picture. Kinda killed the mood for going out for most of the group and I remember thinking, "Great, just great. Just what I needed...a guilt trip about doing what I wanted to do." Half of us bailed on going out and the other half went anyway. I will not

admit to which group I belonged, but you can probably guess.

Anyway, for a long time in my 20s and 30s, I "resented" what I felt were the restrictions of being an Adventist. Without going into great detail here (I have future blogs to write, after all), I finally realized that being Adventist is not about "the rules" - the "dos" and the "don'ts" that had been beaten into my head as a child and teenager. As an adult, I have realized that the MOST IMPORTANT thing is my relationship with Christ. The framework of that relationship just happens to be the doctrines of the Seventh-day Adventist church - meaning, how I worship Him, how I live my life (well, most of the time - God is STILL working with me - Praise Him!) is based on Biblical principles taught by the SDA Church. That makes it a lot easier to explain why I "don't" do certain things. It is not a matter of what I am not "allowed" to do - it is a matter of, because of my relationship with Christ, what I CHOOSE not to do. Could I pierce my ears? Sure, I could. There are places in every mall that would be happy to take my money and do it for me. Could I eat a pork chop? Every day, three times a day if I wished. God is a God of free will - He wants me to make choices and decisions...that's why He gave me a brain, thoughts, feelings.

As I grow older, I have come to realize that, even within the Adventist Church, we all are just striving to serve the best we can. You have saints and devils sitting right next to each other every Sabbath (and depending on what's going on, I can be one or the other). But God loves us each...knows us each individually...died on Calvary's cross for each one of us individually. And that is a wonderful thing. Thank God for parents and grandparents who introduced me to Him at an early age - for giving me that foundation. But thank God that now I know Him for myself and I know He loves ME...personally...intimately...completely...warts, flaws and all.

As the Sabbath approaches, I pray that you find peace. I praise God for the time He built into the week where I can come aside, put down all my burdens and just rest in Him. I invite you to do the same, whether you are Adventist or not. Find some time to just commune with Him and experience the joy of that. No matter the challenges of the week past (or in your life as a whole), trust in Him.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:43AM (-04:00)

Be careful what you ask for...

Tuesday, June 10, 2008

How many of you know that God has a funny sense of humor? Have you learned that sometimes, you may ask for something - figured out all the angles on how He will answer your prayer - only to be shocked out of your seat as to how your prayer is answered? That has happened to me more times than I want to admit.

I am a pretty outspoken person, in case you haven't figured that out by now. When I was younger, I didn't have much of a "filter" when it came to saying how I felt about any situation. (Some of you may be saying, "and so, does she think that has changed?") And as a result, I spent more time than I wanted saying, "I'm sorry." "I didn't mean that QUITE the way it came out." And can I tell you? I HATE having to go back and apologize...for ANYTHING! I'd rather eat slimy okra than have to say, "I'm sorry." So, a few years ago, I determined that my one, sole, solitary resolution (I only can focus on one "problem area" at a time) was: TO PRACTICE THE ART OF PATIENCE. Simple, direct, easy, right?

(See title above)

In my mind, my practicing the art of patience would consist of, you know, not being so "harsh" on people; recognizing that maybe, just maybe, I didn't *always* have to have the last word and maybe, occasionally someone else might have a better idea. Practicing the art of patience would involve taking a breath before speaking in order to clear my thoughts and make sure that what I was about to say was what I really wanted to say. Being patient would be easy. (See title above - and check out that first sentence again too while you are at it.)

God knew that for me to TRULY learn patience, to TRULY learn how to lean on Him and trust in Him, He had to move in a different way. See, the amazing thing about God: He KNOWS us...individually...and He KNOWS what we need. So, I started having some health issues. Started having to go to one specialist after another specialist after another. Started having to endure test after test after test. With no answers - or should I say, conflicting answers. For over a year, doctors could not determine what was causing the symptoms of numbness and tingling in my extremities - and believe me, I learned patience. I learned that sometimes, all you can do is "wait, I say, on the Lord." For someone who prides herself on being "independent", it was sometimes a hard lesson to learn. It was hard to abdicate "control" and wait for God to move and wait for God to answer. But I learned it.

And, even when I thought I learned the lesson, God taught me again. Five years ago, I started to lock my hair. I thought the hairstyle was cute, thought it would be complimentary to my face, thought it would be easy. HA! Again, I learned patience. Not only with unruly, wanna stand up and wave to everyone when I wanted them to lay down flat, locs - but with the unsolicited comments of well-meaning friends, family members and yes, even total strangers. I had to learn not to slap the hands of people who said, "Oh, just let me touch it." as their grubby little hands were already headed for or (horror of horrors) already in my hair! (Sidebar: OK, I HATE FOR PEOPLE TO PLAY IN MY HAIR! Must be flashbacks from being tender-headed as a child, but the whole idea of someone just running their fingers through my hair - EWWW!) I learned (and continue to learn) patience with my friend who, everytime he sees me, lectures me on the history behind locs and who threatens to cut my hair in order that my soul will be saved for God's Kingdom. Oh, yeah: God taught me patience. And continues to teach me. And mold me. And make me fit for His Kingdom.

I am a little more careful with my resolutions. I am not sure that I want to say that I try to "second guess" how God is going to interpret a prayer, but I do know that when I say the words, "Thy Will be done", I am always interested to see how God is going to work things out and manifest Himself in a situation. Because I have learned, He truly does have a funny sense of humor...

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:48AM (-04:00)

Torn between two lovers...

Wednesday, June 11, 2008

There is a picture that I wanted to attach to this blog that has come into (and out of my life) twice now. It depicts a little boy sitting between two little girls. His attention is focused on the little girl to his left - he's leaning into her, handing her a flower, and you can see (and hear) her giggle as she accepts the flower. To his right, sits another little girl - with a big frown on her face as she watches this exchange. Without words, the photographer has caught the essence of a love triangle in a way that the onlooker immediately knows what is going on. It is an amazing picture...and like I said, it has come into my life twice.



The first time was back in 1991, shortly after my car accident (that's the subject of another blog) when my cousin and I were both involved with the same young man. Yeah, looking back on the situation, not a good move. There is no real defense, but when you are young, you do stupid things. And everyone involved was not very honest - about their feelings, the situation, etc. etc. Anyway, I came across a poster sized print of this picture and gave it as a gift to the young man involved, since it was the perfect expression of what was going on at the time. He told me recently that he still has it (and won't even share it with me by taking a digital image of it!) and plans to hang it in his home office. WHATEVER. The second time I saw the print was recently - in an email - which I cannot find to save my life. And while it has been a while since I have been entangled in a real life triangle when it comes to my love life, I recognize that daily, I am involved in a "love triangle" when it comes to my soul.

Matthew 6:24 tells us, "No man can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon." ...and yet, we - ok, I - try to do that every day. Well, maybe I shouldn't say that I "try" to serve two masters every day, but my actions seem to show that there is a daily struggle between serving God and doing the bidding of the enemy. There are days when serving the Lord is "easy as pie" - and Praise God for those days of victory - BUT, the enemy knows me well and knows where to attack - let Denzel or Shemar walk into my presence, I am sure it would be "on like popcorn". (Sorry, I digress). Sometimes the temptations are blatant - in your face - you know if you do it, you are going against everything you say you believe, desire to do, witness about. Other attacks are subtle and when you fall, you look at yourself and go, "Ok, how did THAT happen (again and again)".

My godsister and I have a saying that we say to each other all the time: "If the only sin that would keep me out of heaven was eating okra...my salvation would be guaranteed." Meaning, I HATE OKRA! Hate it. Ain't trying to eat it - not even fried, although I can tolerate it that way if I HAVE to eat it (and guess what, I'm grown - I never HAVE to eat it! AMEN!) So, suffice it to say, if the enemy came to me with a big ole plate of slimy, disgusting, slide down your throat okra, I could walk - shoot, I'd run away from the

temptation. So, he doesn't approach me that way. He comes at me through the lusts of my heart (i.e., Denzel and Shemar), or the desires of my heart (but Lord, I really did need another ten pairs of shoes and I'll return my tithe next week) or through family conflicts and dissensions (by removing my focus from God and focusing on the distractions, he gets me that way too). And just like that - I am "serving" the enemy and not my Lord and Savior.

But there is hope. There is salvation. There is an answer. Donnie McClurkin sings a very simple song that has become the anthem of Christians worldwide: "We fall down, but we get up. For a saint is just a sinner who fell down...and got up." We don't have to wallow in the guilt of succumbing (yet again) to the temptations of the enemy. Get up. Dust off. Pray for (and accept) God's forgiveness (yet another blog subject). Purpose in your heart to do better through the strength God will give and has given you. When the enemy tries to bring to your remembrance all the things you have done in the past that were not pleasing in God's sight - rebuke it, ignore it, and claim the victory in Jesus that you are no longer that person. You might fall again. We all have a sin that trips us up over and over again. Some of us may have more than one. That is ok because we serve a God who has the power to help us overcome it or them.

You have to make a choice. You cannot be happy when you are torn between two diametrically opposite forces. If you are going to serve the Lord, do it with your whole heart, mind, soul. The peace of mind in doing so is amazing - and the rewards are out of this world (literally). If you are going to serve the enemy, do that wholeheartedly as well. If heaven is NOT your goal, then make the most of this life, live it up, because this is the only life you will have. Just something to think about.

Be blessed. POSTNOTE: June 17, 2008: While visiting my father and stepmother in Houston, TX, I discovered that they had a version of the picture mounted on the wall in my stepmother's office. I took a picture of their picture and added it to this blog entry. God is good to His favorite child!

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:45AM (-04:00)

Father's Day...again.

Friday, June 13, 2008

A few years ago, I did a program at my church around Father's Day when I made the startling statement, "I HATE FATHER'S DAY." You could have heard a pin drop in the sanctuary. I then went on to tell my story about my very tempestuous relationship with my biological father - and how, throughout the course of my life, that relationship impacted my relationship with my Heavenly Father. I spoke about hating to walk the aisles of the stationary story looking for a card that wasn't so impersonal that any stranger could have been given the card and yet, didn't lie about the reality of my relationship with my father. I confessed that I was often jealous of my friends who did (or appeared to have) the typical "father-daughter, daddy's girl" relationship. And I remember asking the question: how do I reconcile the idea of a loving, caring, long-suffering Father with my reality of a torn, broken and scarred relationship with my biological father?

Before my parents divorced (over 30 years ago), I was the typical "daddy's girl". If you saw one, you saw the other. My father and I are very much alike in temperament, attitudes, work ethic, and for a long time, we even looked alike. [As I grow older, I look more and more like my mother - which ain't a bad thing - it's just the way I developed]. After my

parents divorced, things changed. Throughout my life, I have consistently maintained that I am more like the paternal side of my family than the maternal side - and yet, my lifelong relationship with my father has been fraught with ups and downs, heartaches and disappointments. After my parents' divorce, I did not see my father for almost a decade - military duty had him stationed all over the world and it just didn't happen. When I was 15, I visited my father and stepmother at their home and let me tell you, it was not the happy "Little House on the Prairie" reunion. Throughout high school and even my college years, subsequent visits were not much better. I am not placing blame squarely at the feet of my father and/or stepmother - I had a part to play as well - but suffice it to say, our relationship did not improve for a LOOOOOOONG time. It took illness for me and a surgery for my dad where he literally got his throat cut for things to change - for us to have a conversation where we were both able to clear the air about things.

It's still not the "perfect" relationship. But it is getting better.

For the last four years, I have spent every Fathers Day weekend with my father and stepmother at their Texas home. We go out to brunch, we walk the beach, I lay out in the pool and Jacuzzi, we make numerous runs to my dad's favorite store [Wal-Mart], he grills me salmon on his grill, we get up at an obscene hour of the morning to do a 5 mile walk around the neighborhood and I take lots and lots of pictures. And it is better than it was. And I thank both my Heavenly and biological fathers for the change. Baby steps...baby steps.

So, did I ever answer the question about my Heavenly Father? Of course, I did. It took time, growth, various life experiences (and several sessions of therapy!) but He sent men into my life who showed me His love for me as a Father.

My grandfather, Edward J. Smith, was the best example of a father's love shown to me. He didn't pull any punches when he thought I was wrong - but he consistently showed me unconditional love. Our conversations every Sunday morning still resonate within me. Whenever I had a question of faith, he was my spiritual touchstone. January marked seven years since his death and I still miss him every day.

My uncle, James, was another "father figure" who loved me unconditionally. His wry sense of humor would brighten my Sabbath mornings as I headed to church in the "land yacht" that he gave me when I was without a car. Throughout my college matriculation, every month or so, I'd get a check from him in some weird, obscure, "let me clear out the balance in this account" amount that was always JUST what I needed to get me through. His love of the music of Mahalia Jackson and the Blendwrights made me appreciate that "ole time music" throughout my teenage and young adult years.

All of my mother's brothers stood in the gap for me and my brother after my parents divorced. Do you know what it is like having seven "daddies" when you are growing up? It can be a blessing and a curse. But these men taught me how to drive a car, how to be a woman that men would respect, how to defend myself - both physically and mentally, how to persevere no matter what obstacles might be placed in my path. And they each taught me how to flirt - so I totally blame them for that! Thanks, Hector, William, Clifton, Milton, Richard, Al and James.

There are other male role models that have impacted my life, but once I start calling names, I am sure to leave someone out, so this is a blanket "thank you" and "Happy Father's Day" to all my "play daddies", "campus dads and uncles", pastors, elders and

friends who have shown God's love for me and to me during the course of my life. Thank you for allowing God to use you to show me His love for me. Your reward is in Heaven.

As Sunday rolls around and you honor your biological father(s), I pray that you, and they, will be blessed. I pray that your relationships will be strengthened and nourished, and for my male friends: I pray that, if you are a father, you will do everything within in your power to let your children see the example of your Heavenly Father in all that you say and do as you interact with them. Your example of a father can point them to God - or turn them against Him. Your example makes a bigger impact than you will ever realize this side of heaven. Just something to think about...

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 08:36AM (-04:00)

I dream of a place...

Monday, June 16, 2008

The question was recently posed to me: If you could have anything in the world completely to yourself for one day — any object or place — what would you choose? My immediate response to the question was Buschart Gardens in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada, which I have had the opportunity to visit twice in my life. Talk about a true display of God's creative power, tamed and cultivated by humans of course, but oh my goodness! I have visited twice with my godsister, Linda Anderson, and the first time we went, we were rushing and almost missed the best part of the garden - the fountain in the Sunken Garden! As we stood there and watched the waterwork display, surrounded by flowers beyond belief - blue skies, fluffy clouds on the horizon - we both remarked of how beautiful it was, but how it could not compare with the original Garden of Eden which was not marred by sin. If I could have it to myself for one day, I'd enjoy it, but about midday, I'd invite all my friends in so we could all commune together and enjoy the sunset.

Other people responding to this question answered things like: the Federal Reserve Bank (and she promised a "real" stimulus package for all her friends - I need to make sure I keep in touch with her!); Disney World with no screaming kids, no long lines and unlimited access to Minnie, Mickey and Donald; the Alamo (or other historic sites) - and I am sure that you are thinking of a place yourself as you read this. [Sidebar: there is a comments link at the end of this blog - send me your choice of place, I would be interested in hearing where/what you'd choose]

I thought further and discovered that, in my lifetime, I have been blessed to visit some awesome sights: Mt. Fuji in Japan (but I must admit, I was just a child and more interested in the rides at the amusement park located there than in the majesty of the mountain); sunsets in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico; Mt. Rainier State Park in Seattle, WA - what a beautiful mountain!; the butterfly house at Callaway Gardens, not too far from my home in Atlanta, GA...the list could go on and on and on.

But, I dream of a place that I will NEVER LEAVE (if I live my life in accordance to the Word of God)...a place with streets of gold, mansions for everyone, beautiful flowers, clear crystal streams...a place of eternal, unending beauty - and I'd like to think there will be a rainbow (or two) in the sky just for me. I'm talking about heaven. And you know, we talk about all the "extra" stuff, but the true attraction of heaven (for me) is the knowledge that I will be able to spend time with my Lord, my Saviour and just say, "thank you" for all

that He has done for me. I have often said, I don't care if I don't have a mansion - if God says to me, "no mansion for you, I want you to live in this little hut by the far far gate", I'll be "Yes, Lord, whatever you say." Because the beauty, the drawing point of heaven is not the material things. It's not necessarily the promise of the ability to fly and visit all the unseen worlds (meet me on the former planet Pluto for Sabbath dinner!). It's not necessarily the promise that there will be no more tears, no more separation from loved ones, no more hurts, heartaches and pain - all that is good, don't get me wrong, but the true draw of heaven for me is Jesus. And truly, no matter how wonderful, how beautiful, how magnificent or attractive it may appear here, there is no place on earth that can compare to that.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 03:19AM (-04:00)

Patience is...

Tuesday, June 17, 2008

...highly over-rated, if you ask me. Yes, it is supposed to be a virtue and all that, but I tend to be a "I want it and I want it now" type of person. An earlier blog talks about how I asked God for patience with my mouth and He opened up avenues of patience I wasn't even aware of...[see, June 10,2008: Be careful what you ask for]. This morning, during our devotional prayer call, the pastor made a comment that resounded with me. He was talking about waiting on and listening for God's direction in our lives - how we can be given a ministry, a charge, a call to do something and we get all caught up in the doing of it, that we fail to continue to listen for God's leading. He used the illustration of being in line at a bank - with the customer from ... the hot place ... in front of you. Instead of them having one single simple transaction, they have a problem, they have questions, they have issues - and they are holding YOU up. And here's the statement the pastor made: IT MAY BE YOUR TURN, BUT IT IS NOT YOUR TIME.

Have you ever felt that way? All your single friends around you are getting married and inviting you to be in the wedding and you haven't had a date that progressed past movie and dinner in you don't know how long - it may be your turn, but it's not your time.

Or...you have worked hard on your job - gone above and beyond the call of duty and there is a promotion coming open in the department. You know it's yours, you deserve it, you are more than qualified and maybe you have been doing the work of the position already, only to have the child of the boss swoop in and take that promotion from right underneath your nose - it may be your turn, but it's not your time.

There are many situations in our lives that may seem unfair, unjust or just don't make any sense at all...in OUR eyes. However, in the Master plan for your life (and I'm preaching to myself as well), God knows what He is doing. We just need to stop and listen and trust. And I don't know about you, but for me as a "single, independent, I got this" kind of sista, it ain't always so easy to "let go and let God" or to "wait patiently on the Lord" or just submit. But I'm learning...as I pray are you.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 10:21AM (-04:00)

Hoop Dreams

Wednesday, June 18, 2008

Congratulations to the Boston Celtics - NBA Champions!

Having said that, I have a confession to make: I ain't a big basketball fan and probably watched less than 30 minutes of playing time all season (OK, let's be honest - in the last 5 years!) If it weren't for my brother - who is forever calling me and asking me to TiVo a game for him - it'd probably be less than that. BUT the hype behind the Celtics for the last few months - and especially since the matchup for the finals was ... final - man, you could not help but get involved, pick a side, know what was going on.

"A classic rivalry revisited" "Who is king of the court: Kobe or Kevin?" I mean, the hype was everywhere and it went on and on and on. I played into the hype during my recent visit to my father's house in Houston. He is a DIE HARD Lakers fan, so of course, I had to play the role of the Celtics fan (which wasn't that hard since that was my paternal grandfather's team). When my father and I went out to Father's Day brunch on Sunday, as we drove away from the restaurant, he yelled "Go Lakers!" and I countered (just as loudly) "Go Celtics!" to the amusement of the other patrons waiting for their cars to be returned by the valet.

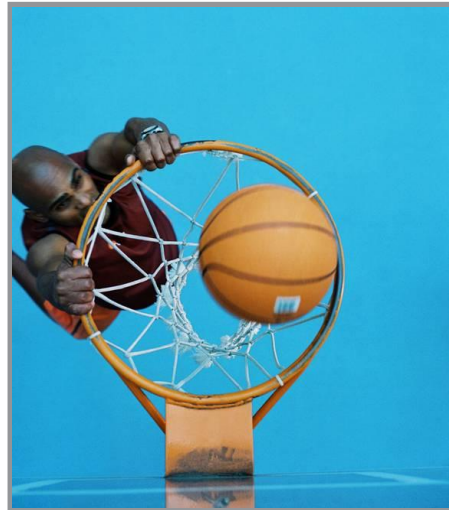
But here's my question: after all the hype...now what? No matter who you rooted for as a fan, Kobe ain't coming to your house to apologize for the Lakers not pulling it out in the final seconds of game 6; Kevin Garnett is not going to let you wear the championship ring because you yelled and screamed his name until you were hoarse...and years from now, some little kid will be watching a retrospect on basketball and wonder, "only 40 points a game and they thought THAT was something? Ha!"

Here's my point: we sometimes get caught up in things that really aren't that important in the scheme of things. The playoffs and finals were interesting - made for great watercooler conversations - kept me entertained to see my friends updating their Facebook status with current stats and shout outs to the players; but five years from now [unless you are one of those people who really does remember every stat for every player in every game...], will this really even matter? Will you remember how many points Kobe scored or how many assists Kevin made or anything else specific about each game? Probably not.

There's a saying, "Only what you do for Christ will last." Now, I know that does not mean that we are not to find enjoyment in things - sports serve a purpose: good exercise, team building skills, comraderie, etc. And there are other hobbies that people embrace that are also time consuming. [Have you ever spent weeks trying to organize 30GB of digital photos? ARGH!] But, in the scheme of things, what will be remembered is not how you played the game, but how you lived your life: were you kind to people? did you nourish and nurture the dreams of a young person? did you put yourself out for someone who never returned the favor? did you show Christ to someone who was lost? Those are the things that will matter - today and always.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:09AM (-04:00)



Photographic memories...

Friday, June 20, 2008

I love photography. Capturing images (memories) on ... ok, I'm about to date myself ... slides, film, and now digital media, has always fascinated me. I was a kid who truly enjoyed when people pulled out the old projectors and had slide shows of their vacation pictures. How cool to have captured tangible evidence of the great big world out there - and your visit to it. My paternal grandparents had a reel-to-reel projector and the slide caddy/carousel - and going to visit them was always an adventure as we watched "home movies" or had slide shows. I even liked the click-click sound as the carousel advanced or the whirr of the projector as the film advanced from one full reel to the empty reel. I always wanted to (and guess I am still "young" enough) to take a film developing class. I am fascinated by the mystery of a darkroom - with its chemicals and fluids and images developing on paper. [With all the advances in digital imagery, are those types of classes still out there?] My friends are tired of me saying, "Let's take a picture - I have my camera." (currently a Canon PowerShot) They are equally tired of me getting upset with them when they go on vacation / out with friends / celebrate a milestone and come back with NO photographic evidence of the event. C'mon people! Memories only last in the human mind for so long. But photographs last forever.

Which isn't always a good thing, I know. I am in the process of trying to scan thousands and thousands (ok, it just seems like thousands) of pictures that I have that were taken in the days before .jpgs and .gifs became part of the English language. Decades of memories: mine, my parents, my brother's. All nicely tucked away in albums, I have come across a treasure trove of memories from my childhood, school days through college, work environments - and I want to get these photos up off the page (remember photo albums with glued pages? removing photos from those albums is delicate work!) and onto CD or some other more durable photo storage media. Some pictures bring back instant memories (did I really wear my hair like THAT and think it was cute?); some taunt me with my forgetfulness (ok, who is THAT? and where did I know him/her from - I didn't know that a quick notation on the back of the photo was a good thing); some produce laughter, some make a tear well up in the eye, some just make me smile. BUT, without the photograph - I wouldn't remember half the stuff these pictures remind me of.

Aren't you glad that God has a photographic memory? That He KNOWS who you are, where you been, where you going? And His memory of you is perfect. Only good memories (that is, if you have confessed the bad stuff and asked for forgiveness along the way), not tainted with the hurts and disappointments and sorrows that sometimes can be dredged up by looking at old photographs. There is a quote that I have received a few times via the Internet: If God had a refrigerator (or a wallet), your picture would be on (or in) it. What a great thought! That I would be worthy to make it into God's wallet - or on his refrigerator. Even as His "favorite child", that makes me smile.

Take those pictures!

Save those memories!

Reflect on the good times shared with family, friends and loved ones!

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 05:07AM (-04:00)

Count your blessings...

