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Rebecca Prince Piasentin

Nancy Magnusson Fagan

Cynthia Cornell Novak

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# The Serendipities of Freedom: What Happens When God Answers Women's Prayers

by

Rebecca Prince Piasentin  
Nancy Magnusson Fagan  
Cynthia Cornell Novak

## Spiritual Journey

Seven o'clock Saturday morning -- it is one of the few profoundly quiet times in our neighborhood. Darkened windows suggest that most people are taking advantage of their one day to sleep in.

As I maneuver my van out of the garage, two friends sleepily approach and climb aboard. We begin what is now a familiar journey down the hill to our Saturday morning prayer group. It is familiar because on and off for several years, we have met very early on Saturday mornings with other Christian women from the Malibu community for prayer. It is a journey because, though we drive less than one mile to our place of prayer, God has used these Saturday mornings to give us the courage to travel from one spiritual place in our lives to another.

We slip into our sacred place, most of us clutching steaming cups of coffee. Who are we? We are of every age and Christian background — single and married; women who have children and women who are childless; professional women and homemakers. Our external lives seem unimportant at this hour. What binds us together is the God of the journey, a Gracious God who has taught us about freedom through the Redeemer Son and the Holy Spirit.

## Shared Assumptions from Galatians

The women who have met together over the

years may not be able to rattle off a litany of shared assumptions; but generally they would agree, we think, with these basic principles found in the book of Galatians:

- It is for freedom that Christ has set us free (Gal 5:1).
- We must find ways to stand firm so that we are not burdened again by a yoke of slavery (Gal 5:1).
- We are to live by the Spirit (Gal 6:18).
- We are to restore each other gently (Gal 6:1).
- We are to carry each other's burdens, and in this way we fulfill the law of Christ (Gal 6:2).
- The Spirit of God produces the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Gal 5:22).

Living in Southern California in 1995 assures that every week the culture(s) of which we are a part — both spiritual and secular — try to enslave us with new and used yokes: wealth, status, family struggles, church work, shame, busy-ness, anger, depression, food and substance abuse. . . . And the list could go on. God has provided, through the avenue of prayer, a means of release.

In short, we can summarize our shared experience in prayer over the past years in this way: When we, as Christian women, invite God to open a path to freedom in the Redeemer Son through the Comforter Spirit, we are not only delivered from the postmodern yokes that enslave us, but we are also led



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to the **serendipities** of freedom. These serendipities are called by the Galatian writer “the fruit of the Spirit:” love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control.

### A Journey Revisited

Our desire today is to walk with you through a meeting of prayer so that you can better picture what we mean by freedom in Christ and the serendipities that come with that freedom.

As we arrive on this particular Saturday morning for prayer, the women speak hesitantly to one another at first, partly because of the early hour, but also because we come with the full knowledge that we have **nothing** to offer each other. We know that on this particular Saturday, as has been the case on every other, we must stand on the promise of our God’s faithfulness — we must stand on what we might call the **principle of grace/weakness**: When we show up weak and empty, and when we invite God to show up full of **power and grace**, He does so — faithfully, week after week.

After we check-in with one another, someone begins a prayer of worship and supplication, and others join in as they are led. Opening prayers praise, honor and invite God’s Spirit to be present:

*Father, we come today as your daughters who love and worship you. We desire to build a throne for you on our praises. We long, Lord, to experience quiet in our spirits that we might worship you as you*

*are worthy to be worshipped.*

*We invite your Healing Holy Spirit to this place.*

*We pray for forgiveness that we might approach your throne room boldly — not according to our own strength but because we wear a robe of righteousness that you have placed on us as your daughters. Anoint us today to bring good news to those with whom we cross paths. Lord, we desire to bind up the brokenhearted and to proclaim freedom to those who have long been captive to the darkness of this world.*

*We desire to know your presence that we might provide for those who grieve a crown of beauty, that we might both experience and bestow on others the oil of gladness and a garment of praise. We long, Lord, to be oaks of righteousness in your kingdom to display your glorious and holy splendor.*

The prayer subsides. There is quiet. The women assembled share a belief that as we listen to the Spirit, God will weave the threads of our lives together into a beautiful and divine tapestry.