Tuesday, June 24, 2008

There's a song from my childhood: "Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings and you'll see what God has done..." I forget the rest, but how often do we focus on the "bad things" going on in our lives and fail to recognize all the good things that we are blessed with on a day-to-day basis. This hit home with me on yesterday as I rode to work and saw a man sleeping on the ground, under a tree, on the side of the road. It is not like I haven't seen it before, but for some reason, on yesterday, it struck a nerve. So, here's my "short list" of blessings that I am grateful for and that I pray I don't take for granted. These are listed in no particular order:

- Life
- Health
- Strength
- A job - especially in this economy
- Family that loves and supports me
- Friends who are there
- Friends who are like family
- Family who are more than friends
- The ability to laugh
- The capability to cry
- Smiles on faces
- Protection on the road
- Riding the Xpress Bus instead of driving or MARTA
- Great bosses
- Clothing
- Shoes (and lots of them)
- A home that is safe, warm and cozy
- Salvation
- Calvary
- Older people who love, nourish and support me and my endeavors
- Food in the refrigerator...and freezer...and pantry
- Ministry - to me - to others
- The Bible - and the promises found within its pages
- The ability to reason
- Waking up each morning
- Going to sleep at night
- My nice comfy bed in which to go to sleep
- Sunshine
- Rain
- Clouds
- Rainbows
- Music
- Poetry
- Photography
- Vacation
- Having a schedule with things to do on it

The list could go on and on and on...but I have to close this and move on to other things. When you get overwhelmed with all the things you see as "going wrong" in your life - take

a moment, stop, and reflect on all the things that are "going right" in your life. I bet it will make a difference in your day.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:47AM (-04:00)

A place for all my stuff

Thursday, June 26, 2008

On Sunday, the world lost a comedic genius with the death of George Carlin. Now, whether you liked him, loved him or hated him, his comedy routines were guaranteed to make you think, ponder and just be amazed. He had a phenomenal love of the English language and would consistently examine it (and the world in which it was used) in ways that would boggle the mind. Every obituary or tribute that I have read this week about his life makes mention of his most famous routine ("the seven words you cannot say on TV"), but that is not the routine that made me fall in love with George Carlin. In 1986, George Carlin appeared on Comic Relief and did a routine about "stuff". At the tender age of 22, I thought it was the funniest thing I'd ever seen and just watching the clip again (Thanks, YouTube) made me laugh all over again. [If you have never seen it - and aren't offended by a few curse words (and this routine is pretty clean in comparison to some of his routines), you can check it out at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvgN5gCuLac>]

In this routine, George addresses the fact that we have "stuff" in our lives and as we move - from house to vacation to visiting friends and family - we take our "stuff" with us. As we move from place to place, the amount of "stuff" we take gets exponentially smaller and smaller based on where we are going and how long we plan to stay there...

Hmm...the amount of "stuff" we take gets smaller and smaller based on where we are going...

It is the belief of Christians everywhere that all you will be allowed to take with you to heaven is your character. Not your house, or fancy car, or prestigious education. Not the money you have accumulated in the bank, not your stock portfolio, not the bonds hidden under the mattress. Not your friendships or family members. Not even all the photo albums of all those vacations you took. None of that "stuff" will go to heaven with you. And guess what? In time, even your memory of those things will be wiped away...Only your character will follow you. I am not saying that you should not enjoy your house or car or job or status while you are here - we are admonished to "occupy until He comes" [Luke 19:13], but we shouldn't be so attached to these things that we would forfeit our soul salvation for them. Enjoy them - God would not have blessed you with these material things if He did not want you to enjoy them - BUT, make sure that you don't lose focus as to what is truly important in the scheme of things.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 03:51AM (-04:00)

Don't love me that much....

Friday, June 27, 2008

Today's text: John 15:13: Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends.

This text has always been a mystery to me because I just don't get it. I cannot think of a single person that I would lay down my life for. (Sorry Mom and Kevin...not happening) I have friends who say they would do it for their children or parents - I have one friend who would probably do it for her dog. Not me! Call me selfish if you wish, but there ain't no one on this earth that I think I would willingly step in front of a bullet for. My life is more precious to me than any of my earthly relationships. In fact, even in relationships, I have been pretty up-front about this: "Don't love me so much that you feel you cannot live without me 'cause, while I'll be sad (momentarily) if you leave, I will survive after you're gone."

On this morning's prayer call, we were told of a situation that happened on yesterday where a man stabbed a woman in the neck, killing her. This directly impacted one of the women in our prayer group because she was closely acquainted with the victim and apparently, was present during the incident. I am not sure if this was a love affair gone south, but it reminds me of an incident in my life that I feel compelled to share.

I was 26 when I was dating a (much) younger man. I knew shortly after we started dating that he had an extremely jealous nature and that this would eventually cause problems for us because most of my friends are male. There was one childhood friend in particular that made my boyfriend see red. I knew this, but felt that since I kept assuring my boyfriend (let's call him "Mr. A") that there was nothing going on between me and this person (let's call him "Mr. B"), it would all work out. Foolish girl. One night, I was sick, not feeling well. Mr. A called and I told him I wasn't well. He said he'd see me in the morning. Shortly after that, Mr. B called, found out I was sick and offered to bring me soup or something. He came over and we sat down and started playing a game of Scrabble when all of a sudden, my front door opened and there was Mr. A. [Sidebar: If you ain't married to him, don't give ANY MAN a key to your house!] He was livid! Called me everything but God's Favorite Child and without warning, pulled a gun on me and my friend and calmly said, "I will kill you both and be ok with it" (or something like that - after 17 years, my memory is a little fuzzy) Ok, I don't know if my life flashed before my eyes at that moment or not (like they say it does), but I do know that I began to call on the Lord for deliverance. Obviously, he did not pull the trigger. In fact, I remember him just kind of smirking before he turned around and walked out the door. It was truly God's providence that Mr. A did not pull the trigger and end my young life at age 26. When we talked later (and of course we talked...you do stupid stuff when you are young and foolish and think you are in love), he said he did it because he loved me and if he couldn't have me, he didn't want me to be with anyone else. Or something equally ridiculous. Mr. B and I filed a complaint against him (which we later dropped for a variety of reasons), Mr. A and I stopped dating, and I thank God that my life was spared.

Ok, this is a weird transision of thought, but this whole "love me or else" makes me think: when Christ volunteered to be a sacrifice for me on Calvary, what was going through His head and heart? I mean, He died so that ALL men (and women) would be saved KNOWING there would be some of us who would reject this gift. He knew that some of us would be like, "yeah, you died, so what? I still don't want your love, your friendship, your

sacrifice and salvation. I'm having too much fun doing my own thing, my own way..." See, that is why I am not God, because I would have had to hurt somebody! I'm up here dying on a cross, pierced in my side, thorny crown on my head, bleeding, thirsty, unable to connect with my Heavenly Father - for YOU and you are REJECTING ME! Oh, heck naw! But that's just me - that's not God. And aren't you glad that He is the One who willingly chose to give His life for you? I know I am.

Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Thank God He considers me His friend. I need to live up to the responsibility of that friendship. I challenge you to do the same.

Have a great weekend everyone. Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:30AM (-04:00)

I.S.S.U.E.(s)

Monday, June 30, 2008

717 miles, 3 states, ~10 hours on the road and about 100 pictures later, I am safely back home after traveling to Winston-Salem, NC to visit (and surprise) my former pastor and his wife who were installed in their new church this past weekend. What a nice congregation they seem to have and I pray for them as they continue their ministry for the Lord.



The pastor's sermon this weekend was entitled "Issue" and he broke down the acronym to mean "Irritating, Suffocating Situations Unsettling Everybody". His text of scripture was Luke 8:40-48 - the passage dealing with the woman with the issue of blood. Boy, can I relate to this story! Without going into graphic details, for almost 10 years, I went through a similar situation due to endometriosis and fibroid complications. I wasted a lot of time, energy, money dealing with doctors and insurance companies who didn't want to address/solve the problem because "you are still young", "you might want to have children one day", and my personal favorite: "how would you feel if we went ahead with this surgery and then you met the man of your dreams and he wanted to have children - then what would you do?" Ok, Shemar ain't knocking down my door - and if he is truly the "man of my dreams", he would accept me as I am...even if that meant having to deal with my inability to have children. It took me ten years to convince them, but on June 23, 2004, I FINALLY had a hysterectomy that stopped my "issue of blood." Amen! Hallelujah!

But I still have other "i.s.s.u.e.(s)" - we all do. We all have things that we allow to cloud our lives, stop our ministry, hinder our fellowships. The woman in the Bible had suffered for 12 years under a cloud of contempt, whispering, gossiping by the "saints" of the day, and generally just feeling like an outcast. But when her chance for salvation, redemption, and a change came, she reached out and grabbed it. Now, she was content to let her change be between her and Christ and just the two of them alone. (How often have you felt that same way?) But in his sermon, the pastor brought out these three points: when

you come in contact with Jesus - when you touch Him - (1) you will know it; (2) He will know it; and (3) everyone else should know it as well. You cannot come in contact with Him without being changed. After being healed, this nameless woman tried to slip away, but Jesus called her out, put her on blast, so to speak - "who touched me?", He said. And she eventually had to stand up and give her testimony about what He did for her - and I'm personally glad that she did, because 2,000 years later, her testimony encouraged and sustained me as I went through my similar trial and test.

I've talked about the value of testimony before. I encourage you again - share what God has done for you in your life with others. You never know how your testimony will bless someone. Yes, you may still have "i.s.s.u.e(s)" going on in your life - you probably will until Jesus returns - don't let that hinder you from being a witness to the goodness of God.

And by the way, just as you want people to be patient with you and your "i.s.s.u.e(s)", be patient with others who have them also. Not always the easiest thing to do, I know, but if you look at others the same way you want them to look at you...you will be amazed to discover that we are all just sinners saved by grace, doing the best we can to make it.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:49AM (-04:00)

Just for me...

Wednesday, July 02, 2008

Donnie McClurkin sings a song, JUST FOR ME, that causes me to tear up every time I hear it or sing it (in the car, shower - NOT in public). Lyrics include: What does the cross of Jesus mean? It's more than words you sing, much more than that emblem hanging on your chain...

Hmmm...

And our lesson study for church this week talks about Christ, His crucifixion, but more importantly, His resurrection and what that means to us as Christians. BUT, do we really think about the cost He paid for us? I know that I don't think about it as much as I should. If I did, I wouldn't do some of the things I continue to do...but that's the subject of another blog at another time....maybe.

One of my favorite Christian authors (Ellen G. White) admonishes us that we should spend some time EVERY DAY reflecting on the cross and the sacrifice made there for our sins. EVERY DAY...I cannot think of anything I think about EVERY day...not even Denzel or Shemar. (Ok, maybe Shemar...sigh) But I can see the importance of thinking on the sacrifice Christ made for...me. And He would have done it JUST FOR ME.

Have you ever really sat down and thought about that? IF everyone else on the world was perfect, never messed up, never did anything wrong - followed all God's commandments, treated everyone with love, compassion and mercy, shared their abundance with joy and not begrudging - if EVERYONE else did that and I was the only

one to mess up, the only one to be mean, irritable, nasty, disobedient, intemperate...If I was the only one - Christ would have still given up glory and His place next to His Father on the throne - become a babe in a manger and died on the cross JUST FOR ME. Unbelievable! And He would have done the same thing JUST FOR YOU as well.

Something to think about. Something to ponder. Something to hopefully change your life.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:50AM (-04:00)

...holding pattern....

Monday, July 07, 2008



"Ladies and gentlemen, the Atlanta airport has closed entrance to the airport due to severe thunderstorms, so we are in a holding pattern to see if the weather will clear. We have plenty of fuel for this, so just sit back and relax. We will keep you informed of the situation."

I spent the Independence Day holiday in our nation's capitol, Washington DC, visiting relatives and friends. We had a great time: good food, good fellowship, interesting sites to visit. Took some pictures

along the way (but, of course)...and now I was flying home. It was a trip fraught with adventure. For this trip, I took advantage of my brother's employment with Delta and was flying home on a buddy pass. I'd already been scared at the airport that I might not get on the flight I wanted due to a large military contingent flying home, and duh! holiday weekend travel...but God blessed and my name was the last name called on the "cleared" standby list. [thank God for praying friends across the country!] As the gate attendant asked me if I minded sitting in the exit row, I thanked God for His mercy in allowing me to board...period.

Two hours later, we should have been landing in Atlanta, when the pilot made the announcement above..."Ladies and gentlemen...we are in a holding pattern." It made me think: how many times do we have things planned, only to have them interrupted by things beyond our control? How many times have our lives been placed in a "holding pattern" where literally, all you can do is ride out the storm and wait? I know there have been several instances in my life when this has happened. And how you survive it depends on your faith and your attitude towards the situation. Do you rail against the delay? Or do you accept that maybe it is for the better good that you don't move forward at the present time? Can I be honest and tell you, I don't always do the former and am only learning to do the latter?

My flight ended up being re-routed to Knoxville TN. As we sat on the runway for 2.5 hours, waiting to be refueled and to be given clearance back to the Atlanta airport, I had a text mail conversation with my godsister in which we both agreed - the delay was frustrating, but better to be safe in Knoxville [where the sun was shining and the winds were calm] than flying through thunder, lightning and high winds. A fellow passenger and I were talking about the delay and how cool, calm, and collected I was being about it. He commented, "Wow, you have a such a positive attitude about this." Well, what was I going to do? Go to the cockpit and demand that the pilot start the plane and get us out of

there? Uh, no. It was out of my hands and control...and the best [and only] thing to do was to wait patiently until the designated time.

A trip that I thought would only take 2 hours to complete ended up taking about 6 hours, but I got home safely and for that I am grateful. When I landed, the sky was clear, the sun was shining, and if it hadn't been for the water puddled along the curbs, you would have never know that it had even rained in Atlanta. I may never know why God put that particular "holding pattern" in my life...but I am sure He had His reasons. I praise Him for safe travel to and from Washington DC.

By the way, my brother called me later in the evening to tell me that all inbound flights were eventually canceled into the airport. The delays, I believe, were too intense to overcome, so they shut everything down. God is good, let me tell you! Knoxville is close enough that I could have driven home, if necessary, but I am glad that I didn't have to make that choice.

Be blessed.

[PS: the attached picture was taken at 10,000 feet through the window of the plane, somewhere between Knoxville and Atlanta...how beautiful! What a wonderful Creator we serve.]

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:38AM (-04:00)

Routines

Tuesday, July 08, 2008

Alarm sounds, hit the snooze, alarm sounds again, groan, turn over, look blearly at the clock, get out of bed, go to the bathroom, get back in bed, turn on the light, adjust the pillows, say a prayer for understanding, read the morning watch, study the Sabbath School lesson, pray, check out Facebook, write a blog, check the time, type faster, shut down the computer, take a shower, make a lunch (ok, sometimes this part gets skipped), write the "honey do" list for my retired mom, turn on the news (only for traffic and weather reports), get dressed, dump and repack purse and work carryall, check my blood sugars (yeah, this doesn't always happen either - sorry, Dr. Schramm), go to the bathroom one mo' time again before the commute, wake up the mom so she can drop me off at the commuter bus, get on the morning prayer call, commute to work, arrive at work safely (God willing) ... and all this happens BEFORE 7:00a usually.

Just writing that - I'm tired already...and yet, that is my weekday routine (few tweaks here and there depending on the circumstances), but to do what I do, I have to have "guidelines", a routine, some order in all the chaos. And when I am out of my element - on vacation, a day off, the weekend - the routine gets dropped and it ain't always pretty. This was brought home to me very clearly on my recent trip to DC for the Independence Day holiday. I was "off my game", not in a way that was immediately visible to others, but I felt discombobulated a lot because my routine was off - because things were not done in their usual manner.

I wonder if God has a "routine"? I mean, I know "He never sleeps, He never slumbers" (and praise Him for that!), but ... when you are keeping the universe in line, and making sure the planets don't collide with each other, and that the sun shines in the daytime and the moon shines at night; and sending the rain on the just and the unjust, and keeping the birds singing and the flowers blooming and the animals roaming, and answering the prayers of the saints and the desperate, and comforting the bereaved, and healing the sick, and laughing at the foolishness of the human being who calls herself your Favorite Child ... do you have to have a routine to keep it all going the way it is supposed to go?

Or are you just God and it just happens that way without effort, thought, or planning?

Just another thing I need to make it to heaven so I can ask for myself, I guess.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:50AM (-04:00)

He's a rock star!

Thursday, July 10, 2008



This is not a political endorsement of any kind (you have to vote your conscience and heart), but I am a Barack Obama supporter. I haven't (yet) "put my money where my mouth is", but I probably will before the election foolishness is all over. Every four years, as the country makes a decision about the Presidency and the leadership of the country, there is a political frenzy - but this year, with the historic nature of the Democratic campaign, it has been crazier than usual - in part because of the charismatic nature of the now Democratic forerunner, Barack Obama.

Mr. Obama was recently in Atlanta for a fundraiser. The cost to stand in line to shake his hand was over \$2000; the cost to have a picture taken with

him \$10,000 and to have dinner with the future President (hey, I'm just putting it out there!) - \$28,500! Ok, a little steep for my budget, but I am blessed to be only 2 degrees of separation removed from the candidate. (I keep telling y'all - I'm am His Favorite!) One of my very good friends at work (and shoe shopping buddy extraordinaire), Cindy, works for an attorney who is very close to the Obama family and the campaign. [I know, you are thinking: Uh...that's 3 degrees, not 2 - but I'm friends with the attorney to, so I'm cutting my friend the secretary out for this scenario!] Anyway...the attorney was present at the dinner and got Mr. Obama to autograph Cindy's copy of EBONY magazine. Of course, Cindy wanted to share this with her friends, including me...so she brought the magazine over to my desk to show me. But, I wasn't there. [Talk about not being at the right place at the right time!]. Then she copied it and sent it to me in electronic format. Due to all the colors and text and...well, suffice it to say, the .pdf was not clear. So, I ALWAYS have my camera with me...ALWAYS. I volunteered to take a picture of the cover for HER...[of course, it was for HER!]. The photo is attached to this blog.

But the funny thing is the buzz that this autograph has caused among Cindy's circle of friends and influence. Already, someone has offered her money for the magazine. The magazine is being kept in a protective cover and plans for a shadow box display (with all her other Obama paraphenalia) is being discussed and scheduled. And he hasn't even become President yet! But the excitement surrounding this candidate is phenomenal....people want to be near him, people want to hear what he has to say, and if someone you know has heard him, then you want to hear what he said, how he looked, what his message was...

Reminds me of how the people flocked to see and hear Jesus when He walked the earth. [I am NOT calling Barack Obama our Savior or Messiah - I am NOT making THAT comparison - I am making a point! Bear with me...] The Bible tells us that wherever Jesus showed up, there was a crowd of people waiting to hear what He had to say - because

what He said was different...it fed their souls...it nourished their minds...it pointed them to the Father. I bet if there was an Ebony magazine back in those days, He would have been on the cover and people would have clamored for His autograph as well.

And yet, He gave something so much more important: He gave His life for you and me. Nothing against Mr. Obama, but I bet he wouldn't do that for any of us. And, even if he did, it wouldn't have the same eternal meaning that Christ's sacrifice did and does. I pray every day for Mr. Obama and his family. I encourage you to do the same. Unfortunately, we live in a world where everyone may not be so happy for him to become President. The next few months until the election will be interesting.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:39AM (-04:00)

Social Networking...

Friday, July 11, 2008

They are everywhere: social networks...Facebook, MySpace, TeeBeeDee...and I am sure the list goes on and on. Places where people who have never met (ok, sometimes, they do know each other in "real life", but a lot of times, that is NOT the case) interact and mingle and share their secrets with each other..."let's connect", "let's be friends"...catch phrases that are new to my generation - a part of the natural scheme of life for the younger generation.

Ok...I have to admit, I am ADDICTED to Facebook. It just sucks you in! It's like legal "crack". I can see what my friends are up to, gauge how their days (and lives) are going by their cryptic status updates, see their pictures, send them virtual gifts, challenge them to online games and competitions...it is amazing...and time consuming. And I haven't even mastered 10% of the stuff that my younger friends know about the site. I mean, I thought I was the woman when my friend list hit 100 - but I have younger friends whose list of friends number in the thousands. I'm jealous...sort of. Because...for the most part, all of my friends are people that I actually KNOW - or know someone they know. I have very few "virtual friends" on my list (meaning, people I have never met, but we have connected due to mutual interests or hobbies, etc.) But even my "virtual friends" (shout out to Ms. Janice Ellis from London) have made significant impact on my life. Janice sends me "wisdom" on a daily basis as well as "growing gifts" and it always brings a smile to my face.

Like anything that starts off good, there are negatives to social networks as well. We've all heard the MySpace predator horror stories, and Facebook could lend itself to "stalking" (if that is a personality disorder you suffer from...hey! I'm seeking treatment! pray for and with me! hahaha) But as I delve more into the many layers of Facebook, I am finding positive things as well. Christian discussion groups are popping up more and more, including those that are based on my personal belief philosophy (the Seventh-day Adventist Church). I see young people joining in and discussing what they believe and why they believe - and I see them using the Internet as a tool to witness to others. And I am encouraged.

The Bible teaches us that "this gospel must be preached into all the world" before our Saviour returns to take us home with Him. No longer does that mean that missionaries have to pack up and move into wilds of Africa or Australia or even downtown Atlanta to preach the gospel. With technology, we can spread the gospel - on Facebook and MySpace - through text messaging and IMs - through our cell phones and Blackberries.

We can each do our part to finish the work of the gospel - all through our social networks - real and virtual.

Have a great weekend.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:47AM (-04:00)

Being polite...

Monday, July 14, 2008

Here's my vent for today: I really hate social niceties. I mean, think about it: how much time do you and I waste every Monday morning either answering the question, "So, how was your weekend?" or avoiding it? I have literally caught myself asking the question and then bracing myself to see if the person I asked will just give the perfunctory "It was fine" and leave it at that - OR if I am going to be regaled for minutes on end with every little minute detail of the preceding 72 hours. And it's not that some of the stories are not entertaining and enlightening - they usually are 'cause I have some INTERESTING friends and co-workers..BUT sometimes, I really don't want to "waste" my time hearing it. Or I asked the question "just to be polite" as I was rushing to do something and now I'm stuck listening to the never-ending saga.

And horror of horrors, don't let something tragic have happened over the weekend - then what do you do? I mean, we've all been in the position when you innocently ask the Monday morning question, only to find out that the house was flooded, or the kid or pet is sick, or word was received of a death of a family member or loved one. And then you're really stuck! Because now you have to give consolation or offer advice or commiserate or...well, you get the picture.

I hate making this admission because (1) it makes me sound somewhat cold, callous and unfeeling - which is not my normal character...[stop laughing!]. (2) I know there will be some people who are going to read this the wrong way and run with the story that I said "don't ask her about her weekend and don't tell her about yours because she really doesn't care." Which is not what I am trying to say at all. I'm just saying...do you ask the question because you really care about the answer - or do you ask the question because it is what is expected of you? Is it just part of what you are expected to do on Monday mornings? How many times have you been asked the Monday morning question and just wanted to invent some fantastic, fabulous, unbelievable story just to see how the person asking the question would respond? I am often tempted.

That may be the reason that I started answering the other hated perfunctory question - "How are you?" with the response, "I'm fabulous - how are you?" When I first started responding that way, people stopped in their tracks..."Fabulous? Really? Why?" and then I could tell them - something, anything...but it started a TRUE conversation as opposed to a false one where no one was really listening. Unfortunately now, at work, people expect that as my response - so much so that when I respond, "I'm fine", people think something is wrong with me.

All I am really trying to say is this: I'd rather have a "real" conversation with someone than a conversation that I will forget the moment I am out of their presence. We have too many "fake" conversations during the course of a day, a career, a lifetime. I think it is time to

have some meaningful conversations - conversations that will make a difference. If you don't want to know about the weekend, don't ask. If hearing (yet again) about the fabulous vacation someone just took will make you want to stick a fork in your eyeball - don't ask about it. Don't fake it. Be sincere in your relationships.

Oh, and in case you were wondering: My weekend was great - how was yours? (smile)

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:48PM (-04:00)

Don't you remember...?