The leader asks one of the women to share in more depth about her week. The woman begins to share the details of her sister’s recent visit. She has been aware for a long time that a lifelong tension exists in her relationship with this sister, a lovely accomplished woman who is one year older than the one who speaks. As the woman talks about her sister’s visit, she admits that there were times during the week when she had wanted to scream inside because she so resented her sister’s myriad “helpful hints” about everything from her house-keeping to the way she feeds her birds. The speaker admits that though they are close in age, she thinks of her sister as older, wiser, the gifted one. She confesses that she always feels “one down” in the relationship, as though she can’t measure up to the exacting standards set by this sister who receives increasing praise from their parents. The older sister, in addition to all else that she does so well, is now an attentive and loving caretaker as their parents grow older.

The woman who speaks begins to weep. She says that she knows she loves her sister; however, she experiences jealousy, rage and dissension when she is with her. And she knows the **jealousy, anger** and tension affect other parts of her life. The rest of



the members of the group listen gently. Some nod as they acknowledge the “shock of recognition,” admitting within their own spirits that this one speaking has hit a deep chord that resonates within them as well. Some look intently at the speaker, praying silently that the Lord will reveal themes, scriptures, pictures or prayers for this one who is contrite and heartbroken.

Aware that she has made herself vulnerable among these women who are virtual strangers to her, the woman looks down suddenly at her hands and grows quiet. One of the women in the group quietly moves from where she sits to take a seat beside the one who has spoken. With tears in her own eyes, the woman who has changed seats puts her arm around the speaker and says gently:

*Thank you for the courage to talk about this issue. It takes so much courage to open up areas of our lives that we want to keep carefully hidden. I feel honored that you would open this place before us.*

Several more women gather around. The women rest their hands on her shoulders as she weeps over the shame and grief and anger and confusion and sorrow which she experiences in this relationship. One by one, the women begin to pray:

*Oh, Lord, we come together with this one who has had the courage to open up this place in her life, a place which causes much pain and sorrow. We come as the friends of the man did, Lord, friends who had to lower the wounded one through the roof in order to get close to your son, the Great Physician. We bring this precious one into your Throne Room and stand with her to share this grief.*

*Please teach us Lord how you would want us to pray. And we invite your Spirit to pray prayers of intercession with language far more adequate than our own. Lord, we are struck by the words of jealousy, anger, anguish and dissension. Help us this day to understand the roots of these words and the pain they cause. Lord, we would ask your Holy Spirit of Comfort to come to this one to let her know that she is precious in your sight.*

*Lord, we ask that you be about reconciliation as you are a God of reconciliation through your Son. Lord, we pray that we*

*may have pictures of the roots of this problem.*

At points throughout the prayer, the speaker is asked to explain past memories that have been particularly hurtful. Slowly hurtful memories surface or themes emerge, and the women pray:

*Lord, you are an ever-present God, who loves us and has been with us in darkest hours of pain. Help us to understand that you have saved us from the Evil One who would have destroyed us long ago. Please remove the heavy yoke of jealousy that has kept this one burdened for so many years. Lift the yoke from her, and allow her the Grace to lift the yoke she has placed on her sister through judgments and jealousy.*

*Help us, Lord, to stand under the cross, allowing the blood of your Son to cover each of these wounds of the past. Dress these wounds with the oil of your Spirit.*

*Lord, allow us to grieve with this one over the place in which she has been robbed because attention has been given to another. Help her to grow in new ways as she learns that your love for her is Perfect and that your plan for her cannot be destroyed by earthly mistakes. Lord, speak forgiveness into the heart of this one. Bring her into a spacious place; rescue her because you delight in her.*

The prayers continue. Someone asks a question; another makes an observation; a third offers a new direction for prayer; yet another reads a scripture or sings a hymn or song. The one who is heartbroken may be asked if she can word a prayer of forgiveness for the one who has hurt her. She may be asked if she is able to word a prayer of forgiveness for herself as she seeks to begin again with her family. She may word a prayer of forgiveness for the anger she feels toward God for allowing her to suffer so much humiliation or loss or grief. Or another in the group may word the prayer of forgiveness, aware that at certain times in each of our lives when the pain is most deep, we must intercede one for another. The prayer for this one woman — perhaps having lasted forty-five minutes or an hour or more — ends:

*Lord, pour out your comfort over the next days. Help this precious daughter to know in new ways your love for her. Help*



**W**e have learned that in submitting one to another in prayer and “admitting” one to another in confession, we invite the healing power of Christ and His Spirit into our midst.