Tuesday, July 15, 2008



The year was 1971 and two young mothers, with seven (7) children between them, were stationed with their husbands in Yokohama, Japan. Far away from their families in the United States and joined by a common belief in a loving God, these women joined in friendship. In 1973, circumstances drove them apart. They corresponded for years, but never saw each other again until a family reunion placed them in the same place at the same time. It was 35 years before they saw each other again...had their friendship survived? Would they still feel the same love and kindred

spirits that forged a friendship three decades before? Or would time have changed the bond they used to feel?

Sounds like the synopsis for an epic friendship novel or a Lifetime movie of the week, doesn't it? Didn't you hear the theme music from GONE WITH THE WIND (or some other epic classic) playing in the background as you read it? And yet, this is the true life story of a reunion that I was able to witness between my mother and her military wife friend, Faye, on last evening. It was an incredible experience to watch, and I am so glad I was there to witness it.

I have to admit, I was reluctant to go. My mother kept trying to make me know who these people were: "Don't you remember? We used to ride to church together every Sabbath? Don't you remember her children? Don't you remember?" Ok, I was all of 7 years old when we left Japan...of course, I don't remember! In fact, even after she told me who we were going to meet, I still went around telling everyone that I was going with my mother to meet my kindergarten teacher...I didn't have a clue. Little did I know, "Aunt" Faye was doing the same thing to her daughter, Patricia, who had come along for the reunion..."Don't you remember? You all were best friends and inseparable." Uh, yeah...she didn't remember either.

And the funny thing: Faye and Rachel - the mothers behind this reunion - didn't really remember either. When we got to the hotel, we called to see what room we should go to and Aunt Faye said, "Oh, I'm in the lobby waiting for you...", so we go to the lobby of the hotel. There were a million convention goers milling around..Mom recognizes no one...we call on the cell phone...no answer...we walk around the lobby...still no one that catches Mom's eye...no one looks familiar...we go outside and see a couple of ladies sitting on a bench, but they don't look familiar and they don't call out to us, so we keep moving...back into the lobby...another call on the cell phone, still no answer...a little bit of frustration is setting in...where is she? she knew we were coming, I just spoke with her! why would she keep us waiting like this?...another call, this time it's answered and a lady stands up...yep, that lady sitting outside that we passed by (twice!) was Aunt Faye. She didn't recognize us...we didn't recognize her. Seated inside the lobby was her husband,

George, who saw us looking around, but he didn't recognize us and we didn't recognize him. We were all at the right place, right time, but without the right tools to identify each other.

Aren't you glad that God always "recognizes" us...no matter how long we have been away from Him? In Luke 12:7, He tells us that "...even the very hairs of your head are all numbered." Ok, if somebody knows how many hairs are on your head, He definitely KNOWS you!...who you are, what your foibles are, what trips you up, what encourages you...HE KNOWS YOU! And that is a wonderful thing.

I am glad that I was able to witness my mother reunited with her friends. As we sat down to dinner and they talked and reminisced and made plans to get together again before the end of the year, it made me aware (again) of how valuable friendships and shared experiences are to the fabric of life. We should be enriched by those with whom we fellowship...and we should enrich the lives of those we come in contact with each day. We should cherish each other...whether we've known each other for 35 minutes...or 35 years.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:35AM (-04:00)

I hear you...

Thursday, July 17, 2008

...but are you listening?

I seem to be surrounded by people who "hear" me, but never "listen" to me. And YES! THERE IS A DIFFERENCE! I am convinced of this fact. Listening, truly listening to people, is becoming a lost art. Webster's Dictionary defines hearing as "the sense by which sound is perceived" and listening as "to pay attention; to heed." Unless you are deaf, we all can "hear" - we are given the ability to discern sounds and words and translate them into language...but listening...that's something totally different. Listening is something we have to learn how to do...and unfortunately, there aren't a lot of classes out there teaching this skill.

I think the problem with listening is that, when you are truly listening to someone, you have to stop and focus on them - what they are saying (and sometimes what they are not) and often, [let's be honest here], we engage in conversations by just waiting for our turn to say something. How many times have you been in a conversation with someone and they are going on and on about something and after a while, all you hear is "blah blah blah blah" and you are just sitting there waiting to jump in with your comment or two cents or change of subject? That's "hearing", not "listening". Listening is truly a self-less activity - you have to suspend your natural tendency to make the conversation about yourself, and truly focus in on what the other person is saying or trying to convey. And that is not always easy - especially if you have had the conversation in question with the person in question before...several times...every day....for the last few years. I mean, really...how many times do you want to hear about a faulty relationship if your advice is going unheeded and no effort is being made to change the circumstances of the relationship? Probably not more than two or three times...but a good listener will sit there and listen to the story again as if it were the first time it were ever told.

I strive daily to be a good listener because it irritates me to no end when people don't listen to me and I have to repeat myself over and over again. But it is hard and few of us do it well. Turning yourself off in order to tune into the needs of someone else - difficult to

do because most of us are basically selfish in nature. I admire professionals who, by the very nature of their professions, have to be good listeners - therapists, psychologists and psychiatrists immediately come to mind. I know I couldn't do it. I would be too impatient..."Mrs. Jones, we have been working on this issue for ten years now - what part of (insert issue here) do you just not get?" Yeah, I don't think my practice would survive very long...

Thankfully, my Heavenly Father is a good listener. Would that I would listen to Him more often.

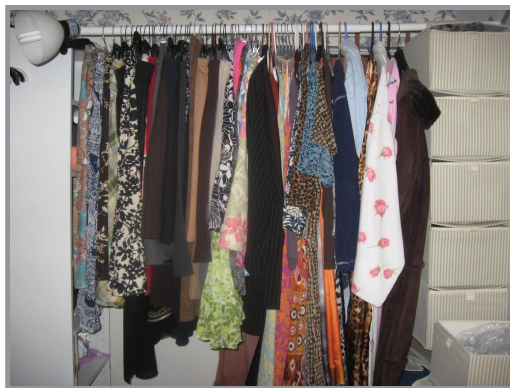
Be blessed.

This blog is dedicated to my mother who hears me say, "You never listen to me!" at least once a day.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:29AM (-04:00)

Packrats Untie!

Sunday, July 20, 2008



(No, that is not a mis-spelling...just read.)

I have (yet another) confession to make: I am a packrat. I save EVERYTHING: movie ticket stubs, every receipt known to man (although, those come in handy if I ever need to return something or validate a warranty), calendars because the pictures are cute. I have tubs of greeting cards for every occasion, journals dating back to before high school (it's amazing to re-read some of those of find out what I thought was so important back then). A friend of

mine recently reprimanded me for increasing my already very extensive DVD collection by 17 DVDs in one shopping experience, but it was WalMart's dump bin and I only paid \$5 for each DVD! Some of them were brand new to my collection - but a few were to replace VHS tapes that I turned around and donated to the public library - so it was my civic duty to buy those! (hahaha)

Just stuff, stuff and more stuff. In my defense, I come by it honestly. I come from a long line of female packrats. My mother still has my childhood military medical records - and we ain't been associated with the military for over 30 years now! And my grandmother has a copy of my kindergarten report card (or she did not too long ago).

I have been home sick since Friday, so one of the things I thought I would do was to switch my closet from winter clothes to summer clothes. (Yeah, I know - I'm a little late, but I been busy!) As I dug through my storage bins to pull out the clothes to hang up and check for wear-ability and style, etc., the bags for Goodwill and "maybe someone at work can benefit from this" and "I know Mom liked this, so I'll see if she wants it" - grew fuller and fuller. As I rearranged and organized out my closet, I thought to myself that it is a blessing to have separate wardrobes for various seasons - especially when there are so many people who do without in this world. I truly don't take it for granted. And even though I make charitable contributions to help generate clothings, supplies, and food for those less fortunate than me, am I truly doing enough? Am I being a faithful steward of the resources God blesses me with? And, why am I keeping so much stuff anyway? In

case of a catastrophic event, I wouldn't be able to take any of it with me anyway...just ask my brother and uncle who lost everything to a fire on New Years Eve. By the way, the picture attached is the "dress and skirt" section of my closet. Yeah, I know: I should never say the words "but I don't have anything to wear" - and yet, sometimes, that is exactly the thought going through my mind...pray for me, will you?

As Christians, we know that we "can't take it with us". The only thing that we will take with us into the earth made new is our characters. Am I packing my character with the fruits of the spirit as outlined in Galatians 5:22-23? Love, joy, peace, longsuffering (yeah, I need to work on THAT one!), gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, and temperance (the bane of every packrat and a trait I personally need to work on)

If you recognize that you are also a packrat, I invite you to join me in "untying" ourselves from the things we have packed into our lives...not only the material things that tie us here on earth, but the spiritual things that we don't want to take with us into God's Kingdom.

[See, I told you it wasn't a mis-spelling!]

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:00AM (-04:00)

Best Girlfriends in the World...

Wednesday, July 23, 2008

From a teabag: "Appreciation is like an insurance policy. It has to be renewed every now and then." AMEN!

Last night, I celebrated a "girls night out" with a group of six FABULOUS women (including me) and during the course of the night, as we were reading our fortune cookies, one declared, "I have the best girlfriends in the world!" and I have to agree with her. Not only the five women I dined with last night, but my life is chockfull of women who have "been there" for me. Which is an amazing thing in and of itself since I am a self-declared lover of male friends as opposed to female friends. (And not just for the obvious physical reasons either!) As a child (and even into adulthood), I was hurt several times by female "friends" who, out of spite or jealousy or over some man or whatever reason, lashed out and caused harm. And, if I am brutally honest: I KNOW I have done the same to some women who have passed through my life. And even if/though I have apologized, the wounds are still there. So for YEARS, I have loudly proclaimed, "I would rather have a male friend than a female one." And there is still some validity to that statement, but I have found (as I get older and hopefully more mature), there is value in having good female friends as well.

A magazine I was reading recently had an article about the "7 Female Friends Every Woman Needs" - and I don't remember all their categories, but it went something like: a travel buddy, a comedian, a wet shoulder, a spiritual guide, the childhood friend...etc. etc. I remember as I read the article thinking that I was blessed to have female friends who filled all their categories and then some. In a blog I did around Mother's Day, I paid tribute to a lot of women who have impacted my life...and in the spirit of the appreciation quote above, I'd like to briefly say "Thank you" to all the female friends, my sistagirls, the girlfriends, "my girls" who:

...continually lift me up

...support me in all my crazy endeavors (and I have more than one occasionally)

...are there at 3:00a when I text them crazy messages

...pray for me and with me

...offer financial advice and solutions to situations I put myself into

...don't judge me

...love me unconditionally

...are "related" to me, even if the same blood doesn't flow through our veins

...go shoe shopping with me

...remember me when they travel

...stand in line to get the autograph of my favorite authors "just because"

...travel with me - and still desire to remain my friend after we get back home

...laugh with me

...are honest with me when I mess up

...compliment me - even when I'm having a bad hair day (and yes, people with locs can have them too!)

...help me dye my hair because I need a little "pick me up"

...help me feel better when I decide maybe I should have stayed with the original color after all

...listen to me vent about ... whatever ... no matter how many times I need to vent

...tell me I am fabulous when I am feeling less than

...know me and love me anyway

...give me my space when I ask for it and wait patiently for me to come back

...encourage my ministry, even when I am feeling less than worthy

...remember me

...send me little notes in the mail because they know how much I enjoy going to the mailbox and receiving personal messages

...text me just to say "hey, how you doing?" or call because it's been a while

...nourish my soul in inexplicable and unexplainable ways

I am truly blessed to have each of them in my life. I pray you have a circle of friends who do the same to and for you. If you do, take time to tell them how much you love and appreciate them. It will mean the world to them...and a lot to you.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:56AM (-04:00)

Small miracles

Thursday, July 24, 2008

Yesterday, I talked about my host of fabulous girlfriends and mentioned that I'd done a "girls night out" with a group of them on Tuesday evening - and mentioned fortune cookies. My fortune that night was "You will witness a miracle soon." (or something like that - I threw it away - one small step for this packrat.) One of my favorite R&B singers, the now deceased Luther Vandross sang, "Little miracles happen every day..." Anyway, it got me to thinking - how many miracles do I witness every day and take for granted?

Obviously, waking up each morning "clothed in my right mind with all my limbs and faculties working as they should" is a major one.

Having a job to go to every day that on most days, I love and enjoy - and that pays me well enough to meet my financial responsibilities - and still buy shoes at will and leisure. [Of course, right now, I am still on my "shoe shopping fast" (only one more month to go), but you get the picture!]

Family and friends that love me - in spite of...

Sunrises, sunsets, full moons, rainbows, flowers

Traveling on the crazy, traffic-congested, construction-obstructed roads and highways of a major metropolitan city every day without accident or incident

Food, food, glorious food

I could go on and on, but you get the picture. I admonish you to "stop and smell the roses" - learn to take time to appreciate the little things and the big things will be even more magnificent - take time to take stock of the many miracles that surround you every day. Maybe by doing that you will take your focus off of your problems and issues and concerns - and find relief from your burdens ('cause we all have them!)

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 08:19AM (-04:00)

"Stay-cations"

Friday, July 25, 2008

I am always amazed when a new word makes into the English "dictionary" or lexicon. I mean, I remember a world before "Internet" and "iPod" and "Facebook" and "cell phones" and "BlackBerry" and yet, today EVERYONE has one or knows about it - even my 88

year old grandmother in the small, tiny town of Palatka, Florida.

Well, the new word of this summer is "stay-cation" - or when you take time off work to stay at home, instead of traveling somewhere for a vacation. With increasing fuel prices, it is becoming harder and economically infeasible for families to travel any great distance on vacation. Whether by automobile or airplane or train or whatever...with gas prices hovering near or above \$4 a gallon, people have to make a choice with their vacation funds...and more and more people are choosing to stay at home. There was recently a Good Morning America spot about ideas you could implement to make it fun - picnics on the front lawn or at a local park; renting a hotel room and playing "tourist" in your hometown (added benefit: using their pool and facilities).

I'm taking a week off work next week and staying at home. Now granted, I will be getting my roof replaced - it was damaged during the tornado that hit our town in March of this year - so it won't be ALL fun and games, but I have some fun things planned as well. I took my first "stay-cation" last year and found it to be very productive and enjoyable. I made a long list of things to do - most of which actually got accomplished, believe it or not - but I also learned a lesson or two:

Time off work should be spent enjoying yourself. While you may have "projects" to do, taking time for a massage or spa day or afternoon at the movies will do wonders for the soul.

Don't make too long a list of things to do. You'll look at the list, get overwhelmed and do nothing.

Set a time limit for how much time you are going to devote to a specific project each day. If you want to go through a closet and clear it out, set a time limit. "I will work on this closet for two hours - or until noon - and then I'm done." Setting a time limit means the end is in sight at the very beginning and maybe you won't resent doing it so much.

Stay focused. If your goal is to re-do your budget - re-do the budget. Don't distract yourself with doing the laundry at the same time or clearing out the DVR queue or ... well, you get the picture. One thing at a time will get more things done.

Turn off the alarm. Your natural sleep cycle will wake you up when it is time for you to awaken. This is always hard for me because I naturally wake up at 4:00a. On vacation/stay-cations, I have to give myself permission to burrow back under the covers and go back to sleep. It usually only takes about two days for me to not feel guilty about it.

Go to a new restaurant.

Go to that tourist attraction that you only get to enjoy when company is in town and insists on visiting. You will find you will enjoy it more when you don't have to play "host".

I don't know what your plans are for summer vacation, but if you are staying close to home, I hope these hints help. Have a great weekend. I don't know (yet) if I'm vacationing from blogging, but just in case...

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:21AM (-04:00)

"Give us this day..."

Tuesday, July 29, 2008

...our daily bread." Matt. 6:11

Have you ever thought about what this text REALLY means? We live in a world of excess...we have multiple homes, multiple cars, multiple televisions, cell phones, BlackBerrys. As Americans, we throw away almost as much food as we physically consume - and think little or nothing about it when we do. I have even had the experience of offering a homeless person something to eat and have them tell me that they didn't like strawberry yogurt and if that was all I had to offer, they would pass. Ok, is it just me or if you are asking for money for food and someone offers you food, wouldn't you accept it EVEN IF it wasn't your favorite flavor? I'm just saying.

Back in Jesus' day (and in some cultures today), there wasn't this type of waste. I have never been to France, but I understand that the culture there is to every day go to the bakery and get bread for the day. "Daily bread", get it. In other words, the Parisiens only get what they will need for just that day. There is little or no waste.

Too often, when we petition the Lord with our requests, we ask for the sun, moon, stars and throw in a couple of planets while you're at it...instead of just asking for strength for the day and the trials inherent in that specific 24 hours. "This day". Jesus reminds us with this short little phrase that all we need help with is the immediate. We don't have to worry about tomorrow or next week or next year - in truth, none of those are promised to us anyway. Yes, we are to "occupy" until...make plans and set goals, but don't "worry" about them in the moment. And trust God to give you just what you need just for today.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:20AM (-04:00)

Hate on me...

Thursday, July 31, 2008



Jill Scott -one of my favorite R&B artists, poet extraordinaire, beautiful bold Black woman - was in concert here in HotLanta last night and I was there! Now, there are some people who say I look like her- I'm convinced it is just the light skin, freckles and locs that make them say that 'cause she is BEAUTIFUL and I just have my moments occasionally. hahaha. On her latest album, she has a song entitled HATE ON ME (which I must admit, when I first heard it and saw the video, I did not like it - thought it was too hard and harsh and written from a place of bitterness after her divorce - but it's grown on me because of

the truth of its lyrics). Basically, the premise of the song is this: no matter what I do, there's always going to be someone who doesn't like it...or me, because of it. As she introduced the song last night, she said (something like this): "you know there are some people out there in your lives right now who are mad at you because you are here at the Jill Scott concert. They sitting at home, hating your guts because of where you are and what you are doing. There are people who hate you because of the clothes you were, or the car you drive, or the blessings you receive...And these are the people who say they love you - ain't that a trip?" And truer words have never been spoken. At least two people (my best friend from college and my cousin) told me last night that they "hated" me when I told them that I was on my way to (or at) the concert last night. I mean, they literally said the words, "Ooo, I hate you!"

Now, I am going to state that I know that both of these women love me, but I also believe that there is an element in truth in the words that each of them spoke to me last night. It is common, normal and human to look at what others have or are doing and be upset/jealous/mad - whatever emotion you wish to call it - if we are not doing the same thing...or blessed with the same attributes. I have a BEAUTIFUL (inside and out) girlfriend who I tell regularly that if she wasn't so nice and such a positive influence in my life - I'd hate her guts! (She was at the concert last night as well.) She is bold and beautiful and artsy and confident in her skin and she has the longest, prettiest, straightest, down to her waist hair - and ugh! - like I said, if she wasn't so genuinely nice and supportive and nurturing, we would not and could not be friends because of my jealous feelings. And then there is my godsister (my favorite person in the world) who can sing like an angel and preach like John the Baptist and is accomplished in her own right - another person who I could spend hours "hating on" if she wasn't all that she is to me. Suffice it to say, we all have our hangups and jealousies.

One lesson I have learned in life (and I'm still learning it): be content with what YOU have, what God blesses YOU with, what God allows to happen in YOUR life. There will always be someone smarter or prettier or with a better car/job/house/vacation destination/401K savings account. Stop looking over the fence into someone else's yard wishing you had what they have. That car may be leaking oil in the garage...that job may be slowing killing them with stress and demands...that house may be falling down around them or not be a haven (as all homes should be) because it is filled with the sounds of anger and distress. Nurture what YOU have...be thankful for the blessings YOU are given...and when it seems like your friends are getting more than you...just praise God that He is loving and generous enough to bless them with the desires of their hearts...just as He blesses you with yours.

Ok, so that is the "human" side of being "hated on". In the spiritual realm, the time is coming (and for some, has already come) when you, as a child of God, will be hated just because...just because you praise His name, just because you give glory and honor to Him for everything...just because you woke up. (doesn't it feel that way some times?) You will be reviled, persecuted, talked about..."hated on"...just because. Jesus tells us in Matthew 10:22: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved." In other words, it is the natural order of things for men to hate you when you live your life according to His will and when you testify of His goodness to you. BUT, salvation is at the end of all the trials you go through for His sake...so, just hold on. Endure. Ultimately, it will be worth everything you go through. Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:52AM (-04:00)

Roof repairs, rollercoasters and rain delays

Friday, August 01, 2008



God has a funny sense of humor. I hope you have experienced this for yourself, but can I say: sometimes when it happens to you, it ain't so funny.

In March of this year, Atlanta was hit by a tornado, and then the next day, there was a hailstorm in my neighborhood. As a result, I suffered some damage to my roof. We contacted State Farm and filed the claim and after interviewing five different roofing companies, two weeks ago, I picked a

company and told them to come on and repair the roof. I thought it was all fortuitous that I was already scheduled to be on vacation this week and asked them to do the repairs this week - you know, so I could be home when the repairmen were crawling around on my roof. So, Monday came, nothing...Tuesday nothing,...Wednesday, the roofing supplies were delivered and I thought, "surely, this means the work will begin". NOPE. Thursday, I waited (im)patiently for the workmen to arrive, but nope...no one showed up. And today is Friday...supplies still in the driveway, no repairmen on the roof. Several calls to the roofing company netted no results and now, with the Sabbath approaching, it looks that the repairs won't be done until next week when I am back at work. That wasn't MY plan, but it obviously was God's.

And did I mention that it has rained almost every night this week? So, every night, there is the scramble to put down the towels and/or cardboard to catch the water from the leaks caused by the damage to the roof. And new leaks are springing up with each downpour. Or maybe it just seems that way.

Every morning this week, I've prayed that God would work it out that the roofers would come, fix the roof and life would move on. But I've also prayed that His will be done, and obviously there is some reason why, on this nice, beautiful, crisp, summer day there is no work being done on my roof. I am trying to be patient and let it all work out in His time, but I haven't been 100% successful - I haven't gone "angry Black woman" (yet), but I've come close. Pray for me, won't you?

So, where do the rollercoasters come in? I was supposed to go to Six Flags yesterday and ride rollercoasters with my cousin Jill. But she called me last Wednesday night to say that she would not be able to go. Turns out that right as we would have been standing in line for the Goliath (or any one of the other 9 rollercoasters in the park), the heavens opened up and rains came down. There was a reason that Jill and I were not out there when it happened. I was teased a lot by friends who said maybe I was too old to be doing rollercoasters anyway...guess we'll never know...although Jill and I have plans to try and go later in the summer. I'll keep you posted.

I have stated before that my favorite text is Jeremiah 29:11: "for I know the plans I have for you saith the Lord..." Some times those plans include rainstorms, delayed roof repairs and (not riding) rollercoasters.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:51PM (-04:00)

Motives and agendas...

Monday, August 04, 2008

Question of the day: Is it more important to be willing to do something or to do something because you are willing? Ok, I know that sounds like "circular reasoning" [as my logics teacher tried to teach me about in college decades ago], but there really is a difference. Even the Bible talks about it. [Read Matthew 21:28-30] In that Bible passage, Jesus tells the parable about a father asking his two sons to go work in His vineyard: one says, I won't go, but repents and goes; the other says, I'll go and yet never does. The first son did the task because he was willing - it took him some time, but he did. The second son was willing to do it, but never followed through with it...never did what was asked of him. Jesus then posed the question, "which son did the will of the Father?"

I am pondering this question because sometimes I feel like I am more like the first son than the second. I will initially resist doing a task asked of me, but then when no one else will step up to the plate [or, in all honesty, if I think they are messing up and I think I can do it better], I'll step up and help out or take over - basically, get it done. I might resent being put in that position (or more honestly, putting myself in that position), but in the end - whatever needed to be done is done. My brother, on the other hand, is DEFINITELY the second son. (I ain't judging, I'm just saying). My brother, Kevin, is a charmer who, early in life, realized that it works for him to say "yeah, I'll do that" and then apologize later when he drops the ball and doesn't do it. By the time he gets around to apologizing, someone (usually me) has already fixed the problem or handled the situation. Who is right - who is wrong in this situation?

I think it all boils down to motives and agendas. I do not mean to imply that my brother does not have a good heart or good intentions. He does. He means well. At the moment he says he will do it, he probably means it with all his heart. But time and experience have taught me that just because he says he will do something, don't be foolish enough not to have a backup plan in case he cannot (or does not) come through. But what about me? What are my motives for always being the one who gets the job done? Is there some secret glory in the "martyrdom" of being the "go to" person at home, work, church, the school board, friendships and relationships? Is there a level of vanity in knowing I'm the "responsible" one in so many aspects of my life? It is a slippery slope and one that I have to be very careful about.

Even with writing this blog, sometimes I have to question my motives. Am I writing for praise and accolades and "Girl, you sure blessed me with what you said/wrote"? Or are my motives pure? Am I writing because I know God has blessed me with the ability to write and I am just trying to use this talent to praise Him - in my own unique and quirky way? I know what I think is the true motivation - I just pray that I am not deluding myself. 'Cause it really ain't about me. It is about Him. I am glad whenever someone tells me that they are blessed by something that I write or say or do. Praise Him that He is willing to use a faulty, cracked vessel like me to bless someone else, but if I ever get the "big head" about, I hope my friends will pull me up short and say, "hey! It ain't about you." [And believe me, I have friends who I KNOW will do just that!]

As you move through this day (and through life), my prayer for all of us (especially those of us with ministries that God has placed on our hearts and in our lives) is that our motives are pure and our agendas are in line with His plans for our lives.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 05:07AM (-04:00)

Too much information?

Tuesday, August 05, 2008

A really good friend of mine recently commented to me that he didn't understand why women felt the need to "tell everything" - to put too much information (about themselves, their feelings, etc) out there into the universe for everyone to read, hear, digest and comment on. Ok, I expanded a little on what he said, but it got me to thinking...I mean, it's not the first time that I have been questioned about "Why are you doing a blog now?" - my mother and my grandmother REALLY don't get it, but yet they enjoy reading them. What is the motivation behind putting my thoughts and feelings out into the public realm? Does it do any good? Does it serve a purpose? Maybe not in the grand cosmic scheme of things, but this is what I have found out about blogging...for me:

1) It is a creative release. I have always (tried to) keep a "daily" journal, since I was a preteen. Writing stuff down that I could not talk about out loud was a way for me to deal with the things going on around me over which I had no control. My parents' divorce, living with my maternal grandparents for a while when my mother first remarried, going through cultural shock when this very Southern girl was transplanted to the concrete jungles of the Bronx NY - all this stuff I could write about - even if I couldn't talk about it. Going back and reading some of the stuff I wrote back then - always interesting. [Yeah, my journals are in my will, entrusted to someone who will keep my secrets even after I'm gone! But if Hollywood comes knocking, do you think Halle will be available to play me on the big screen? hahaha]

2) Hopefully, it is a blessing to someone. I grew up not knowing my parents' stories from their childhood, teen years, early adulthood - and therefore, was doomed to make some of their same mistakes in life. Not their fault - the older generation in which they grew up functions under the perception that "private things are private" and "home stuff should be kept at home" [which ain't necessarily bad], but if I had known some of their stories, maybe I could have avoided some of their mistakes. I am sure that I would have made my own mistakes, but maybe they would have been different ones than the ones they made - 'cause as I grow older, I have discovered, I am definitely the child of BOTH of my parents!! If by telling my story (or stories), I can help someone else from making a misstep - or help them see something in a way that they never thought about before, that is great. We are here to help each other along the way. Sharing our life experiences is one way to do that.

3) God is amazing. And I want to share that with people. While it is important to reverence Him and praise Him as our Creator/Father/Redeemer/God, it is equally important to KNOW Him...to understand His love for me, for you - on a up close and personal basis. So, that is why I talk about rainbows showing up just for me; flowers that bloom on magnolia trees and then disappear; lessons that He tries to teach me...because it is personal and it is just for me...just as it is personal and just for you.

There are a lot of blogs out there. There are a lot of people talking and discussing and sharing their lives - often with total and complete strangers. I am often amazed at what people are willing to share about themselves, their lives, their hopes and dreams. I am amazed at what I am willing to share...but I truly feel "called" to do this - and until such

time as I am led otherwise, I pray God to be a blessing to anyone who takes time to read whatever God places on my heart to say.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:18AM (-04:00)

Happy Anniversary!

Thursday, August 07, 2008

Today marks 8 years on the job for me at the law firm where I currently work. WOW! 8 years! That's over 2,900 days of my life - a mere drop in the scheme of things when you consider how old I am, but still - the longest that I have ever worked anywhere on a consistent, without a break, daily basis. And for the most part, I still love my job and where I work. There have been some challenges recently, but God is in control of those challenges and I am just waiting for deliverance, which I know is sure to come. (Remember, I AM His favorite...hahaha)

In eight years, there have been a LOT of changes in my work environment - we have added 5 new office locations (including two on the West Coast); I have changed attorney pairings often enough that I no longer work with any of the people I was originally hired to work with - they have all left the Firm to pursue other options; there have been weddings and funerals and births and retirements; there have been pay raises (AMEN!) and schedule changes and 401K adjustments; friendships made and lost; hair style changes (I started locking my hair while working here); good times and bad.

It is a testament to God's goodness and love that I have reached this milestone in my professional career. It is a blessing to have a job to go to every day - especially in THIS economy. It is an additional blessing to love the job you go to every day. It is a blessing to work with people who edify, support and value you as my attorneys do. It is a blessing to have friendships at work that do that same. Now, I would never state that everything is perfect (I do live in the "real world"), but given the choice to be where I am or anywhere else working, I know I am blessed.

Here's to anniversary #8. Thank you Heavenly Father for the blessing. Now, help me use this blessing to bless someone else. 'Cause that's what it is all about anyway.

Have a great day and be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:54AM (-04:00)

Forgiveness ain't about "them"

Thursday, August 07, 2008

...it's about me.

Have you ever really thought about forgiveness and what it means in the scheme of things? There have been a few times in my life when God has brought this subject before me as a topic of study and for some reason, it is back in my life again. There must be a lesson I need to (re)learn about forgiveness. In my morning devotions, I am reading a book entitled WALKING WITH JESUS ON THE MOUNT OF BLESSING by George R. Knight. In it, he is dissecting the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5-7 - literally,

verse by verse. And this week, the focus is on the portion of the Lord's Prayer where Jesus teaches that we should pray "Forgive us our debts (sins) AS WE FORGIVE our debtors (those who have sinned against us)." That is powerful when you stop to think about it.

AS WE FORGIVE.

Hmm, I think I might be in trouble here, because I don't know about you, but it ain't always easy to let stuff go. I wish I could forgive others as my Heavenly Father forgives me - throw it into the depths of the ocean - as far away as the east is from the west - never to be brought up again. Uh...yeah. It is a goal to strive for, ain't it? I mean, some things are easy to forgive. It is easy to forgive the idiot driver who cuts you off while you are driving, but what about the friend who betrays a trust? What about a family member who steals from you? Or the pastor who betrays a confidence? What about a spouse who cheats - again and again? Or the child who disrespects you and your teachings? How do you forgive those things and move on?

Obviously, without the help of Jesus, it won't happen. But one thing I have learned over the years: forgiveness is less about them and what they did to me, but more about me and how I react, anyway. As long as I hold onto the hurt feelings, the sense of betrayal, whatever it is that is stopping me from truly forgiving someone - I am the one who is being affected. The person who did me harm has moved on and is living their lives without thinking about me - yet, I am the one mired in the "I cannot believe she did that" and the "what did I ever do to him to make him treat me that way" feelings. But once I forgive them, I am the one who is released, who no longer has to worry about ulcers and high blood pressure. If I TRULY forgive them, then the anger and frustration and hurt disappear and life is good again.

I am glad that God doesn't take as long to forgive me as I take to forgive others. His forgiveness is instantaneous - as soon as I ask for it, He does it. AND, He never brings it up again - even when I continue to beat myself up about things I have done, He doesn't. He forgives and forgets. Oh, to be like Him and to treat others as He treats me. That's the goal, isn't it?

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 05:08AM (-04:00)

It's the weekend, baby...

Friday, August 08, 2008

...and I, for one, am glad. This has been a long week. I don't know why - it hasn't been particularly busy or trying or traumatic...although, if you count the ongoing issues with the repair of my roof - maybe I should rephrase/rethink that statement. It is not like suddenly there were more (or less) hours to the week - each day came with the same 24 hour period to it - and there were only six days since Sunday - but for some reason, I am just TYE-RED today...drained, exhausted.

PRAISE GOD FOR THE SABBATH!

A built-in day of rest. For those of you who may not know what I am talking about when I say the word "Sabbath", I'll explain. As a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, I believe every

week ends with a 24 hour period of rest and relaxation in the Lord called the Sabbath. This 24 hour period begins at sunset on Friday and ends at sunset on Saturday. (Granted, some Adventists would disagree with that statement since it seems like more and more stuff gets stuffed into the Sabbath when you consider church and potlucks and AYS and "a quick five minute meeting in the mother's room after services" and..well, if you are Adventist, you know what I'm talking about...) But it is my belief that at the end of Creation Week, God took time to rest and He hallowed the day of rest which we now call the Sabbath. [See Genesis 2:2,3] I further believe that when He wrote out the Ten Commandments and gave them to Moses at Mount Sinai, He specified that the Sabbath as a day that we should come aside and commune with Him...in fact, it is the ONLY commandment that starts with the word "Remember", so it must have been pretty darn important. [See Exodus 20:8-11]

But on a more personal level, I think God (who sees all and knows all from the beginning of time to the end of time) - when He was creating the world looked down through the annals of time to August 8, 2008 and said, "you know, my daughter is going to be tired around 4:30p when it's time to get off work. If I don't set something in place that will give her "permission" to put her cares and worries aside and come and rest in Me, she will work herself into the ground. I think I'll set something in place that will make her pause and think and regroup and rest. I'll call it the Sabbath and maybe, just maybe, she'll appreciate it. Maybe she won't, but why don't I set it in place anyway, just in case she will."

He knows me well, don't He?

He knows you in the same way. I personally believe in the seventh day Sabbath - that means, for me, my "day" of rest is from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. This is not the time, place or forum to get into a discussion about Sabbath worship v. Sunday worship. I just suggest to you to find some time this weekend to commune with the Lord. Whether you do it in a church building - or out in nature - or in the comfort of your own home - I encourage you to take some time to get back in touch with your Creator, commune with Him and find rest for your weary spirit.

Be blessed and have a great Sabbath.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:42PM (-04:00)

Relax, relate, release...

Monday, August 11, 2008



So, I ditched church on Sabbath and headed to Stone Mountain Park instead. The weather was beautiful - a little warm with temps in the low 90s, but I have a "spot" in the park that I frequent that is off the beaten path - right by a body of water where there is a cross breeze and you can feed the ducks and immerse yourself in the solitude of nature. I packed up a picnic basket with some good food, my blanket and a pillow, a good book and my laptop (which did not work - I couldn't get a good

strong signal) and spent a good, solid four hours in the park. One of my "spots" in the park is near a carillon - a pipe organ that was built for a World's Fair (I think) and donated to the park. On the weekend, Ms. Mabel Florence (a cute older Southern lady - complete with floppy straw hat) plays selected hymns and songs at preset times. Ms. Mabel knows me and everytime she sees me at the carillon on Sabbath, she will interperse her playing with lots of hymns, especially "It is Well with My Soul", which she knows is a personal favorite. There is nothing like it. It is a wonderful Sabbath experience and one I try to take advantage of at least once a quarter or so - whenever duties at church don't tie me to the building and the weather is cooperative.

And I am sure you are not surprised to know that I speak to the other visitors to the Park who wander by my spot by the water. There were the two guys who went fishing in the lake, caught some bass and were headed home to fry them up and eat 'em. [I tried to give them a healthy grilled recipe alternative, but I know they fried those jokers up and ate 'em!] Other tourists wandered down to take pictures by the carillon or of the paddleboat, the Scarlett O'Hara, or with a view of the mountain across the water. [Of course, I offered to take group pictures so that EVERYONE was in the picture 'cause I'm notorious for being the photographer and not in the picture] There was the group of six from Louisiana in town for the weekend, and the couple and their daughter visiting from the Bay Area in California. There was the group of women who waded out into the water to get their toes wet. And invariably, I heard the comment (over and over again), "Now SHE has the right idea...a picnic in a shaded spot...I wish I could do that...I wish I'd thought of that".

Why can't they? Why didn't they? When did we get so caught up in "life" that we forgot how to slow down...to relax...to take time to relate to the world around us...to release ourselves from our pent up tensions, worries and cares? Is it part of being an adult? Of being responsible? There are enough hours in the day when I have to focus on going to work, paying the bills, washing the dishes, taking out the trash, cooking, cleaning, organizing...it is a never-ending cycle. But I have learned that if I don't take time to "stop and smell the roses", I get sick...mentally, emotionally, spiritually. I have to find time to "recharge my batteries" - whether it is going on vacation or finding a quiet conference room at work to journal at lunchtime or checking out of church to go spend the day at the park - in order to keep up with the busy pace demanded of me by life.

God didn't create us to work ourselves to death. I think that is why He created flowers and birds and beautiful vistas. So that we would have things to admire if we would just take the time to do so. As I stated before, He built a day of rest into the week when He created the world so that we could take advantage of it. Your way to "relax, relate, release" may not be the same as mine - you might like gardening or skiing or bungee jumping - I don't know. But take time to recharge your batteries. Take time for you.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 12:41AM (-04:00)

Under His Wings...

Wednesday, August 13, 2008

He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge (Psalm 91:4)

I usually write straight from the heart, but today, my best friend from college sent me a story that I'd heard (several times) before, but which was right on time for me today, so I want to share it in this forum:

A little something to put things in perspective. An article in National Geographic several

years ago provided an interesting picture of God's wings. After a forest fire in Yellowstone National Park, forest rangers began their trek up a mountain to assess the inferno's damage. One ranger found a bird literally petrified in ashes, perched statuesquely on the ground at the base of a tree. Somewhat sickened by the eerie sight, he knocked over the bird with a stick. When he gently struck it, three tiny chicks scurried from under their dead mother's wings. The loving mother, keenly aware of impending disaster, had carried her offspring to the base of the tree and had gathered them under her wings, instinctively knowing that the toxic smoke would rise. She could have flown to safety but had refused to abandon her babies. When the blaze had arrived and the heat had scorched her small body, the mother had remained steadfast. Because she had been willing to die, so those under the cover of her wings would live.

WOW! Talk about love. What a glorious story about the sacrifice that mother made for her children, but what about the baby chicks who were safely nestled under her wing? Did they appreciate her sacrifice or did they peck and claw at her to get out? Were they aware of the impending danger or were they only aware of how heavy her wing was as it pressed against them? My point is this: often I am in the midst of an inferno of strife and stress and danger - [more often than not caused by something of my own doing] - and God tries to gather me under His wings in order to safeguard me and protect me - only to have me fight and fuss and rail against Him for trapping or hindering me from doing whatever it is I want to do. How often do we take His protection for granted or even resent Him for protecting us?

And notice, when the chicks were set free - they scurried off. The story does not say that they lingered around to grieve their mother's sacrifice, they didn't stop and say, "thanks Mom for giving your life so that I could live"...they just went on with their lives. Just as I tend to do when God delivers me...sometimes, I am negligent with my praise and thanks...and just scurry off without looking back.

But the most amazing thing: the next time danger approaches, God doesn't stand back and say, "Shoot! She didn't say thank you last time...she's on her own this time." He lovingly gathers me under His wings again to offer shelter and protection through the inferno. What a wonderful God!

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 01:09PM (-04:00)

It's the pattern, not the incident, that counts...

Sunday, August 17, 2008

For the past week, I have been studying about the disciple John - first known as one of the "Sons of Thunder" (along with his brother James), but who, by the end of his life, was known as the "Beloved Disciple" of Christ. At church on Sabbath, we discussed how Christ looked at John at the beginning - looked past his brashness and quick temper - and saw the man he would become. [Did you realize that John was the only disciple who did not desert Jesus when He was put on trial and eventually crucified? John was also the only disciple at the foot of the cross when Jesus drew His last breath...no wonder he was called the Beloved]

The thing that struck me was this: Jesus never takes one incident in our lives and judges us based on that sole incident. John and his brother, James, came to Jesus and brashly

asked to be set up as His "right hand" and "left hand" men when He established His kingdom. They also asked Jesus to rain down fire from heaven when the Samaritans didn't treat them the way they felt they should have been treated...I mean, these were some feisty brothers! Yet, Jesus looked past that and saw John's heart...saw his willingness to change...his desire to be more like Jesus.

I am glad that Jesus treats us all that way. There are things in my past that (praise God) only He and I know about - and He ain't telling nobody, so neither am I. I am also glad that, for whatever reason, He didn't take me while I was in the midst of my "wilding out" phase of life...that He looked at my heart and saw that, deep down inside where it really counts, I do have a heart bent towards Him and that I am striving every day to be the woman He wants me to be. He sees the pattern of my life and not the incident(s) of the past.

Thank God.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 08:24PM (-04:00)

Membership has its privileges...

Tuesday, August 19, 2008

Remember when that catch phrase was synonymous with American Express? We all bought into the hype - wow! with this credit card, you are a "member" and there are certain privileges that only members of this club are afforded. It made you WANT to carry that credit card because that meant you had ARRIVED, you were a "member" of the club. [I know I sure felt that way the day I was approved for mine. I was an "adult"].

But now, you can be a "member" of almost anything: shopping clubs like Sam's, Costco or BJ's; book clubs; social networks; health clubs; even websites now have "memberships" where if you are a member, you are allowed access to more information than the general viewing public. I should know - I am in the process of designing some personal and family websites and setting up the permissions and privileges for "members" has been one of my biggest tasks. I mean, everybody can't see everything about you. Some things need to be shared with only the chosen few.

And then, there are the different levels of membership. You can be a regular member, or a gold member, or even a platinum member - depending on the different levels determined by the host entity. Of course, each level has different (and presumably better) benefits the higher you climb up the hierarchy. Of course, the cost associated with each level is exponentially higher. It is great to be platinum level with your frequent flyer membership - you get higher priorities on standby lists and sometimes, automatic upgrades to first class - but you have already paid for those benefits many times over every time you flew coach (and sat in the middle next to the screaming, hollering baby or were talked to incessantly all the way from NYC to LAX by the seat mate who just would not shut up! - sorry, flashback), or every time you got bumped from a standby list. Believe me, you've paid for that status or level of membership by the time you get it.

Another thing to remember: membership is always a choice. You don't have to accept an invitation to join when the offer is presented. I am a avid Facebook member and I get requests frequently to join various groups online based on my list of hobbies and

interests. I join some, but not all...it is a choice. There have even been groups that I have joined impulsively only to realize "Hmm, maybe this group really isn't for me". [That is especially true with applications to add to my profile...I mean, do I really want my friends to send me online strippers?!]

There is one "club" where the rules above do not apply and that is membership in the family of Christ. There is no hierarchy at the foot of the Cross - it is a level playing field for all who come. It doesn't matter if you are rich or poor, male or female, young or old, Black or White (or taupe - inside joke)...we are all the same: sinners saved by grace. The price was paid for all of us by the shed blood of Jesus Christ. All we have to do is accept His free gift of membership. And you even have a choice about that...the invitation is extended ("Behold, I stand at the door and knock"), but you don't have to accept it. What a loving God! Even knowing that our lives are better or would be better with Him in it than without Him in it, He still gives us a choice to accept or reject "membership" into the family. I don't know about you, but I am glad to be a member of His family. I mean, how else could I be the "favorite", right?

Be blessed.

PS: Information about my personal website coming soon. Website <http://www.godsfavoritechild.com/> still under construction, but I hope to have it up and running soon. Pray for this effort. Thanks.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:48AM (-04:00)

Home ownership ain't for sissies...

Wednesday, August 20, 2008

The saga of my roof repair (or not) continues. If you have been following this drama, you know that it was in March 2008 that my roof was apparently damaged by a hailstorm following the tornado that struck my fair city. It was in June that my mother and I started gathering information about roofing companies and in mid-July, after an extensive round of interviewing companies and meeting with roofing company representatives, we picked a company, hired them and waited for our roof to be repaired.

...and waited

...and waited

...and waited.

Finally, one day in August, the materials to do the work on the roof were delivered to my house. Excitement reigned in the house because we'd been told, "the materials will be delivered one day, roof put on the next day, cleanup the following day". Yeah right. Materials were delivered on a Wednesday...Thursday, no roofers...Friday, no roofers...Monday, no roofers...and no matter how many times I called the contractor and/or the roofing company directly, I could not get anyone to answer one simple question: "WHEN Y'ALL GONNA COME AND FIX MY ROOF?"

Finally, one Tuesday morning, the roofers showed up. My old roof was torn off - a new roof put on...well, most of it anyway. Apparently, you have to take BOTH skylights off before you realize that the size you bought was too small and that you need to order the right sized skylights. So, you cover the holes with flashing (some aluminum type stuff)

and duct tape and say, "yeah, that should hold it until we get the right sized skylights up here." And then you drive away...and the wait begins again.

It has been almost two weeks since the roof was put on my house and still...no skylights. Again, calls to the contractor net no response. I am sure that when I left the message for the contractor that the only reason I wasn't being "angry Black woman" with him was because no money had yet changed hands, he either got scared at the thought of my metamorphosis into such a creature, or he laughed at my feeble attempt at keeping my cool. When he finally did call me back (TODAY!!!), he told me that he'd just found out that the skylights may take up to FIVE WEEKS to be delivered from the distributor! FIVE WEEKS! Are they crazy?! He did offer this disclaimer: your roof should be secure, but if it rains and there is any damage, our company would be liable and will reimburse you any damage...UH DUH!

So, the wait begins again. I truly appreciate all my friends, loved ones and just generally nosey people who continue to ask me "So, what's going on with your roof?" - Well, here's your answer. NOTHING!!! Pray for a sista, will ya? I am really striving not to go "angry Black woman", but there's only so much a woman can take.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:05PM (-04:00)

Appearances can be deceiving...

Friday, August 22, 2008

"But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 1 Samuel 16:7

This is a much rehashed theme, but this text is so much a part of my psyche today that I had to write about...AGAIN! In the text above, God commissioned Samuel to go to the house of Jesse to find the replacement king of Israel (because, frankly, Saul was messing up!). As Jesse brought his sons forth, one by one by one, Samuel would look at them and think, "Wow, he's tall - he must be the new king - he has a kingly stature"; or "And this one, look at that smile - he would be a good diplomat". Over and over again, Samuel would look on the outward appearance of Jesse's sons and deem them "appropriate" for the job. BUT God had a different plan and way of looking at Jesse's sons. He was looking at their hearts, their motives and motivations.

I wish I had the ability to look at people's true hearts and characters as I interacted with them...and sometimes, I wish people could do the same for me. To know that, generally, I want the best for people and mean no harm. A remark, given in love and kindness, shouldn't be the start of an argument or friction. But sometimes that is what happens. Because I am NOT God, I don't know what trials, tribulations, struggles a person may be hiding behind a smile or professional demeanor. I cannot tell by looking at someone if they had an argument with their spouse before leaving the house that morning - or if the baby threw up on them as they were walking out the door - or if they missed their morning devotion and gave the enemy a way in...I don't know all these things - just as, by looking at me, they don't know any of these things about me.

I think we sinful, selfish, soul-scarred, battle weary humans are sometimes overly

sensitive to words said and the tones in which they are said - sensitive to body language - sensitive to everything. I had a situation this morning with a co-worker that just blew out of control because I believe both of us were coming from a position of defense instead of compromise. She didn't know what I'd already been through this morning - just as I didn't know what she was going through - and in anger, we both lashed out at each other. Luckily, eventually, calmer heads prevailed and I hope we both walked away with a better understanding of the situation and with our working relationship and personal friendship intact.

Smiling faces often cover a multitude of wounds. Just because someone appears to be standing strong doesn't mean that, in reality, they are barely standing at all. Let's all strive to be more compassionate with each other. One of the prayers I strive to pray every morning is: "Dear Lord, thank you for the forgiveness of my sins and for the gift of salvation at Calvary. Help me as I interact with my friends and co-workers today to remember that they also are Your Children and are forgiven sinners just as I am. Help me to be as patient with them as You are with me." That's my prayer. I ain't always successful - but I'm trying.

As the Sabbath hours approach (AMEN! HALLELUJAH!), I pray that you are blessed. I pray that you find some time to rest, relax, release...and I pray that as you interact with the saints at church, you will remember that the pretty dress, the beautiful suit, the smoking shoes may all just be a front - that person may just barely be making it through - pray for them and be patient.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 10:53AM (-04:00)

If I could turn back time...