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*her to picture your throne room and herself as a loved daughter resting in your Comforting Presence. In the name of Christ, we speak deliverance and healing from the oppression of jealousy, rage, and dissension.*

The prayers and tears subside. Another begins to speak. Week after week, the cycle continues. Women come and go in the group as they have need, opening their deepest selves when they experience the “safety of the circle,” an anointed safety that only a Holy God can provide. They come with every kind of sorrow: some come with a sense of “lostness,” not sure who they are in their own homes or in God’s Kingdom; some come with sins heavy on their hearts which they have a desire to confess and no safe place to do so — no safe place even in their church homes where they often feel they must appear “together” and “happy” in order to “fit in”; some come with a need to find strength in prayer to go on in the confusion of life for one more week; still others come with the deep hurts of abusive childhoods. Each week women encourage other women to record what the Living God is accomplishing in their lives.

Weeks pass. The woman described in the scene above returns to discuss an encouraging dream she has had of the house of her youth. In the dream, she could see the hill on which her childhood home had been built. She saw in the dream a new structure

on that hill. She reports awaking with a sense of being lifted up, offering the interpretation that her insides feel as though they are being recreated in a new way.

She prays a prayer of thanksgiving and joy, happily recounting a new sense of being able to release her sister from the past judgments she had made about her. Those who have prayed with this woman the first time pray again.

They celebrate together the serendipities of this new freedom in Christ — the fruit of the Spirit that has replaced the yoke. They celebrate the **love** which is being strengthened between sisters, the **joy** of relationship, the **peace** that comes when Christ’s Spirit is the redemptive force, the **kindness** that parents receive from children who live in close relationship, the **faithfulness** of Christ to us when we come to him for Strength, the **gentleness** of one’s spirit in the place in which the Savior reigns, the **self-control** possible in relationship when forgiveness has broken the yoke of jealousy.

### **Redemptive Freedom and the Restoration Movement**

The journey down the path to freedom in Christ is one well worn in the Churches of Christ. From the beginning of the Restoration Movement, people who have loved God have desired to be a part of a community of believers who experience freedom in Christ as “Christians only.” It has been this same desire — to find the path to freedom and unity — that has motivated us to make our weekly trek down the hill. We have found ourselves seeking that which our Movement promised, that upon which our Movement was built. We have found ourselves traveling down the hill on Saturday mornings, eagerly seeking the Promised Land of the Restoration Movement.

How might we summarize that which the Lord has provided in our prayer group? In short, we have found:

- **“Christians only.”** We have met women mentors who love the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength and who seek to live their lives as “Christians only.” We have found in this circle of women the unconditional love of Christ necessary to illuminate our own sin and “stuck-ness.”

- **Common yokes enslave postmodern women.** Women in contemporary society have numerous yokes which enslave them, including shame, relational problems, silenced voices, anger, lack of identity, depression, critical and self-critical spirits, jealousy and busy-ness to name a few. We have learned that in submitting one to another in prayer and “admitting” one to another in confession, we invite the healing power of Christ and His Spirit into

our midst.

• **Women who come in the name of Christ as their only power can minister one to another.** God is the Creator of birth and rebirth; Christ is the Great Physician; the Holy Spirit is the Comforter. As we learn to cooperate in our giftedness, we can use God's Spirit to free one another of the yokes of this world, pronouncing forgiveness and deliverance to those who have been held captive.

### **Ye Shall Know the Truth**

American writer Flannery O'Connor offers this wisdom: "You shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you odd." While O'Connor's wittily recast cliché gives pleasure, her statement also contains a good bit of truth. To suggest that the Lord longs to restore sight to the postmodern blind just as He did when He walked among us as Word Incarnate may not seem so odd; however, to advocate prayer as the means to that release might well qualify one as a bit "odd" in our society, a culture so impressed by personal control and image. And to suggest further that the fruit of the Spirit is God's work and not a crop we can ever cultivate on our own -- no matter how many sermons we listen to and no matter how many classes we take or teach — this, above all, marks us as odd.

Odd or not, our experience over the past years has taught us to accept with joy the freedom the Lord extends through His Son and the serendipities of the Spirit connected with that freedom:

. . . When the time had fully come, God sent His Son. . . to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of daughters. Because you are daughters, God sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." So you are no longer a slave, but a daughter; and since you are a daughter, God has also made you an heir (Gal 4:4-7; authors' translation).

Amen.

Rebecca Prince Piasentin is a graduate student in the School of Education and Psychology, Pepperdine University, Malibu, California.

Nancy Magnusson Fagan is the Dean of the School of Education and Psychology, Pepperdine University, Malibu, California.

Cynthia Cornell Novak teaches in the Humanities Division, Seaver College, Pepperdine University, Malibu, California.