Monday, August 25, 2008

Almost six years after it left the airwaves, I became a fan of the TV show FELICITY (thanks NetFlix!). In this drama about college student angst, the main character, Felicity (played by Keri Russell) spends four years trying to make a choice between two men: Noel (played by Scott Foley) and Ben (played by Scott Speedman). At the end of four years and graduation, the producers/writers throw the viewers a curve and Felicity is given the opportunity to go back in time to a pivotal incident, make a different choice and see how it all pans out. (I have 4-5 more episodes to go, but it ain't looking so good.)

This weekend, an ex-boyfriend of mine was in town. For over 20 years, we've had a tumultous, back and forth, forth and back, type of relationship. We are still really good friends, but we have both moved on. He is now married and living in Jamaica. But he was in town because his father recently overcame a year long medical crucible and the family was gathering for a big celebration. [I'm telling you, his father is a medical miracle! One year ago, he weighed less than 75 pounds and the doctors were encouraging the family to consider hospice for him - and yet, on Sabbath, he stood before his church and gave his testimony about the goodness of the Lord - but I digress]

Anyway, as my mother and I visited with the family after church on Sabbath, the question came up about why he and I never got married - why our relationship never made it past the courtship stage. I mean, we never would have had any in-law issues - his parents love me and my mother thinks he is the most wonderful person ever; his brothers love me and have always considered me their "sister"; all the parents get along and enjoy spending time with each other. But there are reasons why we are not together. Good,

valid, important reasons. Of course, he has his version of why we are not together and I have mine - isn't that always the case?] And while our lives have taken very different paths, it was interesting (FOR A MOMENT) to play the "what if" game. What if we had gotten married? What if some of the choices we made back in the late '80s/early 90's had been different? Would he still be in the church? Would I still be living in Atlanta? Would we have had children? LOTS of questions.

But the reality is this: unlike the TV show FELICITY, in real life, you don't get to go back and "re-do" your life. You don't get to see what would have happened "if". You pretty much have to suck it up. You have to live with/accept the choices that you made in life and as much as possible, be happy with those choices. This ex played a very important part in my life for YEARS (decades even) and as I said, we remain friends and he (and his family) will always be important to me and have a very special place in my heart and my life - but time marches on - and you have to accept the consequences of the choices you make.

It was good to see him.

It was good to see him go.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:46AM (-04:00)

I just LOVE her!

Monday, August 25, 2008



I have NEVER watched a Democratic (or Republican) convention speech - EVER! I have never wanted to sit and listen to all the speeches. I mean, of course, you hear the highlights, the sound bites, what the news media and pundits want you to know. But I watched tonight because, as much as I love Barack, I have been fascinated by Michelle Obama since they, as a couple, entered the political fray. I wanted to hear what she had to say and how she would introduce her husband to the American people. I LOVE hearing the stories of how a couple meets and how they maintain the relationship over (in this case) 15 years. I LOVE how she spoke so lovingly about her parents and their influence in her life. I LOVE how she talked about her brother and their relationship. I LOVE how she talked about how her father's legacy shadows her daughter's future. Point is: I just LOVE her!

And she is BEAUTIFUL! Inside and out. Her giving up a high profile career as an attorney to dedicate her life to public service; her love for her children and I ain't mad at her for saying (several times), "I love my husband"; "this is why I fell in love with him" - that's right, girl! Stake your claim, stand by your man. Let all the floozies who are plotting their moves know there will NOT be a repeat of the Clinton debacle. (and you know there are some skeezers out there that are just waiting to be the next Monica Lewinsky of history!)

I liked her classiness in her speech as she paid homage to Hilary Clinton, who did put "18 million cracks in that glass ceiling so that others could follow". In a convention that is still fraught with Clinton supporter who may or may not support Barack's presidential race, I thought that was a classy move.

I think if we could elect our First Lady, Michelle Obama would win hands down. I mean, I would be willing to bet less than 20% of the people reading this can even tell me what John McCain's wife's first name is. Michelle was beautiful, eloquent, elegant, inspiring,

humble and everything this country needs as we move through the next four years.

Only God knows what will happen in November, but I know who I'm voting for on November 4, 2008, and I cannot wait to see Michelle Obama in the White House as this country's First Lady.

Just my opinion.

Be blessed.

PS: Congressman Jesse Jackson, Jr. made a significant impression tonight, as did Senator Ted Kennedy. I will be watching again tomorrow night to see what Senator Hilary Clinton has to say.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 10:59PM (-04:00)

Thank you Bill and Hilary!

Thursday, August 28, 2008



It is unbelievable to me that I have been staying up night after night to watch the Democratic National Convention. While I have my political views and opinions, I have never been one to go for all the "rah-rah" of the conventions and the long list of boring speakers and speeches...but this election is different in so many ways and I find myself, not only watching the convention, but TiVo-ing it just in case there is something I missed. As a Barack Obama supporter, I was especially interested to see and hear what the Clintons would do and

say at this convention.

For the record, I LOVE the Clintons. If Barack was not in the race, I probably would have been a Hillary supporter - any thing to get Bill back in the White House. No matter what opinion you have of his personal foibles, he was a great President. I know that I was able to save more, purchase my house and clear up some credit card debt during his administration, and next to Jimmy Carter, he is my favorite President and one I proudly voted for...twice. Personal opinion here: Hillary and Bill thought they had the nomination wrapped up. They waited 8 long, hard, excruciating years under the Bush administration before making their move to run a campaign to get Hillary elected into the White House. And out of nowhere, here comes this young upstate senator from Illinois who upsets the apple cart. In their human-ness, they made some mis-steps...said some things they should not have...did some things that made some of their loyal supporters stop, step back and scratch their heads...well, at least I did. And while I understand it, I didn't appreciate it.

So, when I heard each of them would be speaking at the convention, I was very excited. I wanted to hear what they would have to say - and I NEEDED them to "redeem" themselves. If you are watching the convention, you know that there was a lot of tension between the Clinton delegates and the Obama delegates. Would the Clintons "split the party" or would they thrust their support behind Barack and his candidacy? I was very interested to see and hear for myself what they would do.

On Tuesday night, I waited with great anticipation to hear Hillary speak. I watched the montage narrated by Chelsea and sat through the applause as Hillary took the stage. Within the first five minutes of her speech, Hillary did what I personally NEEDED her to do. She declared, "Barack Obama is my candidate and he must be our next President." As I have said to several people since then - the rest of her speech was just gravy. I feel she HAD to be emphatic in her statement of support and she did that. On Wednesday night, I watched the roll call of the states and saw Hillary make the motion to "let's stop all this casting of votes and just nominate the man" and I feel she HAD to do that - it was the right move.

And Bill also did what I felt he HAD to do. Unlike Hillary, he made me wait for my piece of meat (which was when he compared Barack to himself: "16 years ago when this convention nominated me as the Democratic presidential candidate. At that time, lots of people talked about my youth and inexperience...sound familiar?") after making me swim through all the "gravy" first. Don't misinterpret what I'm saying, he made some good points throughout his speech - but I needed one of the Clintons to ... apologize, if that's the right word ... and although Bill didn't say the words, I felt it was implied and that was enough for me...personally, as a Obama supporter.

So, thank you to the Clintons. I am not naive enough to believe that the support of the Clintons didn't come without some strings and political favors...but in order to get Obama elected (which I think is VITAL to our country), it was necessary.

Just my opinion.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 11:24AM (-04:00)

I'm not taupe, I'm Black

Friday, August 29, 2008

It all started a long time ago and innocently enough. And I have to admit, I played a big part in allowing it to happen, but things have changed recently and I have to stand up and make a change.

It started when I was a sophomore or junior in college and I had a conversation with my roommate, Reta. We were discussing Spike Lee's movie, SCHOOL DAZE, which was causing such conflict at the time - "jigaboos" and "wanna-bes" were the lines being drawn among the Black race. Reta and I discussed how slaves were designated as "house" or "field" Negroes based on whether they could pass the "paper bag" test. [If your complexion was lighter than a paper bag, you could work in the house - if not, to the fields you go.] So that was our conversation, when Reta (who is darker than a paper sack) said, "yeah, Kris, you would definitely be a "house Negro", you are the color of pasty wheat bread." Great...according to my friend, I'm not even the color of cooked bread, but yucky-still-to-be-baked dough. Years later, I related this story to my very good friend and co-worker Julie (who is White) and she responded, "But you are not 'pasty wheat bread', you are more of a 'taupe' color...and when you come back from your trips to the islands, you are really more of a 'caramel' color". And that's how it started.

In my closest group of friends at work, I am the only person of color. Let me say for the record, even before I started working where I work, I have maintained a position of distance when it comes to identifying with my racial heritage. Too many years of cringing whenever the news media shows an African American person doing something amazingly stupid have made me often deny my race by saying things like, "I'm not Black, I'm Indian" - which is not a false statement - my parental grandmother's grandmother was

a full bloodied Creek Indian. [Ok, you can say that is a stretch, but it is still true!] Having been raised in a home where my parents didn't allow slang, and to this day, my mother gives me strange looks when I use words like "ain't" and "nigga", I shudder whenever I hear a person of color on TV slaughtering the English language. Why is it that I would take upon myself the weight of every Black person's public failures as if they were my own and then turn around and say, "well, that's them, not me, 'cause I'm not like them." So, when issues of race would arise at work, it was easy for me to say, "I'm not Black, I'm taupe." And it became a standing joke...a commentary...a "thing" ...and I was fine with it.

Or so I thought.

I guess the uneasiness about the "taupe" joke has been simmering since February 2007 when Barack Obama threw his hat in the Presidential race. Pride in seeing a Black man run for the highest political office in the land made me want to declare my "Blackness" again. But, in February 2007, who really thought that he stood a chance? I have watched him over the last 18 months to see if he would be weeded out, cast aside, dismissed. But as I said in an earlier blog, he's a rock star and last night, I watched with pride as he stood before 84,000 people in Investco Field in Denver, CO as he accepted the Democratic nomination for President of the United States. It is significant that it was 45 years to the day that Martin Luther King, Jr. stood on the national lawn in Washington, DC and gave his I HAVE A DREAM speech.

Last weekend, I went to see an exhibit at the High Museum of Art entitled THE ROAD TO FREEDOM. This photographic essay on the Civil Rights Movement literally changed my life. I never knew or recognized, or maybe I just forgot, just what my ancestors went through during that era (and let's face it, the eras preceding). I never knew or realized, or maybe I just forgot, that less than 40 years ago, there were laws in place that said that no matter how much I might proclaim "I'm not Black, I'm taupe", if I'd tried to drink out of a certain water fountain, I could have been jailed...or if I tried to sit in a certain section of a bus, I could have been arrested...or if I dared to speak back, raise my voice, or just look the wrong way at the wrong person at the wrong time, I could have been killed...and no one would have been able to do anything to stop it...and most people would not have even tried. Because of the things I saw in this exhibit, the emotions I experienced, the tears that I shed...I can no longer cavalierly deny the sacrifices of those who went before me. I can no longer neglect my responsibility to reach back and help those who are coming behind me. Yes, there are problems within the Black community...I can either continue to complain about it and do nothing - or I can take a stand and try to stop the foolishness within the realm of my influence.

Earlier this week, I made my friend Julie cry. I didn't mean to, but I did. When I told her that I didn't want to be referred to as "the taupe girl" anymore, I didn't explain to her what I hope I have explained in this blog. As she reads this (and I know she will 'cause she reads EVERY blog I write and provides me with invaluable, loving, supportive feedback - good and bad), I want to publicly tell her what I've already told her in private. I am sorry I made her cry. I want her to know how much I love her. And she needs to know I know she never meant to hurt me or cause me any harm whenever she called me "taupe". She is the most genuine, loving person I know (next to my godsister). In the years that I have known her, she has made such an impact on my life that everyone in my family knows her. Whenever there has been a family crisis, Julie has been there. She prays with me and for me on a daily basis and her friendship is one of God's greatest blessings towards me. 40 years ago, we would not have even been allowed to be friends.

We are living in an amazing time of change for our country. I am not naive enough to believe that when Barack Obama is elected President in November everyone in this country will be happy. Julie and my core group of friends probably will not be happy. In order to maintain our friendships, we don't talk politics - but I know they are not Obama supporters. That is their right and I respect their choice, even if I don't agree with it. I believe they feel the same about my choice. I am not stupid enough to think that years of prejudice - Black v White; Republican v Democrat; straight v gay; rich v poor - will suddenly just disappear. It won't. But I do know this: I can change. I can make a difference. I can declare, loudly and proudly: I'm not taupe. I'm Black.

Have a happy, safe, wonderful holiday weekend.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:33AM (-04:00)

When the towers fell...

Thursday, September 11, 2008

Today is September 11th. Seven years ago, a defining moment in United States history occurred. For my generation, everyone will always remember where they were when the towers fell, similar to how everyone from my mom's generation remembers where they were when Kennedy was assassinated.

I remember the buzz in the hall - "go to CNN.com - something has happened in NYC at the World Trade Center" - and then CNN being hit so much simultaneously that no one could get online.

I remember picking up the phone and calling my brother who worked at the hospital less than two blocks away from the towers. God blessed in that I was able immediately to speak to him and know he was safe, even though while we were on the phone, the hospital went into emergency mode and it would be almost 2 days later before we would talk to him again.

I remember going into the dining room of the law firm where I worked (and still work) and watching them pull TVs in there so people could gather and watch. I remember sitting on the floor in total disbelief as the second plane plowed into the South Tower. And I remember erupting into tears when a puff of smoke confirmed the unbelievable - that the towers had crumbled.

I remember my boss, John H. Goselin, compassionately telling me to go home and be with my mom hours before the firm made the decision to close its door for the safety of its employees. I remember walking to the MARTA station with my paralegal and friend, James Wardrick - a NYC native with family still living in the area - and having to go two stations in the opposite direction because MARTA was packed to the gills with people trying to get home to be with loved ones as the horror continued to unfold. And I remember being on the train headed home when news of the plane hitting the Pentagon and of Flight 93 going down in the fields of Pennsylvania hit the news and wondering, "Ok, when is this going to end? How many more planes are out there?"

I remember calling and speaking with my godsister, Linda, who was in Connecticut trying to get back to Seattle, WA, but unable to because the airports were closed. I remember

going to the home of my friend, Kenneth White, and just watching the reports over and over and over again and talking about NYC and our ties still to the city.

I remember waiting to hear that my friends were ok. I remember the reports of people walking home from downtown Manhattan to Brooklyn - and of my friends who had cars who picked up strangers and gave them rides because it was the right thing to do in times of crisis.

I also remember immediately thanking God that, as horrible as it was, it could have been so much worse. We have all heard the stories of people who were "out of place" - who should have been there, but weren't. Even in the tragedy, God showed mercy.

And I remember going to NYC for the first time one month later for my friend Rhonda's wedding and crying as we flew over Ground Zero, which was still bellowing smoke from the hole where the towers had stood...one month later.

I don't know where you were seven years ago. I don't know if your memories of the day are as clear as mine. I don't know if you lost someone important to you when the towers went down...if you did, I am praying for you especially today - for strength, peace and comfort.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 11:17AM (-04:00)

They take a beating...

Thursday, September 11, 2008

Somewhere in heaven, there is an angel assigned to watch over and protect me who is wondering what she did to get saddled with me!

You might know that I was on vacation last week. My mother and I drove from Atlanta GA to Gatlinburg TN to spend a week in the Great Smoky Mountains. As part of our adventures, we visited Hot Springs NC to enjoy the hot mineral spring tubs for a day. Although we took the scenic country route for our drive up to Hot Springs, I decided to take the interstate back to Gatlinburg.

So, here's the picture: concrete dividing wall, the shoulder, then three lanes of traffic. I was traveling in the far left lane, an 18 wheeler truck was in the middle lane and in the far right lane, another 18 wheeler truck. I'm driving along, talking to my mom, listening to Sirius Radio, when I see the 18 wheeler in the center lane begin to move over into the far right lane. No soon does he make that move, when I notice him swerve back into the center lane and over into my lane! Well, I push the accelerator and question why he is swerving back into my lane when all of a sudden, out of nowhere, comes a blue Pontiac Firebird. Apparently, the Firebird was in the blind spot of the 18 wheeler and when he saw the 18 wheeler heading over into his lane, he also accelerated to cut between the two 18 wheelers - only he was going too fast and over-corrected, losing control of his car!

Now, the Pontiac is careening into the far left lane (where I was!) in a spin! I promise you, I braced myself for impact because I just KNEW that his rear bumper was going to collide with my rear bumper - sending me into a spin and into the concrete wall on my left. Here's where my guardian angel must have stepped in because:

1. the Firebird missed clipping me - and I still don't know HOW that happened. (my mother claims she saw the whites of the driver's eyes as he spun around);
2. the 18 wheeler in the middle lane stopped, as did all the other cars following in order to give the Firebird room to do whatever it was it was going to do; and
3. the Firebird spun through the center lane, the left lane and came to a stop in the shoulder, facing the right way of traffic - ALL WITHOUT HITTING ANYTHING OR FLIPPING OVER!

As I watched all of this unfolding in my rear view mirror, all I could say was, "Thank you Jesus, Thank you Jesus, Thank you Jesus."

But here's the "funny" part: That morning, while on my daily prayer call, I asked the pastor to pray that my mom and I would have safe traveling mercies for our short day trip. After giving me grief about all the vacation time I seem to have (HATER! hahaha), he prayed what I will call a "throw away" prayer about traveling mercies. I really can't blame him for that, because when Mom and I got in the car to head out to North Carolina, I did the same thing. "Father in Heaven, give us safe traveling mercies as we head out. Bring us back safely to our destination if it be Thy Will" and got in the car and drove off. My point is this: Even with my "throw away" prayer, God looked down from heaven, heard, dispatched the angel to travel with my car and answered my prayer. And, going even deeper than that: He protected all the people on the road with me at the time. I have reflected since last Thursday that if one person had been distracted or on the phone or in an argument with someone in their car - if someone had driven just a little bit faster or a little bit slower, the results could have been a lot different. AMEN! Hallelujah.

We serve an awesome God - and I cannot wait to meet my guardian angel and tell her thank you for the bumps and bruises she took for me on Thursday, September 4, 2008.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 03:37PM (-04:00)

The Lord's Calf

Friday, September 12, 2008

The story is told of a farmer who happily reported to his wife and children that their best cow had given birth to twin calves, one brown - one white. He said that he was so grateful that he had decided to dedicate one to the Lord. "We will bring them up together and when the time comes, we will sell them. The proceeds from the sale of one, we will keep; the proceeds from the sale of the other, we will give to the church in support of the Lord's work." "But which one is the Lord's?" asked his wife. "There's no need to bother with that now. We will raise them the same way until they are ready for market." A few months later, the farmer came home distraught. "What's wrong?" asked his wife. "The Lord's calf died this morning," he replied. "But I thought you hadn't determined which one was the Lord's." she said. "Oh yes, I decided a while ago that the white one was the Lord's, and that is the one that died this morning."*

How convenient!

Yet, don't we often do the same thing? We make promises to the Lord - to be faithful stewards of our time, money and talents - and yet, when the chips are down - the bills are



due - you are asked to participate on a program for the church - all of a sudden, "the calf is dead." My girlfriend Victoria and I were just discussing this very thing this past weekend. Being fiscally responsible in this day and age of rising food and gas prices and still being faithful with tithes and offerings to the church is a challenge. And the enemy often times tries to convince us that "God will understand - He knows you need to pay your bills, meet your responsibilities - the work of the church has been going on for years - it can continue without your weekly/bi-monthly/monthly contribution - you can always catch up later..." Yeah, right. That never happens.

I am so glad that God doesn't treat me as cavalierly as I treat Him more often than I wish. I am glad that He remains faithful to me even through my unfaithfulness. I

pray constantly for more faith, more trust, more dependence on Him (which if you know me, is a daily struggle!)

Let's strive to be more diligent in honoring our commitments to the Lord. I'll pray for you to that end and solicit your prayers on my behalf as well.

Be blessed.

Prayer request: God's mercy as Hurricane Ike approaches the Texas coast over the weekend.

*Story of the Lord's calf excerpted from WALKING WITH JESUS ON THE MOUNT OF BLESSING by George R. Knight, published as a morning devotional book in 1996.
Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 05:09AM (-04:00)

If you worry, why pray?

Friday, September 12, 2008



You might have heard: There is a storm brewing in the Gulf of Mexico called Ike that is predicted to cause all kinds of damage, peril and havoc on the state of Texas - primarily the areas of Galveston, Houston and surrounding areas. I have a particular interest in the storm since my father and stepmother call Houston home and according to a phone call I had with my father this morning, they are staying put and riding out the storm as it blows through.

After talking with my father at length, I am confident that he knows what he is doing in making this decision. He is a meteorologist by profession, so he knows a lot more about storm surge and winds and trajectory than I could ever try to begin to explain, but he seems confident that while the next few hours will be "interesting" - he is safe in the palm of God's Hands and will be ok. They will be hunkering down in an upstairs bedroom that has very few windows and access to an in-suite bathroom. They have candles and flashlights, water and food - so he has done all that he needs to do in order to be properly prepared. According to him, the winds and rains should begin picking up for them around 2:00 or 3:00 this afternoon (Central Time), so if you can remember, please send up a prayer of protection for him, Linda, and their neighbors who have also decided to ride it

out. As my dad is able (barring loss of cell phone service, electricity, etc.), he promises to keep in touch with me and let me know how it is going for them. For anyone interested, I will pass the information along as I hear it.

I also called and spoke with a friend of mine who is a reporter for the Houston Chronicle and who lives in Galveston. He was still in Galveston when I spoke to him, but had boarded up the house and was closing all the storm windows before driving to League City where he would be hunkering down with the rest of the media staying behind to cover the story.

All of this makes me grateful for the morning devotion I had this morning about "worrying". In Matthew 6:25-34, Jesus is talking to his disciples when He tells them that they (and we) can have freedom from worry if we just trust in God. He reminds them that God takes care of the birds of the air and the flowers in the field - won't He surely take care of them? Of us? Verse 27 asks, "Who of you, by worrying, can add a single hour to his life?" None of us can. Reminds me of a plaque I once gave a friend that said, "If you worry, why pray? If you pray, why worry?"

I am not naive. I know the dangers inherent in the storm. Hurricanes are nothing to play around with. We all learned that lesson with Katrina three years ago. But I also know there is NOTHING I can do by worrying that is going to change whatever the outcome of this storm will be. My worrying while sitting at my desk in Atlanta GA is not going to change the path of the storm; it won't lessen the intensity of the winds or rains; it won't stop the surge of the tide...it won't do anything but cause stress in my shoulders, give me a headache and exhibit a lack of faith. However, sending up a prayer, putting it in the Hands of the Man who calms the waters (remember that song?)...I can do that. I can then sit back and trust that His will shall be done - for my father and stepmother and all the others in the area that will be impacted by this storm. And I mean that - no matter the outcome. If it is God's will that I have spoken to my father for the last time, we both said "I love you" before we hung up the phone and I have to trust that we will meet again one day on heaven's shores.

Thank you in advance for all your concern, thoughts and prayers. It's all up to God now. Be blessed.

PRAYER REQUESTS: Pray for my friends from the Houston area: Scott and Linda Nagle and family; Robert Stanton (reporter for the Houston Chronicle); Shibbon Mitchell and family. Also for Sean Ritchie, who may have to travel to the area after the storm to help with rebuilding - and for his family that will remain here in Atlanta.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:57AM (-04:00)

It's been a while...

Monday, September 22, 2008

...so let's just catch up:

1. My dad and Linda survived Hurricane Ike with little damage and many praise reports. Thanks to everyone who prayed for their safety (and the safety of others) during this time.
2. Even "God's Favorite Child" has challenging days - last Thursday, September 18, 2008

was such a day - but even through the trials and challenges of the day - God proved how faithful He is to His Children - even wayward, disobedient, rebellious, hard headed ones like me. Years ago, my New Years resolution was to "have an attitude of gratitude". What a blessing it is to strive to be in a constant state of gratitude. Over the years, I have moved a little away from that, but after last week, I am moving back to that. It is a little hard to focus on what is going wrong in your life when you focus on what is going right in it instead. Try it and then, if you wish, share some of your praise reports with me so I can be encouraged as we move through some very discouraging times.

3. The political season is underway and I don't know about you, but I personally cannot wait until November 4th so I can cast my vote and then wait to see what God has planned for this nation. See, while I believe that I have a responsibility to vote in the election, I also believe that no matter who I believe to be the best candidate for the job, I KNOW that God is in control of the situation and however this election plays out - HIS WILL SHALL BE DONE! And for those who are still sitting on the fence - or even taking the stand that voting is not important and/or unnecessary - I implore you to remember the sacrifices made by others in order for you to have the right to vote - especially if you are a person of color and/or a woman. My father told me years ago, "if you don't vote, you don't have a voice." That stuck with me and if you know me at all, you know that "having a voice" is very important to me. Bottom line: if you don't vote, you do not have a right to complain or commend whoever is elected on November 4, 2008.

4. Prayer requests: There are numerous requests that I could post here, but the following are the ones most pressing on my mind right now:

a. Hailey Trainer: the 9-month old baby of one of my attorneys who was diagnosed with two massive tumors in her brain. Surgery was done on Friday to remove the largest of the two masses and praise God, the surgery was successful, but now she has to undergo chemotherapy to remove the other. Please keep this family in your prayers.

b. Valley of decision: I have been asked to serve in a capacity at my church that surprises me and my initial reaction is "NO!", but I am trying to do what is truly the will of God. Pray for me as I need to make a decision today.

c. Without details, please pray for: Mother of Tamika Walters; Kaye Combee; Carmen Mouzon; Wanda Carter; Cecile Martin-Banfield; Robin Wagner; Chelsea (last name unknown); and a whole host of others who have asked me and while I may have forgotten - God knows.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 10:20AM (-04:00)

Standing on the promises...

Wednesday, September 24, 2008

There is a hymn that we sing in church all the time whose refrain is "Standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of Christ my Savior..." This is NOT one of my favorite hymns, but as I get older - and especially in these days and times - I am learning the value of those words.

Yesterday, EARLY in the morning, I received a phone that shook me to my core. When I

realized that my godsister was up at 4:30a to make a phone call and heard her voice, I knew the news was not going to be good. As she told me the news that her sister, Sylvia, had been diagnosed with cancer, we both broke down and cried. I wanted to scream as Evilene (the wicked witch of the West in the movie THE WIZ) did - "don't nobody bring me no (mo') bad news!" It seems to be coming at an unrelenting, unending, constant stream - bad news, mo' bad news, and then even more. How do you survive when it seems every email you receive is a prayer request or every phone call is news that is less than pleasing? How do you stand?

You stand on the promises of God.

So, I thought about that. What are some of the promises we can stand on? Are there verses in the Bible that I can immediately think of when times are tough and all the ground around me seems to be sinking sand? Is there something, some hope, I can cling to when there seems to be nothing to hold on to? Yes! There are several promises throughout God's Word that are there for times like these - when hurricanes/tornados rage one after another after another; when illnesses hit the young and the good and the kind while it seems like the old and the evil and the mean prosper and flourish; when gas is scarce and if you can find it, the cost is high; when choices have to be made daily between buying food to eat and buying the gas to get to work so that you can buy the food to eat; when it seems all hope is gone; when you feel like you cannot stand and must sink to the floor under the weight of the burden - there are promises you can stand on. Here are a few that I claim:

Jeremiah 29:11 (you knew that would be there!): 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.

Psalms 91:1,2: He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in Whom I (will) trust.

Psalms 121: I lift my eyes to the hills-where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip-He who watches over you will not slumber: indeed, He who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord watches over you-the Lord is your shade at your right hand; the sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night. The Lord will keep you from all harm-He will watch over your life; the Lord will watch over your coming and going both now and forevermore.

Isaiah 65:24: Before they call, I will answer; while they are still speaking, I will hear. (Deliverance is coming!)

You may have another one - there may be a promise that you hold onto in times of stress and grief and uncertainty. Whatever that verse is for you (or verses if you have more than one) - hold on to it. The days ahead will be bumpy ones. Finally, there was a song from my freshman year in college (decades ago!) whose lyrics were: "After you've done all you can, you just stand..." I encourage you to keep standing.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:32AM (-04:00)

Smorgasbord...

Saturday, October 18, 2008

Wow. I knew I hadn't written in a while, but didn't realize it'd been almost a month! And I have no really good, viable, reasonable excuse. I could blame it on my laptop being out of commission almost since I got back from my Gatlinburg vacation (but I do have a computer at work and I get in early enough that I could have written before I started my work day.) Or I could say, I have nothing to say, but anyone who truly knows me would bust a gut laughing if I ever tried to say that about anything. I could say I was so caught up in the election debates and pundit reviews that I haven't slept and therefore, couldn't put two or more coherent sentences together in order to write anything - and while true, not necessarily honest. I could also blame my inattention to my blog to my attention on so many other issues: friends who are battling illnesses and personal issues - celebrating the joys and sorrows of my friends' lives - trying not to freak out over gas prices that hovered and then topped \$4.00 a gallon - and let's not talk about what the stock market has done and continues to do. And I could say concerns over some recurring medical issues have been the reason, but that would totally negate all those blogs I wrote about why we, as Christians, should not worry - so, I cannot use that hmm... I think I've run out of excuses about why I have not written and just have to say: I didn't make the time to do it. I missed it. Want to start again. Hope you will forgive me. Now, let's move on.

Because it's been a while, I have a million (ok, slight exaggeration) ideas swirling around in my head to write about, but don't want to bore anyone with several blog postings all with the same date. How boring (and confusing) that would be. So, here's a quick snippet of some things I have been thinking about:

1. The election: with (you insert the number) of days left before we vote for a new President of the United States, I am anxiously awaiting Tuesday, November 4th so I can stand in line, cast my ballot and pray that my guy wins. I know both parties are pushing early voting - and my friends who have done it say that, even now, the lines are ridiculous. That is WONDERFUL! I am glad to know that people are voting, that people are getting involved in the process. People, like my brother who has never voted in his life, are involved for the first time. And no matter who you are supporting, that is important. But I find it interesting that some people are taking this so seriously that friendships are strained because of people being on different sides of the political fence. Tempers are flaring over stupid stuff and I know people who are not speaking to people that just months ago, were considered "best friends." Foolishness. And yet, in a spiritual sense, this is only a foreshadowing of things to come. In the Bible, we are admonished that husband will turn against wife, parents against children, friend against friend - all of this will happen in the days right before Christ returns for His Children. If friendships are strained because of a difference of opinion between Obama and McCain - can you imagine what the conflict will be when the difference of opinion centers on religious freedoms and/or belief in Christ and His redemptive power. Something to think about.

2. Worry v. Prayer: My godsister and I recently had a conversation about the "Mt. Carmel" experiences in our lives. How we will have an experience where we have seen the glory of God manifested in our lives, only to be immediately followed by a temptation that has previously been rebuked and overcome - or a new trial will befall us. And how that is a ploy of the enemy to distract us and make us doubt. The last few posts I wrote were all about "if you worry, why pray. If you pray, why worry?" And I believe that - honestly, deep down, I do. And then the stock market crashed. And I saw financial security slowly

seeping through the cracks. Money set aside in my 401K gone. Personal stock portfolios reduced overnight. And I would be less than honest if I denied that for a minute, I worried. I fretted. I talked to friends who were more financially savvy than me. I cried tears of anguish and "why me?" (Poor Linda...) But eventually, I pulled myself together and realized, just as I'd been saying over and over and over again - GOD GOT THIS! He has promised to provide our NEEDS, He blesses us with "the extras". And there is a promise in the Bible that "His seed will not go begging for bread." I know this to be true - so, I'm back on the "trust Him" ship and not worried about what is going on around me. I am being prudent...not doing too many stupid things with my finances (smile) ...but I am also not sitting up at night, watching the NASDAQ and other stock indices to see what they are doing, which direction they seem to be moving in. I am trusting in the Lord.

3. So let's count those blessings: I have a measure of good health. I have a (most days) I enjoy going to and am paid a salary that is more than sufficient to responsibly take care of the needs of myself and my retired mother, as necessary. My house, while still without the skylights that I have been trying to get installed since late June!, is standing against the weather and keeps me, my mother and my vast array of stuff protected against fire, flood and invasion. And although it seems like \$1.00 goes no where as far as it did a year ago, I still have a few of those laying around somewhere - enough to provide for some "wants" in the near future. I am blessed with family, friends, and acquaintances that love and support me - in my good ideas and the ones that make them scratch their heads and go, "are you sure you want to try that?" And I have a loving Saviour who died for my salvation and loves me - even when I miss a step and am not the best of example of who He wants me to be. And that is blessing enough!

Be blessed. I'll write again...soon!

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 12:38PM (-04:00)

Validation...

Tuesday, October 28, 2008

God loves me, oh yes, He does!

For the last two weeks, I really have not been feeling well. I am not a "complainer" when it comes to how I feel - mainly because that leads to the inevitable "how are you feeling?" and other hovering questions by well-meaning relatives, friends and loved ones. And while I know they mean well, I am a bad patient - I hate when people hover - and get very irritated when people do. (Sorry, Mom and Grandma and Julie and ... well, you know who you are...) And yet, when I get in my self-pity mode, I want to scream that no one seems overly concerned that I am sick. It is a vicious, vicious cycle.

But God showed me today - actually, over the last week - that He loves me, that He is concerned and that He cares. "Out of the blue" (and I say that in quotes because I don't believe anything is truly random, but all a part of His plan for our lives), the following things have happened:

- a phone call from my former pastor, who just called to say Hello and ended up encouraging me in ways he will never know.
- a phone call from my father in which he literally said, "I just called to say 'I love you' and that I really mean it." - which if you knew my father, you would know this is HUGE. (and he's reading this, so I ain't talking about him behind his back...)

- a co-worker of mine told me today (when I was relaying to her my distress about how fat I feel and about the size of the gown I just bought for my church's anniversary gala that I will be Mistress of Ceremonies for next weekend) - "stop it! You are beautiful just the way you are!"
- an email from a high school friend who hadn't heard from me with the frequency that she normally does who wrote me to say, "I just wanted you to know that I've been thinking of you and that I care tremendously about you."
- the phone call from my brother this morning expressing his concern about all the medical tests my doctor keeps running (with no seemingly good results) - and if you knew my brother, you would know this is HUGE also...
- the comment to a blog I wrote that said, "keep up the good work" - (and I'm feeling all guilty for not writing all the blogs God has put on my heart to write...
- and there have been other things....too many to write about - and some too personal to share.

All I am trying to say is this:

Often we get bogged down with the "busy-ness" of our lives
and feel overwhelmed
and that things are out of our control
and that nothing is going right
and that everything is going wrong

God knows

God cares

and if you stop and listen, He'll let you know that He does
in just the way you need to hear it.

God loves me, oh yes, He does! And He loves you too!

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:21PM (-04:00)

Less than a week...

Wednesday, October 29, 2008

We all know what will happen in less than a week...in the United States of America, we will choose the next President of our country. We will decide who will lead this country, at least, for the next four years.

Yeah, the President of the United States of America...and yet, we really are not UNITED at all. I have never in my life seen one political race cause such division and dissension and controversy and name calling and ... I could go on and on. And I'm sorry - no matter how people try to couch it in difference in "issues" or "policies" - deep down in my heart, I truly believe the division is caused because of the color of one man's skin.

Now, whether you agree or disagree with me, I say this because never before have I had to "defend" my candidate's heritage when discussing political issues with friends. Never before have I had to break down what it means to be "Black" when it comes to politics. Never before has a candidate had to have Secret Service protection EQUAL to the current President since early in his campaign. Never before has someone come to me and said, "Well, I guess you are happy now" when discussing the political race. (I will

never forget the Republican friend who on the day of the first primary race in Georgia - not knowing if I was a Hilary or Barack supporter - just assumed it didn't matter one way or another to me...because hey, there's a woman running and there's a Black man running - so I was covered no matter who won the Democratic nomination) I just don't get it. I even had a dream about it - the race - the political ads - the debates; how different it would have all been if Hilary had gotten the nod instead of Barack...hmmm....but that didn't happen and I wouldn't want to speculate on where we would be now if that had been the case.

And then this week, we hear the reports that some misguided men (and of course they HAD to be from the South!) decided that they want to "take out", not only Barack Obama, but 88 random people who look like me... *JUST BECAUSE* they look like me! Not because they did anything horrific, or posed a threat to them or their family in a personal, in your face way - but just because they have melanin in their skin and their skin is not lily white. I don't get it.

No matter who wins on November 4th - we all still live in the same country. Unless there is going to be a mass exodus of American citizens to Canada or Mexico or Europe - on November 5th, when we wake up, we will all still be here. We will still be American citizens. We will still ride on the same streets to go to the same jobs. ***We will all still be here.*** We will all have to pull together and make it work. One man, one party - cannot do it alone. If Obama wins, and you voted for McCain - I am sorry. Complain for four years and start now to support a candidate who can step up to the plate in four years who can effectuate policies more in line with your beliefs. Because if McCain wins, that is what I am going to have to do.

And let me say this right now - if you do not exercise your right, your privilege, your obligation to vote - whether early or on November 4th - don't say nothing to me about the results on November 5th! If you don't vote, you have no voice about what happens!

I pray every day for the Obama, Biden, McCain and Palin families. For whatever reason, these men and women ('cause the spouses are in this race just like the candidates) have been chosen for this purpose at this time. Regardless of who wins and who loses, there will be people in this country (and let's face it: in the world) who will be ecstatic and there will be people who will be devastated. And there will be people who will react inappropriately - whether from joy or anger. I pray every day for my country.

Because it is MY country.
Because it is YOUR country.
Because it is OUR country.

And we are ALL in this together...

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:11AM (-04:00)

Girls Night Out...

Thursday, October 30, 2008



I want to pay homage to friendships. We all have 'em. (At least, I pray that you do). I am blessed to have some of the best sistagirl friends in the world, and last night, I got to hang out with three of them - and saw some additional ones along the way.

In April 2007, my friend, Dorothy Johnson (aka "DJ") organized a day trip from Atlanta GA to the north Georgia mountain town of Dahlonega. She pulled together a diverse group of women - some who knew each other; some who knew her and no one else; and one who knew me and no one else. Five women - different backgrounds, beliefs, ideologies - pulled together by one woman. Since then, we have made a point every other month or so to do something together. Usually DJ organizes it, but others of us have stepped up to the plate and come up with some really interesting things to do as a group. It usually involves food (and wine) and picture taking and lots and lots of laughter. Sometimes, all of us make it - but can you imagine trying to get a date when EVERYONE is available; over the course of the year, we've added another woman to the mix and a few months ago, we temporarily lost DJ to a move out of state. (but she will be back in Atlanta soon! I cannot wait!) DJ said her motivation for doing it was that she has "the best girlfriends in the world" and she wanted us all to meet each other.

Last night, four of us got together to attend an event geared towards women and their friendships. It was an evening of shopping and a goodie bag stuffed full of gifts and shopping and some really hot men pushing gym memberships and serving margaritas and mojitos (I shoulda taken some pictures!) and shopping and food...and did I mention, shopping? We had a blast. We laughed and giggled and scoped out the "competition" and shopped and..as we sat and ate a late dinner at California Pizza Kitchen later, I realized, she does have the "best girlfriends in the world" and because of my friendship with her, so do I.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 08:46AM (-04:00)

It's Halloween...again

Friday, October 31, 2008



Yesterday, all the kids belonging to the attorneys and staff of my group came to the office to "trick or treat" in a safe, loving environment. (Pictured here is one of my attorneys' son, little Master Reese.) Ok, I don't have children - so, after about 20 minutes of them running around on the floor, I jetted! But, they were cute...they had a great time...and I guess it was worth it.

As a child, my parents didn't play the whole "trick or treat" thing. As Christians, we didn't believe in the whole "ghosts and goblins" thing - and as (what would now be called) overprotective, psychotic parents, they totally didn't buy into the allowing my brother and I to roam the neighborhood streets begging for candy. In fact, I can only remember one time that my parents allowed us to dress up and participate in a Halloween event and that was when we were living in Japan and there was an activity (a parade) on the Air Force base where we were stationed. I was a princess and my brother was a hobo. (When you think about that, not much has changed. - hahaha, just joking...a little)

As an adult, I hold to the same principles. As I said I don't have kids - but if I did, I would be one of those "mean mommies" who probably wouldn't allow them to participate in such events. I have always questioned the weirdness in teaching your kids all year long that you shouldn't take candy from strangers - only to allow them to do so - with great glee, greed and anticipation for one day a year (and let's face it - between going to Mom and Dad's job(s) and church functions called "Fall Festivals" or "Harvest Nights" (that's a whole 'nother blog in itself!) and other neighborhood or school "safe" events - Halloween has become a month long event!). What are we really teaching our kids during the month of October when we "celebrate" this "holiday"?

Just something I think about.

On a different note: Tomorrow is November 1st. The year has just flown by. I begin the two week countdown to my 44th birthday. (I know, I look so young in my pictures! hahaha) And my four week countdown to my trip to Mexico with my godsister Linda. I apologize now - in advance - for any obsessive "nah nah nah nah nah"s that ensure as I look forward to these two major events in my life.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:57AM (-04:00)

The longest day EVER!

Monday, November 03, 2008



I don't get why people get so excited about Daylight Savings Time and time "falling back" for an hour. Yesterday was the longest day EVER in history! Because my body clock didn't know time fell back an hour, I was wide awake at 5:30a! (yes, I normally wake up around 6:30a on Sundays because I have a weekly phone call with my 88 year old grandmother on Sunday mornings that starts at 7:00a.) WIDE AWAKE and could not go back to sleep - I went online to Facebook, I sorted through papers, everything - anything in an attempt to fall back asleep. Didn't work.

And then, throughout the day - no matter what time I looked at the clock, it was 1:00 in the afternoon - or so it seemed. Time just did not move! It was dark at 6:00p, so that threw me even more off whack - and in an effort to "reset" my internal clock, I forced myself to stay up until the new "11:00 p.m." (which in reality was midnight), only to be wide awake again at 3:00a! The LED display on my clock just mocked me as I lay there trying to go back to sleep. I finally just got up, did my devotional study, got on the computer (yes, I was on Facebook before 4:00a! There is just something wrong with that on so many levels!) - only to get sleepy as my alarm went off. Of course since I'd already done everything I normally do in the morning, I had to pitter patter around for an hour before finally leaving to catch my bus to work. And you know by 3:00p this afternoon, all I will want to do is put my head on my desk, close my eyes and take a nap. Think my bosses will go for that? Yeah, I don't think so either.

Maybe it won't be too bad.
Maybe.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:41AM (-05:00)

Experience the Joy...of Grace

Monday, November 03, 2008

I know - two posts in one day, but I have to share the lesson I learned from the sermon I heard in church on Sabbath.

The story is told of two gentlemen from Rhode Island who visit Georgia for the very first time. They come to Atlanta to attend a business meeting and as they get up in the morning, they decide to go to a local restaurant and order breakfast. After perusing the menu, they decide to order chicken fried steak, scrambled eggs, toast and coffee. The waitress takes their order and within minutes comes back to the table with chicken fried steak, scrambled eggs, toast and coffee...and a bowl of white, creamy stuff with a big ole

pat of butter swimming in the middle. Well, these two gentlemen from Rhode Island who have never been to Georgia before turn to the waitress and say, "Ma'am, what is that? We ordered chicken fried steak, scrambled eggs, toast and coffee." And the waitress says, "Well, sirs, them's grits." "Grits?! We don't want any grits. We didn't order 'em, we don't want 'em, and we will not pay for them." "Well sirs, you in the South now and you don't have to order 'em, you don't have to want 'em and you don't have to pay for 'em - but you gets 'em with your meal."

Grits are sort of like grace, which is defined as "unmerited favor". We didn't ask for it, we surely don't deserve it, we may not even want it - but with Christ's sacrifice on the Cross, we all get it. We are all given the gift of grace.

The pastor went on and gave another example - one we all have probably experienced...the speeding ticket that you deserved but didn't get because the police officer showed mercy and grace. When I went to visit my cousin Kelly and her family in Washington DC for the 4th of July holiday, I experienced this. I was headed back to the airport to catch my flight back to Atlanta and I pulled off the highway to get Starbucks and gas so I could return the rental car with a full tank of gas. Not familiar with the area, I was ZOOMING down this windy road when I saw the cop sitting off to the right. Yeah, I was busted BIG TIME! He pulled me over (into a gas station) and you know the drill: "Miss, do you know why I pulled you over?" "Yes, sir." "You were doing 45 in a 25 zone...I'll be back." Well, I got on the phone and was complaining to my mother, "You will not believe what is happening to me...I cannot believe I got pulled over...I don't even know this area, I didn't see a sign..." (you know the drill.) Anyway, I'd just said to my mother, "Well, he's coming back to ruin my day" when the officer (who overheard me say that) said, "No. I see from the registration papers in the car that you are visiting the area, so I am just going to give you a warning. Be safe and have a good flight back to Georgia." GRACE!!!

Three things immediately happen when you are given grace like that: 1) you immediately fall under the law. You best believe I did not go above 25 mph until I got on the expressway and then I stayed within the speed limit until I got back to the car rental plaza at BWI Airport; 2) you immediately feel joy; and 3) you cannot wait to tell somebody about how you were delivered. That is the way we, as Christians, should be when we experience the joy of salvation and the receive the gift of grace from the Lord.

So whether you like the grits story or the speeding ticket story as an illustration of God's love and grace - I hope you will experience the joy of grace for yourself and that you will share it with others whenever, however you can.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:53AM (-05:00)

This one is for...

Wednesday, November 05, 2008

I will always remember Tuesday, November 4, 2008. It will rank up there in my personal lexicon of great days - as momentous an event as my birthday (which is only 9 days away - so get those birthday cards in the mail people!), or September 11, 2001 or November 2, 1990 or January 20, 2001 (days of personal significance for me). But I write this blog (and it's probably going to be a long one - just a warning), not necessarily for me. This blog is for...



...my co-worker, Geri, who asked me yesterday afternoon, "Where is your blog? I cannot wait to read what you have to say about your election day experience." I told her then that I couldn't write it because I was too overwhelmed by the emotional significance of the experience I had at the polls on Tuesday morning. (I still cannot write THAT blog, so you'll have to settle for this one);

...the woman who, with her friends, gathered at 2:30 in the morning so that they could be first in line at my polling place;

...the people who were ahead of me in line yesterday morning, who didn't know me from Adam, but who willingly shared with me why they were in line at 5:00 in the morning to cast their votes in this election;

...my brother Kevin, and my cousin Kelly, and the millions of other people who cast their votes for the first time EVER in a political election because it finally mattered enough to them for their voices to be heard;

...my mother, my father, my stepmother, my grandmother, my cousins, my friends - who vote in every election no matter what because they realize the importance and power of your vote;

...every person - Black, White, male, female, young, old, slave, free - who gave their life so that EVERY American could have the right and privilege to vote;

...all of those who have gone before who didn't live to see this day;

...Justus, who still "gets" me almost 30 years later (thanks for listening and understanding);

...Janice, whom I have never met face to face, who woke up at 4:00a in London England when the announcement was made and who was just as excited for me as I was for my country;

...Julie, who immediately agreed with me this week that we HAD to take a picture of me wearing my Obama button and her wearing her McCain button and that the caption for the picture would be "We may not always agree, but we always love each other" (or something equally sappy);

...all of my friends who disagreed with me politically and felt comfortable enough to share with their fears, concerns, and plans to leave the country if Obama won - whether they were joking as they said it or not. For my friends who got on their soapboxes and vented to me and then apologized (you know who you are) - I still love you and know our friendship is strengthened by the fact that we can agree to disagree and still call each other "friend". I put myself in their shoes and know how I would feel if the results had been different, so my heart truly goes out to them. But I pray they listened to McCain's concession speech and Obama's acceptance speech and that they will heed the call that each candidate put out for unity as a country from this point forward;

...John McCain and Sarah Palin and their families. It doesn't matter that I didn't agree totally with their ideas and their vision for this country. They ran a campaign based on their convictions and desires for a country that I truly believe they love as much as I do. Maybe more because you could not PAY me to run for President. (or any political office!) And that is the true beauty of the democracy in which I am blessed to live. I listened closely to John McCain as he spoke to the American people last night and I applaud the way he handled what had to have been a heartbreaking loss for him. I pray for him and I truly hope that he meant what he said when he said he would throw his support behind the new government because it will take all of us working together to make this work;

...everyone who stood in the long lines for early voting or cast their votes via absentee ballots - and it is even for those who, despite the "hype" of this election, decided not to participate and didn't vote;

...every person who marched or was hosed or sat down or rode a Freedom train or bus in

order that we all have the right to life in a country undivided;
...every soldier in every military installation around the world who fights for the freedom of those they have left behind on American soil - thank you for your service - now let's bring you home as quickly and responsibly as possible;
...every tear that was shed at 11:00 EDT as the race was called in favor of Barack Obama. Whether they were tears of joy or despair, I firmly believe you didn't cry if you weren't invested in the outcome. The passion with which people followed every move every candidate made, every word they spoke, every outfit they wore - was amazing and inspiring and gave me hope. I appreciated every conversation I had during the last 21 months - especially those where we were not in agreement - it showed to me that people were taking it seriously and not just voting because he's Black or she's a woman or "well, I've always voted (you insert the political party of your choice). People cared and that was huge! In a nation known for its apathy and "who cares" attitude, people proved that when it is important enough to them, they do care and they will show up.
I could go on (and on and on), but I have to get ready to go to work. (Yes, I am going to work today, no matter what Chris Rock said!) Five and half hours later, I am still overwhelmed by seeing history made in my lifetime. I wish everyone I knew would embrace the awesomeness of the moment. Whether your candidate won or not, this election is going down in the history books like none other before it. And you and me - we are alive to see it! How amazing is that?! What a blessing to be living in these times. I wrote a blog last month about what I thought would happen on November 5, 2008. Let's see if my predictions come true. Be blessed.
PS: As much as I am THRILLED that Barack is our President-elect, my greatest joy is that Michelle is our First Lady! I LOVE HER!!!
Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 03:57AM (-05:00)

Transformation...

Tuesday, November 11, 2008



So, after six years (almost to the day!), I decided to cut off my locs. Now, since I'd been thinking about it for a while (and even hinted of my plans to a few people), I was AMAZED at how people reacted when they saw me for the first time "post-locs". While the comments for the most part were positive ("Oh, you look so much younger...and slimmer), there were a few comments and reactions that ... I cannot, even now, explain how they affected me. There was my fellow church member who called me to say, "I heard the good news...Praise the Lord!"; and the co-worker who said, "Now you have SOPHISTICATED hair"; and another co-worker who, throwing her hands in the air, exclaimed, "Thank you Jesus, she's finally seen the light and come to her senses." Really? Was it THAT deep? And what do you mean, "NOW I have sophisticated hair?" Is that to imply that before I was less than that? Or the comment, "you are so beautiful", implying that I wasn't just as beautiful with my locs. I beg to differ. It astounds me how my cutting my hair impacted other people. Some people took it personally. "But you looked so good with your locs." So, I don't look good without them? I just wonder if people think before they speak sometimes...and if I am guilty of the same thing when I think I am complimenting someone who has done something different - with their hair, or their clothes, or whatever.

Hmm....

And then I thought about this: when I truly gave my heart to Christ, did people notice? Was the transformation as obvious as when I cut my hair this past weekend? Did people (want to) say, "Wow, you are so much nicer, kinder, sweeter, (insert your favorite Christian attribute here)"? I don't know. I don't remember. But I hope so. Because that is really the ONLY transformation that really matters - the transformation of our characters to be more like Him and to reflect Him. Just something to think about.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 09:28AM (-05:00)

Amazing Grace...

Thursday, November 13, 2008

Song lyrics: Amazing grace shall always be my song of praise; For it was grace that bought my liberty; I cannot know just how He came to love me so; He looked beyond my faults and saw my needs. I shall forever lift mine eyes to Calvary; To view the Cross where Jesus died for me; How marvelous the grace that caught my falling soul; He looked beyond my faults and saw my needs.

Now, I am sure that if I got those lyrics wrong someone will correct me! hahaha. That's ok. I can take it. Tomorrow will be the 44th anniversary of my birth - also known as a birthday. Wow. 44! I don't feel 44, and if you say I look that old, you ain't really my friend. (fake stamp of the foot on the ground.)

Birthdays always make me stop, look around and reflect...mainly on the goodness of the Lord. When you calculate it out, I have been alive for more than 16,000 days! Another WOW. It makes me think and wonder: how many of those days have I totally wasted? How many of those will be remembered forever? How many of those days were spent being mean to someone who truly needed kindness - or being kind to someone just because? Looking back, how many people did I love truly - and did I tell them somewhere along the way? How many flowers did I not stop to smell - or give - or receive graciously? I think the answers are more positive than negative. I mean, there is a reason I claim the moniker "God's Favorite Child." (smile)

Already the cards and gifts have started coming in. Shout out to my dad (and stepmother) for the beautiful musical water globe that encases a cross with the Serenity Prayer engraved on it and plays the "other version" of Amazing Grace. (Lyrics: Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound; That saved a wretch like me; I once was lost, but now I'm found; Was blind but now I see). [I know a LOT of song lyrics!] Shout out to my mom who bought me the lovely gown I was wearing in the picture posted with the last note "Transformation" - I got LOTS of compliments on it - in person and online. That was "grace" - and amazing.

But, birthdays have never been about the gifts for me. To put it bluntly, I have enough "stuff." I have enough bath stuff and candles and books and stationary and music and movies and ... well, you get the picture. Last year, I sent out the email blast to my friends saying, "don't spend your money on a gift - let's spend some time together and make a memory instead" - and that's what some of them did and what a great year I've just had

as a result. That's "grace" in another form as well, and just as (if not more) appreciated than something that is used quickly and/or soon forgotten. It is always nice to be remembered on November 14th, don't get me wrong - but it's truly not about the gifts.

Grace = unmerited favor. I am so glad that God has blessed me with it for the last 16,000+ days. I am glad that He loves me...in spite of myself. And I look forward to the next 365 days He has planned for me. Full of His love, GRACE and mercy.

Amazing.

Grace.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 11:11AM (-05:00)

Unused blessings...

Tuesday, November 18, 2008



I hope you can see this picture. This is the view from the bed & breakfast where I celebrated my 44th birthday weekend. The view of Stone Mountain Park is not truly done justice by this picture, but you get the idea. It was a nice, relaxing, restful time away from home where I could "relax, relate, release" and spend some "me time" rejuvenating my spirit...all desperately needed.

One of the reasons I picked this bed & breakfast for my "in town getaway" was the advertisement for the room, which included an in-room fireplace, veranda and whirlpool jacuzzi tub! Woo hoo...yeah, I took advantage of NONE of those amenities! It was too cool to sit out on the veranda - although I did walk out there to take this picture (hahaha). I was out too late both evenings to start the fire - I have this thing about not going to bed while there is a live fire burning...I know, you have the fireplace guard and you can be safe, but I ain't going to bed while there are open flames burning...call me crazy if you want to...And even though I kept saying, "I should start the water in the Jacuzzi and go swim in it for a minute (it was HUGE!)", that never happened either. I kept putting it off and off and then, voila! the time for my retreat was over and it was time to return home to reality.

It got me to thinking though. One of my favorite Adventist writers, Ellen G. White, talks about how when we get to heaven, God will reveal to us a storehouse of blessings that we did not receive because we didn't ask for them or, we didn't tap into them when we had the opportunity. How stupid of it was for me NOT to take advantage of the very things I went to the B&B to take advantage of. Now, don't get me wrong - I have a very enjoyable, relaxing time - it just could have been better. I have a wonderful life now - but it could be better if I would just lay hold of, take claim of the blessings God just has waiting for me if I would just ask. What about you? What blessings are you not laying claim to? Wouldn't today be a good day to start?

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 01:09PM (-05:00)

Reunited...

Wednesday, November 19, 2008

I have said this before but, I LOVE FACEBOOK! I am such an addict. Being on FB (as it is affectionately called) has connected me in new ways with people I see everyday (shout out to Alvin and Libby!); with people who I used to know but who have moved away and we are not as close due to lack of proximity (shout out to Janice M and Leah M); introduced me to new people who have become meaningful in their own way (shout out to Charlie G and Janice E); allowed me to show off my competitive side with Word Twist and Scramble challenges (shout out to Beth W and Everet L); and just yesterday, reunited me with my stepsister who I have not spoken to, heard from or otherwise had contact with in at least ten years.

Ok, those of you who know me well are like, "YOU, not be in contact with someone for a decade of time! You are ALWAYS in contact with EVERYBODY!" Yeah, I know...hard to believe. I still have address books with peoples' contact information from high school and that's been over 25 years ago. But the situation with my mom and stepfather, and consequently my relationship with my stepsister and stepbrother, is complicated. Without going into family history and skeletons and ... mess, suffice it to say, our parents' breakup and divorce was not amicable and when you are children/young adults - you take your parent's side...no matter what...and that is the way it was...and is. And I honor and respect that.

However, about six months ago, I was impressed to pray for Nicki and Todd. Every morning. "And bless Nicki and Todd, wherever they are." Every morning. Even as our parents recently headed to court to hash out a property settlement agreement that was 20 years in the making - and a lot of old feelings (read: negative) about my stepfather resurfaced - I still prayed. Every morning. And God answered my prayer with a friend request on Facebook from a name I didn't recognize and a picture too small to verify if it was indeed the woman I had been praying for. (did I mention: I was praying for her every morning?)

We haven't talked yet. I gave her my cell phone number and I hope she will call me. So we can talk and catch up. I didn't have a sister growing up - never really wanted one. She never had one either - until our parents married in February 1978, and we were "forced" into each other's lives. We had fun, as only children can have. We had conflicts, as only children can have. We had the whole "jockeying" for position that siblings have. But, when I think of her (and Todd), it is always with fondness. When I think of how their mother, Toni, included me and my brother Kevin in activities and events, it makes me smile - because she didn't have to do it, but she did. She was very kind to us...even when we probably didn't deserve her kindness.

Reunions can be difficult - especially when time has passed and people have grown up, apart and away from each other, but I am praying that this reunion will be wonderful and that a new, mature friendship and "sisterhood" can be forged. I hope that being in contact with her will help me get in contact with my "other brother" Todd. That would be great. I'm praying to that end. Won't you pray with me?

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 04:06PM (-05:00)

Reaching a milestone...blog #100

Thursday, November 20, 2008

It was March 27, 2008 that I began my blogging adventure. Hard to believe that in eight short months, I found 100 different topics to talk about, express my opinion and basically bore my friends to tear about. And hopefully, somewhere along the way, was a blessing to someone as I shared my love for the Lord and His love for me (and you). It is an accomplishment - one I am proud of, especially since a recent online quiz said that it is within my personality to start something very enthusiastically and then just drop it. (Yeah, that resembles me...) But so far, my love of writing (and my desire to express my opinion) has helped me stay motivated, and God has blessed.

So, today I want to talk about "storehouses". Malachi 3:10 states, "Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse that there may be food in my house. Test me in this, says the Lord Almighty, and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out so much blessing that you will not have room enough for it." (New International Version) I am sure you are familiar with that text - you are beaten about the head with it every time there is an offering plate passed in church, and the indication is that if you don't give your money to the church, you are not being faithful in your stewardship. I have recently begun to question/have a problem with that philosophy. While I agree that it is our duty as members of a church to support the church, I wonder if the "storehouse" can be something other than the physical building in which I may go to worship. Could the "storehouse" be the friend who is jobless and needs assistance putting food on the table? Could the "storehouse" be the single mother who has unexpected car troubles and needs gas or repair money? Aren't we also admonished, as Christians, to do unto the "least of these" when we see someone in need?

A situation recently occurred in my life where I was impressed that I needed to help someone in need in a very meaningful, tangible, sacrificial way. And the only way to do this was to use the money I had designated for my tithes and offerings. I had two conversations with two women who I consider to be spiritual giants and well grounded in Scripture. Both of them encouraged me to follow the unction of the Holy Spirit and to sow into this person's life with the money. So, I wrote the check, prayed over it and put it in the mail. A few days later, I had the opportunity to speak with the person who I sent the check and he told me the following story:

Times had been hard for his family. It seemed like time they got through one crisis, another would arise. The most recent mishap was that his wife's car had some major repair issues. The first mechanic they took the car to told them that it would be \$500 to repair the car. They did not have \$500 - in fact, all they had was \$180. They took the car to a friend who worked in a car repair shop who told them, I'll do it at my employee discount and it will only cost you \$275. Not knowing where they would get the extra money, they stepped out on faith and told him to go ahead and repair the car. When he got home from the repair shop, he checked the mail and there was my check which was sufficient for him to get the car repaired! God is good! Not only was this person blessed to get his car repaired, but God (I believed) blessed me by telling me this story and letting me know that He used me as a conduit of His blessings! What an honor!

And I could go on about how I have been blessed this month - in tangible, financial,

spiritual -"save me from myself" - ways...but that should be the subject of another blog...or two.

All I want to say is, follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit...you will be blessed for it and not only will your "storehouse" overflow, but so will the storehouse of others.

Be blessed - and I look forward to the next 100 blogs, don't you? (smile)

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:50PM (-05:00)

Taking a bite..out of the Big Apple

Monday, November 24, 2008

It has been six years (almost to the day) since I last "went home" to New York City. I went back in November 2002 to attend my 20th high school reunion and haven't been back to visit since. While that was a happy occasion, the reason for this visit was not as happy. My best friend in high school, Melvin, lost his brother Michael to a brief battle with liver cancer and I journeyed to New York to attend Michael's memorial service on Friday evening, and then stayed for the weekend to visit with other old friends who still call New York home.

First, what an amazing thing to be able to be there to support my friend Melvin and his family in their time of need. While I feel like I didn't "do" anything while I was there, I was told several times how important it was that I cared enough to show my support in such a physical, tangible way. Well, I believe Melvin would do the same for me if the situation was reversed...but even if he wouldn't, I am glad that I was able to be there with him and for him in his time of loss. And while I didn't really know Michael (I mean, who has time for your friend's younger siblings when you are growing up?), hearing the testimonies and tributes of the men and women who gathered to pass tribute to his life was amazing. When attending services like this one, I always wonder what will be said of me when it is my time to die. Nice things, I pray, but in order to ensure that, I have to live my life in such a way that those are the memories that people will have when I am gone. Yeah, I need to start working on that!

Then, I was blessed to be able to attend the church that I attended as a teenager and where I was first baptized into the Adventist faith. What a blessing to see old friends who are still actively involved in the church (although it is very interesting to see my contemporaries holding the offices that our parents held when I attended!) I am so glad that my friends are holding on to their faith and to the Hand of God decades later. Amen!

Saturday evening I was able to spend time with a high school classmate who reached out to me five years ago with an amazing story that I cannot share here, but suffice it to say, from that story, we have developed a friendship that has only been nurtured by phone calls and emails for five years. Saturday evening, we were able to sit down, face to face, and break bread together at Cheesecake Factory. I love stuff like that.

And then Sunday before I left to fly home, I was able to spend time with a couple who sowed kindness, love and friendship into my brother and I at a time when we needed it desperately. They provide a refuge from the madness that was our home environment at the time and, for years later, were a source of encouragement, friendship and parenting for my brother after I was long gone to Atlanta and my mother had followed me south. What a blessing to be able to visit with them and tell them "thank you" for what they did

for us. And finally, I was able to spend time with two other high school classmates and share stories about our joy at being alive at such a time as this - more good food - Thai food!, yum! - fellowship and conversation before one of them drove me to the airport and I flew home.

It was a packed weekend - and now I have to unpack one suitcase and immediately begin packing it again as I am flying away to Mexico on Saturday for a week's vacation with my godsister - don't be jealous! I'll think of you often as I sit on the beach and drink various and sundry drinks brought to me by gorgeous Mexican men...hahaha. I am glad I had all the experiences I had this weekend. I am glad I am home safely.

When will I visit New York again...? Have no idea, but the memories of this visit will long remain with me. I pray you had a great weekend as well - wherever you are, whatever you did.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 11:40AM (-05:00)

A brief tribute...

Monday, December 01, 2008



I am currently on vacation in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico with my godsister, Linda Anderson. My grandparents were/are Linda's godparents. Linda is the youngest girl of nine children and before I was born, my grandparents (who had no grandchildren at the time) showered her with clothes and purses and shoes and love and ... you get the picture. Two years later, I was born and the clothes and purses and shoes and love shifted to me. Needless to say, the first time I visited Hartford, CT and

all the attention was focused on me and not her, little Linda Anderson made the comment: I don't like that lil ole girl, when is she going home? Over the years, as we grew up, that sentiment changed and she'll tell you herself: I just love that lil ole girl now!

Have you ever had a friend/sister that you could tell ANYTHING and know you would never be judged for it or that it would be held against you at some later time? Have you ever had someone in your life that you can just look at and both of you bust out laughing because you were thinking the same thing at the same time? (Like: "Lin ain't no deaconess"; or "they send them back to Africa when they are bad"; or "And they thought I was such a cultured woman until..." (Sorry, inside jokes, but I bet Lin as she is reading this is busting a gut!) Or with whom you say the first two words of a story/memory and they know EXACTLY what you are talking about? That's me and my godsister. Whenever we are on the phone and my mother walks into the room and sees me laughing hysterically with tears running down my face, she just shakes her head and says, "you must be talking to Linda" and walks out the room. Whether we are in our respective homes in Atlanta GA and Seattle WA talking on the phone - or writing each other via email - or praying with and for each other as one of us (usually me) is jetting from one place to another - I know Linda has my back and loves me regardless. And the most special thing about her: She truly truly loves the Lord, and encourages me to do the same

every time I speak with her or am with her.

She is an amazing singer, motivational speaker, single mother of one daughter, great friend, lover of her family and mankind and each and every day, inspires me to be a better person and a better Christian and lover of God. She has truly been and is a blessing in my life. Now, she is not without flaws - don't get a sista wrong: she never cleans out her voice mail inbox so you always have to call her 5 million times to get through to her, but even if I call her at 3:00a (which I do not do often!), she will pick up the phone and talk me down from whatever crisis I think I am going through at the time; she is TOO addicted to TV and the Internet - I won't tell you how many times I've had to pull her away from the laptop on this vacation already and we've only been here two days, but she's doing much better than I expected! hahaha; and I don't think she knows how truly beautiful and "stunning" she is inside and out, but I hope she realizes it one day...soon. I mean, look at that smile! She is amazing.

I believe in giving people their flowers while they can enjoy them. When Lin reads this, she will be slightly mad at me, but she'll get over it. Hey, she got over my birth 44 years ago, surely a little blog post won't be a deal breaker!

I pray you have a Linda Anderson in your life. Everybody should.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 05:18AM (-05:00)

God is all around us...

Monday, December 01, 2008



"God is all around us, Even when we feel we're all alone. Can't you hear Him whispering your name, telling you that you're His own?"

Me and my song lyrics...this one from a song by a group called Anointed from their album, THE CALL. Beautiful song and so appropriate to what I want to write about. Lin and I were sitting on the beach yesterday and we started talking about how here we were sitting on the beach in Mexico, basking in 80 degree weather (I

know, I'm rubbing this in just a little too much, huh? Sorry.) while our families back home in Atlanta and Seattle were suffering with cool temperatures and rainy weather - and yet, God was watching over them just as He was watching over us. That even though we were separated by thousands of miles from our loved ones, He was not separate from any of us at any time. How amazing is that?

I don't take it for granted that God is constantly, consistently and always blessing me and my loved ones. I thank Him for all the blessings He pours into my life, and while I get much grief all the time about claiming to be His "favorite" child, I honestly believe that because things happen to and for me all the time that prove to me that I am important to Him. Look at the sunset in this picture - God's personal "good night" to me (and my godsister) just because we took the time to stop and look and thank Him for it. He'll do the same for you if you let Him, but so many of us get caught up in the daily busy-ness of our lives and don't acknowledge the "little" ways in which He blesses us every day. We thank Him for the "big" things - jobs, family, finances, health - and forget that the ability to move, breathe, appreciate, love (or hate if you so choose) are all blessings as well.

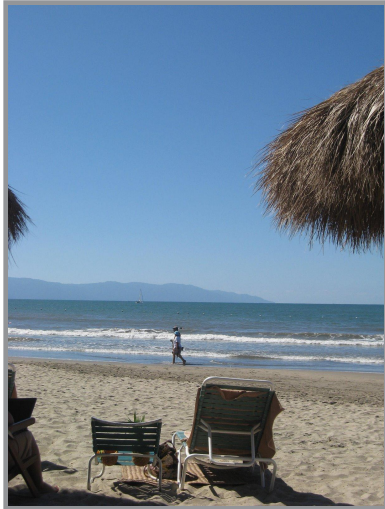
I pray that you will take time today and acknowledge His presence - large or small; still and quiet; loud and booming - however, He comes to you - acknowledge Him and say, Thanks. He is worthy of that, don't you think?

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 05:43AM (-05:00)

Vacations are necessary....

Tuesday, December 02, 2008



I am convinced of this fact. We all need time to get away, step out of our routines, and enjoy what life has to offer. I am always reminded of this when I go on vacation and talk to other people who are also on vacation. And after yesterday, I am even more convinced of this.

You mighta heard a rumor that I am on vacation in sunny Puerto Vallarta Mexico with my godsister, Linda. Yesterday, we journeyed off the resort and took a "Tropical Tour" of the city of PV with the touring company, Tani Buses. We met some very interesting people who just confirmed my belief about vacations being necessary.

Like Chuck from Sacramento, who was traveling alone, but who joined Lin and I for lunch. In his early 40s, he travels a lot and like me, looks for little adventures along the way. He regaled us at lunch with his story of his first skydiving experience in Hawaii this past March. Both Lin and I want to do that, but will probably have to settle for parasailing on this trip. (That's the plan for today anyway!)

And like Vernon and Virginia from Canada, who retired five years ago and are my new role models when it comes to traveling. Virginia says they have been non-stop with back to back to back trips all this year. She says that they travel all over the world (their next stop is Thailand for three weeks) and go home to Canada just to wash clothes and repack their suitcases. A nice life if you can afford it, but how enjoyable for them. Married for 35 years, they seem to still have a good rapport with each other - share the same interests and were genuinely nice people to hang out with.

And like Collin, his domestic partner (whose name escapes me) and their friend

Cassandra, who told us about how they travel to places like PV and actually volunteer to sit in on timeshare presentations at as many hotels/resorts as they can for cash and tours and gifts - always with the intention of saying no and basically, "trying to make enough money to make not working for two weeks worth it". Of course, they were very young and so maybe that works for them, but Collin says that they agree to do a minimum of two presentations a day which ties up their mornings, EVERY MORNING, but they are usually done by 2:30/3:00 in order to do whatever tour they got as a gift or to hit the beach. He told us that they can sometimes "make" over \$1000 in a week, so that more than pays for the time he takes off from work in order to do this. I guess that is one way to vacation...sounds too much like work to me.

And then there's the group of six men that Lin and I met on the beach the other night and you know me, Ms. Photographer that I am, offered to take a group picture of them together for their photo memories. Turns out that for 17 years, these men - most of them friends since high school - have left their wives at home for a week to ten days for a "once in a lifetime annual vacation" to bond and re-cement their friendships with each other. How cool is that?! You don't often hear of men doing that, but they have done it for 17 years! Every year! And don't feel sorry for their wives - while the men are away, the women get together and do their own "girls vacation" - usually in Hawaii.

I am glad that I am blessed to be on this vacation - especially with my godsister. We are having so much fun. But I wonder - does God ever wish He could go on vacation? And if He did, where would He go? When You are Creator of heaven and earth, the sea and all that in them is - do You have a favorite spot to visit? I know, I think weird things sometimes, but I do wonder...

When you can, take some time out for yourself. A vacation doesn't have to be far away to some exotic climate or location - it can be a picnic in your own backyard with your dog and kids - or a drive to a nearby state park for the day - or a weekend getaway to a local bed and breakfast. There are plenty of ways to "vacation" - find one that works best for you (and your budget) and do it.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:29AM (-05:00)

Living Single...

Saturday, December 06, 2008

According to CNN, there is a new prejudice on the horizon: singleism - or the prejudice against people because they are single. CNN is WAAAY behind the times because I have always been convinced of this fact. CNN came to the realization of this "new" prejudice because of a comment made by someone that Barack Obama's choice for Secretary of Homeland Defense (or whatever the official title is) is a good one because she "has no family and (therefore) no life, so she can devote the 18-20 hour days that will be necessary to do the job." (OK, that is my paraphrase of what this idiot, I mean, gentleman statesman, said...but you get the picture) My response: What the heck?

As a single woman of a certain age, I have also run up against this often thought of, but rarely spoken about in mixed company, kind of mentality. When the overtime requests go out at my job, there is a subtle implication that because I don't have a husband and kids

to rush home to, I should be willing, ready and able to stay late to help out the secretary who does have a husband and kids to go home to. And for major holidays, when the vacation requests are being discussed, the comment has been made or implied, "Well, all of your family is here and you don't have to travel, so why are you taking the week off?" Or my "favorite" is when people use their husbands or kids or pets as the reason for calling in sick or coming in late and no one EVER questions it - but let me say I'll be late coming in (or heaven forbid, call in sick!) and I get the 5th, 10th and 20th degree line of questioning from well meaning co-workers - as if single people never run late or get sick...I mean, after all, we don't have kids spreading germs or husbands who need to be babied.

And let's not even get into the whole "what's 'wrong' with you? why haven't you settled down? you are such a nice girl - why haven't you found the right man? why are you so picky? why are you depriving someone of how wonderful you are? (and my personal favorite) are you gay?" lines of questioning that you go through, especially if you reach my age and have NEVER been married. ARGH! Like there is something inherently wrong with me because I never settled ... I mean, because I never settled down.

Why can't I just be single? And happy? And productive? And responsible? And content? And fabulous? Because I am truly all those things - with or without a mate/companion/significant other. I am a firm believer that until I am happy with myself/by myself, I will never be happy with anyone else. And I know there are some things that I still need to work on (ok, God needs to work on) within me before I would ever be able to be happy with someone else - or to truly make someone else happy. Talk about baggage, I got some. (Maybe that's why I travel so much! Might as well put it to good use.)

And in case no one has told you, I am a little selfish. I mean, I know that about myself. But it truly came home to me on vacation when my godsister told me that a woman observing her buying some ceramic bowls on the beach remarked to her: "I love those bowls, but my husband won't allow me to buy any." (Ok, first slamming on of the brakes: won't ALLOW you? Uh...ok, let it go - move on) When Lin replied, "Well, I don't have a husband to ask permission of," the woman replied, "Lucky girl." (you got THAT right!) I don't know. It may have a lot to do with how I grew up, but I believe that if I work hard for my money every day, I shouldn't have to ask permission on how to spend it, but that's just me. (And the same goes for any man who would be crazy enough to be my husband - as long as the responsibilities of the house are met (by both of us - I am NOT looking for a sugar daddy), the bills are paid, etc., I could personally care less about how he would spend his money. If he wants to blow \$1000 on season tickets to his favorite sports teams, go for it! Life is too short to deny yourself.)

And then I have my friends who love to throw scriptures at me: You know, God says it is not good for man(kind) to be alone. We are built/made for companionship. And I agree with that statement - in principle. There is also a commandment that says, Thou shalt not kill - and if I was with the wrong person, I might be tempted. So, isn't it better (for me) to live my life as I wish - within the confines of God's laws (as much as possible) and be happy/content/free - than to become part of a couple just so that society can be satisfied? I think so.

And let me say this for the record: I have NOTHING AGAINST MARRIAGE. If it works for you, more power to you. I have friends who were blessed to find the right person for them and they are truly happily married. Lin and I met several couples on this trip who have

been married for 30, 35, 40 years who when asked the question, "Would you marry your spouse again?" resoundingly, quickly and without hesitation, said Yes. (and sometimes their spouse was nowhere around when the question was asked). I love hearing stories of how people met, how they "knew" their spouse was the one for them and how they've made it work through trials and tribulations and joys and happiness. It encourages me that maybe, someday, somewhere out there, there might be someone for me. But I am not putting my life on hold as I wait for that person to show up...what if he never does?

I am SURE that this blog will set off a firestorm of comments from my friends - married and single. (It always does...) That's fine. I can handle it. Feel free to let me know how you feel. I look forward to the conversations.

Until then, be blessed.

PRAYER REQUEST: Lin and I are leaving Puerto Vallarta, flying back to Seattle, WA and Atlanta, GA respectively. Would you please send up a prayer for safe travel? Thanks and God bless.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:05AM (-05:00)

What a way to spend the day...

Thursday, December 11, 2008

One of the loves of my life is live theatre. Jonathan Larson, who gained fame and recognition for writing the play RENT before he died, also wrote a play that I was able to see called TICK TICK BOOM! On the eve of his 30th birthday, Jonathan questions if he has made the right choice in pursuing his dream of fame and fortune as a playwright when it seems as if he has failed over and over and over again. In a song titled WHY, he writes: "With only so much time to spend, Don't want to waste the time I'm given, Have it all, Play the game...some recommend. I'm afraid it just may be time to give in." Shortly after writing TTB, his play RENT was noticed by the powers that be (including musical genius, Stephen Sondheim) and we all know what a success that show became. Unbelievably, Jonathan Larson died on the night of the dress rehearsal of RENT and never witnessed the phenomenon that the show would become.

I'm writing about Jonathan Larson because as I listened to this song on my iPod this morning, I was envious of his discovery of the passion of his life. As he contemplates the joys and struggles of making his dream come true, he pens the chorus of the same song which states: "Hey, what a way to spend the day...hey, what a way to spend the day. I make a vow, right here and now, I'm gonna spend my life this way." It made me wonder about the passion of my life. Do I really have something that motivates me to get up and move every morning? Is there anything in my life that I enjoy so much that I'd want to spend all day doing it? I mean, I love to travel, but would I want to do it ALL the time? I love to write, but I am not disciplined enough to do it EVERY day as I would need to be in order to be truly successful doing it. And there are other passions I have as well - but nothing that moves me with such dedication and fervor that I cannot think of anything but that one thing to do with my life.

At the suggestion of a dear friend, I am reading a book called THE SHACK. The book is a story about a man named Mack who has an encounter with God after a brutal tragedy hits his family. (Bear with me, I'm going to pull this all together, I promise). The book expounds on the love that the Godhead has for Mack (and mankind) in general. And how it is love that motivates everything that God does for us - from Creation to Christ's birth,

life, death and resurrection to the daily trials and tribulations we go through - it is all based on the principle of love.

So, I think God's favorite way to spend the day is to shower us with His love, grace and mercy - if we will just stop, look around and appreciate all that He has done (and continues to do) for us. I believe it is God's passion and motivation every day to show us His love for us. I pray that we are taking the time to see it, experience it and then share it with others.

I don't know if you know what your passion is, but if you do, I hope you are doing everything within your power to pursue it. Life is too short for regrets. If you don't know what it is yet - ask God for direction - I bet He'll let you know.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 10:15AM (-05:00)

I don't do Christmas...anymore...

Thursday, December 11, 2008

In January 2007 - at the beginning of the year - I sent an email to all my friends telling them that, disillusioned by all the commercialism of the holiday, I was no longer celebrating the season in the way I had been accustomed to - no more mass holiday card mailings, no excessive spending to make sure that everyone known to me and my family had some token of love or appreciation to open on December 25th - no lights, no stockings, no tree. I further decided to ditch the family and take myself away on a "holiday by myself retreat" (that's the subject of a whole 'nother blog!) Bah-humbug became my new favorite phrase...what a backlash that decision caused! Even though my friends were given a 365 day warning, with a subsequent follow up reminder in early November of 2007, I still had people inviting me to parties and sending me their holiday wish lists and mailing me holiday greetings. Not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings, I decided to honor the holiday greetings I received by sending personal notes of "thanks for the card, here's what your friendship means to me" - but after I spent two hours on a Saturday night doing that, I felt like it would have been better to just send holiday cards instead! Writing the notes became a tedious, time consuming chore and seriously, after note #25000 (ok, slight exaggeration, but it sure felt like that many!), it was getting really really old..

And you have to know, I was one of those "everybody gets something" type of holiday people. I would buy presents all throughout the year - hoard them and hide them so that I could spread cheer to EVERYONE - from the bank tellers at each of the banks I have funds to each and every co-worker on my floor to my bosses to the older members at church and the list goes on and on. But when someone said to me once, "so, what are you getting me this year? you always give such good gifts.", it turned my stomach. Is that what the meaning of the holiday season had become? How much loot you could rack up?

When I announced my decision not to do Christmas anymore, I was called "Grinch", "Scrooge" and all other kinds of names. I was asked (more times than I could count), "why aren't you celebrating Christmas?" as if it were a personal affront or a denial of my Christianity. I had to "defend" my position over and over again. I suffered through, thinking, "Ok, this is just the first year. Next year, it will be easier because everyone will know how I feel and why I am boycotting..."

Uh...NO! This year, it seems even worse!

Today our firm is having our holiday party. Due to economic concerns, instead of the two lavish parties that the firm throws every year (an evening party for those who want to get dressed up and drink free alcohol; and an afternoon luncheon for those (like me) who don't do the drinking, dancing, dress up affair) - the firm has opted to do one on-site, heavy appetizers and free alcohol event. I am not attending because (1) I don't do Christmas; and (2) my cousin Candace is graduating from college tonight and I am attending her special event in honor of this achievement. (Go Candace!) But I digress. Any guesses on how many times I have been asked today if I'm going to this afternoon's event? And how many times I've had to explain why I don't do Christmas (in the traditional sense) anymore? Too many to count.

So, for the record, here are my main reasons for not doing Christmas anymore: (1) I strive to honor the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ EVERY DAY, not just December 25th - which ain't really His birthday anyway, but that is the subject matter for another blog at another time!;

(2) my love for someone is exhibited all year long, again not just on December 25th. I am a big celebrator of birthdays. I figure a birthday is the one day of the year where you specifically honor a person for what they mean to you. If I remember your birthday, why do I need to show my love for you again on December 25th? And if I don't hand you a present on that day, does that mean all the other times I showed love throughout the year all of a sudden are invalid? Whatever!

(3) do you know how much money I save by not having to buy holiday cards, wrapping paper, bows, stamps, gifts...it is ridiculous that amount of money I used to drop during the holiday season. Now I can use those funds to bless others - friends who are struggling financially due to job layoffs or other economic impacting factors - and isn't really what the holiday season is supposed to be about?

So, yes, I no longer do Christmas - not last year, not this year and I don't foresee me changing my mind in 2009 either; and yes, I will be "abandoning" my family again from Christmas Eve until the day after Christmas by going away (again) for a "Kristina time retreat"; and no, I don't feel guilty at all about doing it. (wink)

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 02:50PM (-05:00)

Remodeled...

Friday, December 12, 2008

As a belated birthday present, my brother surprised me by remodeling my bathroom while I was vacationing in Mexico. This is not the first time that my brother thought he was Ty Pennington and took it upon himself to change something that I thought of as fundamentally "mine" without my permission...a few Thanksgivings ago, he bought me a bed and while I was gone, he removed my old bed and set up a new bedroom for me. Maybe I just need to not go on vacation...yeah, that's not going to happen! While I greatly appreciate the love that motivated my brother's actions, I really wish he'd discussed colors and my vision for my bathroom with me before he took it upon himself to remove the layers of wallpaper and linoleum that clogged the walls and floors of the old

bathroom. I hate to sound ungrateful, but Brilliant White is so NOT the color I would have painted my bathroom walls. Do you know how bright that color is at 5:00 in the morning? I was thinking more of a peach or sage or blue (I hadn't decided yet) theme, but now have adjusted to a cream, chocolate, beach kind of theme in the bathroom - which is nice, but not my vision for the bathroom. I am sure that I will grow to love it - I did with my bed...eventually...

BUT...

How many times does God need to "remodel" us to make us more in line with His vision for us? Granted, He doesn't necessarily do it by means of a sneak attack, but there have been times when He has molded and rearranged some stuff in my life in ways that I thought made no sense or were not in line with my vision for myself. I mean, PRAISE GOD He did because His way is always best, but the very human side of me often goes through the whole "But I didn't want to do it THAT way" temper tantrum phase before I calm down and submit to the perfectness of His Will. My favorite example of this was a resolution I made a few years ago to "practice the art of patience." In my mind, I was asking for patience when it came to speaking my mind - you know, open mouth, insert foot syndrome - I had it bad (some would say, I still suffer from it, but if that is true, I am a LOT better now than I was a few years ago). Well, God's plan to teach me patience took a whole 'nother direction - I got sick and the doctors didn't seem to know what was causing the myriad of health problems. Can I tell you - when the doctors are just "practicing" on you with no answers in sight, you learn patience! It wasn't the way I thought I needed to be molded, but it turned out for the best.

I don't know what "remodeling" you might need in your life, but my advice: don't fight it. Surrender to God's will and I promise, it will all turn out right.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 11:18AM (-05:00)

Resolution: C.A.R.E.

Friday, December 19, 2008

We are 12 days from the end of 2008 - and people are beginning to think about resolutions for 2009: lose weight, exercise more, save money, clear up all that credit card debt (that reminds me, I need to call John Camuda back...)...you get the picture. Good intentions that last...maybe to MLK Day (if you're lucky). I stopped making lists of resolutions years ago. I tend to pick one "flaw" and focus on that for a year - and let me tell you, God has used that to teach me some valuable lessons about myself! There is a lot of truth in the saying, "be careful what you ask for" because, just because you think you've thought it all through doesn't mean you see it as God sees it for you...

But for the last two years, I have kept returning to the same resolution - well, actually, it is more of a mission statement for the person I want to be - and I think I will be embracing the same resolution for the coming year - 'cause I don't think I've got it all together just quite yet. C.A.R.E. is an acronym for:

C: Communicate generously. Use letters and other forms of communication to let friends, family and loved ones know their importance in my life. In this day and age of the quick email, text message, Facebook and Twitter - we are losing the art of the written word -

the note card that shows up unexpectedly in the mailbox with a stamp on it! I know I love getting mail that is not asking for a donation or soliciting for something I would never support anyway, so wouldn't my friends get the same joy from walking to the mailbox? I am pretty good at doing this, but I could be better. (If you want a card sometime in 2009 - other than your birthday - send me your address and you never know!)

A: Accept people as they are. Stop trying to change people to be who I want them to be and just accept them as they are - warts and all. Yeah, that one is kinda hard for me because I think I know what is best for everyone...must be the Scorpio in me (if you believe in horoscopes and all that stuff). But, if I would just do this, it sure would save me a whole lot of frustration, headaches and tears in the long run. Patience, grasshopper, patience.

R: Return gratitude for every act of kindness. Treat others as you wish to be treated and express gratitude to those who are kind - in expected and unexpected ways. I may have this one (almost) under control. I do tend to do the "thank you" thing almost too well. But, I think what I need to work on is the "treating others how I want to be treated". More patience needed here as well.

E: Embrace every blessing...that God sends my way - even when the blessing shows up in a different form than I expect them. I think we limit God when we only want blessings the way we want them. We pray, "Dear Lord, give me a man 6'4", 200 pounds, athletic, a good singer, nice looking, kind to children and animals" (and no Wayne, I am not talking about you! hahaha) - and instead God sends the 5'6" Christian brother with a good job, good credit, but maybe he has bad skin, bad breath or a crooked, jacked up smile and you are like, "uh, thanks but no thanks"... sometimes our greatest blessings come in the plain brown paper wrapper and not the shiny package with the bow on top.

So, that's my resolution (again) for 2009. What are you resolving to do (or not to do) in the year ahead? Whatever it is,

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 06:44PM (-05:00)

"Ma'am"? Do I look like a "ma'am" to you?...

Tuesday, December 23, 2008

McDonald's has a commercial running where a woman goes in for breakfast and as the server finishes serving her, he says, "have a great day, ma'am." - and she spends the rest of the commercial murmuring about how she is not a "ma'am", she still feels like a "miss" (or "Ms."). At the end of the commercial, a mailroom guy in her office says, "Good morning, Miss" and she feels better - all because she ate a McDonald's chicken biscuit for breakfast. Now, when I first saw that commercial, I laughed...and then, twice in just as many days, two random people called me "ma'am" and I totally understood what she felt and went through. I mean, I remember, as a child, my parents teaching my brother and I to address our elders as "ma'am" and "sir" as a measure of respect - and I remember babysitters rebelling at the very thought of being thought of as an "elder" - now, I know how they feel.

The first incident happened in church when I asked a young man if he would be assuming leadership of the youth program at the church and he responded, "Yes, ma'am." OUCH! Then, yesterday on MARTA (Atlanta's public transportation system), I

asked the young man sitting next to me if he was about to exit the train at the next station and he turned to me and said, "Yes, ma'am" - OUCH again! Now, I know both of these young men were just exhibiting home training and praise God for that, but do I look like a "ma'am"?

Putting this question to a (used to be) very good friend of mine, he said I had indeed passed into "ma'am" territory because I could answer "yes" to 3 out of the following 4 "official ma'am status" questions:

1. Are you over 40 years old? (Actually, he said, "well, you ain't no spring chicken no more", but...whatever!) Yes. I am over 40 years old...

2. Do you wear your hair cut short? Yes. I just cut it all off on November 8th as a matter of fact. According to him, young girls want long hair so they can flirt with it by flinging it, playing with it, etc. Older women ("ma'am"s) have realized the value of short hair - no fuss, no muss, no stress.

3. Do you wear hats? No. Apparently, older women embrace the wearing of hats. We might not want to mess with hairstyles, but we want to be fashionable. After discussing this with him a little, I had to admit that I did like seeing other women in hats, but hadn't worn them because of the bulkiness of my locs for the last six years. He intimated (and I secretly agree) that I'll be a hat wearing sister soon, which will again prove that I am officially a "ma'am".

4. Do you wear comfortable shoes? YES. I am a shoe fanatic (as my shoe closet is a testimony to), but I believe in wearing comfortable shoes whenever possible. I keep a pair of office slippers under my desk just in case the "super cute, match my outfit" shoes get to be too much (usually after lunch) during the day. And I keep a pair of running around shoes in the car just in case a quick trip to the mall turns into a day long adventure.

So there you have it. According to my friend, I am officially a "ma'am". I didn't feel like one before. I don't feel like one now. And I don't think I look like one. Do I have to embrace being one? I don't think so. I think I'm going to head to McDonalds, get me one of those biscuits and wait for the mail room guy to walk by. (and if he knows what's good for him...)

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 08:49AM (-05:00)

"I have prepared a place for you"

Saturday, December 27, 2008

My mother has a goldfish bowl. She is currently out of town and it has fallen upon me to feed the little jokers. And if that is not bad enough, their water has gotten a little murky, so I needed to change the water. Ok, anyone who knows me knows that I am not an animal (and yes, that includes fish) person. I don't get the whole "I gotta feed you but you ain't bringing no money into the house" thing...may be why my brother doesn't live with me, but I digress. (and I am kinda joking...no, not really.)

So, back to the goldfish. I got the new vase to put them in all ready for them. Rocks on the bottom, cool water that had been sitting for at least 24 hours so that their systems would not be shocked by the change in environment...their new home was prepared and



ready. So as I get the scoop to transfer them, do you think they swam peacefully into the scoop to be transported to their new home? OF COURSE NOT! They ducked and dodged and swam as near to the rocks as they could to avoid being caught. I eventually caught them all and they are now swimming happily in their new abode (as evidenced by the picture I snapped and attached.)

But you know this made me think about how we react when God puts us into "new environs" - it may be a new job (or the loss of an old one), or a new relationship or something else that is different. Do we act like my mom's goldfish and resist the change? Or do we trust that He has promised to "prepare a place" for us BEFORE He moves us? I know I am not always as trusting as I should be, but I am striving to change that. I pray that you are as well.

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 10:19AM (-05:00)

Introspective Retrospective...

Monday, December 29, 2008

There are only three days left in 2008, and like everyone else, I am taking some time to reflect on 2008 - what I did (or didn't) do; what I accomplished; what goals were achieved and which were not; what friendships were strengthened and which ones underwent major changes; losses and gains (and not just financial); what I plan to carry with me into 2009 and what I really and truly need to let go of. I think the end of the year is a time when most people really look at themselves and the world around them and take some time to reflect - set some goals for the 365 days ahead - wipe the slate and start over. But before I embrace 2009, I want to pay tribute to 2008:

TRAVEL: Yes, I did a lot of that in 2008. Palatka, FL; Houston, TX; Gatlinburg, TN; Puerto Vallarta, Mexico; Washington DC; Huntsville, AL; New York, NY - (I think I'm missing some) - lots of good memories and fellowships with family, friends and loved ones. Being able to spend time with friends in good times and bad - as we celebrated lives lived, visited with friends who were ill, explored new venues and locales - all will serve as memories when I'm sitting in my rocking chair in the nursing home one day in the future.

GIRLS NIGHTS OUT: Hats off to the girlfriends (and guy pals) that I spent time with this year - usually somewhere eating! - whether at work or around the city or country: Conrad, Melvin, Julie, Lisa, Metha, Robin, Debbie, Ginny, Carol, Cheryl, Alice, DJ and the "best girlfriends in the world" crew; Linda, Hillary...and I am sure I am forgetting someone - charge it to my head, not my heart.

CELEBRATIONS: Kudos to my cousins who did their thing and graduated from college this year (Candace and Caron); to my friends who found their soul mates and jumped the broom this year; smiles and memories for those who were laid to sleep this year; joy for those who added children to their lives - whether through adoption or birth; praises to God for those who were healed or otherwise overcame medical hurdles and obstacles; thanksgiving for those who went through trials and tribulations and came out the other

side stronger and more resilient.

RELATIONSHIPS: 2008 has been a year of change for a lot of relationships in my life. Some have gotten stronger because of the trials and tribulations of the year, while some have undergone a metamorphosis and have changed. And change doesn't necessarily mean bad, just different. I praise God for the friendships that are new and still exciting and waiting to be fully explored; and for those that are like a worn, comfortable pair of slippers - no matter when you "slip into them", they are always warm, inviting and enveloping.

TRIALS: Yes, I had those in 2008 as well. We all were hit in the pocketbook this year with the dramatic changes in our global economy - but God sustained. Even though this was the year for filing insurance claims for me (car, house, and house again), God sustained and blessed. And even when the enemy tried to take my life (Sept 2008), God protected and blessed. Amen! And despite higher unemployment rates than have been seen in decades, I am still blessed with a job that I enjoy 99.9% of the time. I am blessed to work with really great bosses who appreciate me and tell me they do frequently. I don't take that for granted.

POLITICAL CHANGES: Since I have friends on all sides of the political fence, I'll keep this brief. November 4, 2008 will go down in the history books for a lot of reasons, but I will always remember where I was, what I was doing, and how I felt when it was announced that Barack (and Michelle) Obama were headed to the White House. 'Nuff said.

So, what do I want in 2009? Peace, goodwill and prosperity? Of course, but I want more of the same of what I was blessed to receive in 2008. Good times and bad, throughout the year, I truly saw God's Hand at work in my life and the lives of my friends, family and loved ones. I pray as you reflect on the year past and look forward to the year ahead that you will put your trust in the only One worthy of it and trust His Heart, no matter what.

Be blessed and Happy 2009!

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 10:00AM (-05:00)

"the plans I have for you..."

Wednesday, December 31, 2008

My all-time favorite Bible text and promise is Jeremiah 29:11: For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." What an amazing promise to hold onto - especially in uncertain times like the ones we are currently living in. Inspirational writer Corrie Ten Boom puts it this way: Never be afraid to trust an unknown future to a known God."

In just a few hours, we will welcome in a New Year - 2009. Wow. Who woulda thunk it? I remember when Prince released his song "1999" and how we thought that by the time 1999 rolled around, the world would end, Jesus would return, cars would be obsolete because, like the Jetsons, we'd all have jet paks. And let's not forget all the hype around Y2K - the world was really supposed to come to a crashing halt then, but it came and went without even a whimper and now we are almost a decade past it. And here we are - still standing, no jet paks, and while I believe Jesus' return is soon, in mercy, He delays

His return so that we can get, no - be ready.

I don't know what challenges you may be facing as we approach 2009, but I do know that God is in control of your (and my) situation. When I cannot see His Hand, I'm learning to trust His Heart - which is always full of only good things for me. The future is uncertain for a lot of us: the housing market is in the tank and our houses are being devalued by the minute; the unemployment rates nationwide are higher than they have been in decades; the stock market fluctuates daily in a way that reminds me of my favorite rollercoasters; the whole "wars and rumors of wars" prophecy is fulfilled every time you turn on your TV - and YET, God's promise is that He only wants good for you and me. I have to trust that even when I cannot trust anything else.

I pray that you and I will approach 2009 with a new attitude of trust, hope and confidence that all things will work for our good in the days, weeks and months ahead. I wish you all of God's richest blessings: peace, prosperity, good health, abundant love and laughter, and anything else your heart desires. I thank you for all you have meant to me in 2008 and look forward to more good times ahead in 2009. And however you plan to celebrate the entrance of the New Year, I wish you safety and common sense. (hahaha)

Be blessed.

Posted by Just me thinking out loud... at 07:23AM (-05:00)



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