

*Special presentation by: Tabitha Shilalo*

*Volunteer Engagement Specialist with UNTO, A Cru Ministry*

*Introduction:*

*It is our pleasure this morning to have Tabitha Shilalo here, as our speaker. She serves as a missionary with UNTO, the Humanitarian Ministry of Campus Crusade for Christ. UNTO seeks to express the kindness of Jesus to people living in the toughest places on Earth by relieving suffering, restoring dignity, and revealing hope. A native of Kenya, Tabitha is married to Pastor Joseph Shilalo and is blessed with three children, Katherine, Jesse and Elizabeth. She lives in Ephrata. Welcome, Tabitha!*

Hi, is it still morning? Good morning! Again, as I have been introduced, my name is Tabitha, and I was born and raised in Kenya. And somehow, I have been in this country for so long, but my accent is not going anywhere. Some words I speak, my children say, Mommy, you don't say it like that. And I tell them, leave me alone because I have tried. My accent is not going anywhere. So, tune your ears in to understand this. I love it that the Bible says that all languages and all tongues will meet to praise the Lord. Amen. So, let us pray before I start. Dear Heavenly Father, in the mighty name of Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of Lords. You pursue us. You look for us. Who am I, that you think about me? Father, we choose to thank you this morning, we choose to bless your name this morning. Thank you, Lord, for giving us an opportunity to be in your presence. Spirit of the living God, have your way in this service. We thank you; we thank you for so many blessings that you have blessed us with. All of this in Jesus' name, we pray, trust and believe. Amen.

Like Mary Ann has introduced me, thank you for your introduction again, my name is Tabitha, and I was born and raised in Kenya. I am married to Pastor Joseph Shilalo, and together we have three children. They are not really children anymore because our youngest just turned 19, our son is 20; He will be 21 next month, and our oldest is 26. I am so blessed. And this morning I see that some of you are still young parents. I remind others that when you are a parent of young children, you read books about parenting. But when you get to my age, you read books about prayer. So, get ready, get ready. Invest in prayer. It's never too early to pray for your children and it is not a waste of time. Let us pray for our children. That is one thing that God has given unto me, to keep on telling and reminding people to be people of prayer. We, as the church that knows the Lord Jesus Christ, we must come to a place where we know that our God answers prayers. He's the only God that answers prayers. The Bible says that all the other gods are the works of men, but our God answers prayers. And so, as the church, it is time, even as the battle gets severe, even as we see our children in the world these days, with things that we did not have. We did not have those cell phones. Maybe you might think I'm not that old, but we didn't. We didn't even have a TV. I turned on the TV as an adult. But these days, our children are growing up knowing how to turn on all these gadgets, these cell phones. That is what we give our children to quiet them, and some of them, they just push a button, and they are exposed to sin. How can we not pray? How can we not call upon the Lord? But I just want to encourage you that we serve a God that answers prayers. Amen.

My message this morning was about being grateful. Gratitude. It seems like we are in that season of thanksgiving. And I was saying this morning, when I was talking to the other group, did you know that the word *thankfulness* is mentioned in the New Testament, more than 70 times? There is a reason why that

word is repeated and repeated. God wants us to be people that are full of gratitude. And then I asked, what do you think when you hear the word gratitude or thanksgiving? Some of us will think about November 24th, Thanksgiving Day. Maybe some of us might think of the food and expectations of that day. That is a day that I really respect, because for most of us, we meet and get a chance just to thank God and just to focus on the things that God has done. Gratitude is more than that. Thankfulness is more than that. And I wanted to read from the Book of Psalms 100. The Bible says, "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before Him, singing with joy. Acknowledge that the Lord is God. He made us and we are His. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture; Enter His gates with Thanksgiving, and His courts with praise, give thanks to Him and praise His name. For the Lord is good and his unfailing love continues forever, and His faithfulness continues through all generations."

I am so glad for this Bible verse that has invited us to enter the gates of our Lord Jesus Christ. We shout with gladness. I don't know how many of you are very passionate. One of the things that I am passionate about is football, American football. I love American football. Especially on a Sunday afternoon, after my husband is done preaching. Sorry, I forgot to say my husband and I, we are pastors at a church in Lancaster City called Streams of Life. It's a small church, but it is growing. We used to go to Hempfield United Methodist, and then we started that church. But right now, we are meeting somewhere in Lancaster and we are ministering to refugees from Congo. And in our church, you are welcome to visit us and bring your dancing shoes. Oh, my goodness! It's always fun! Even especially for this pastor's wife. She enjoys dancing before the Lord! I am so passionate about worshiping my God. And for you to be passionate about something, you must love it. You must enjoy it. You must believe in it. And we as a people, we must love our God. We have to know Him, and how do we know him? Read the what? Immerse yourself in the what? So let me tell you, read the Old Testament. When you read the Old Testament, it tells you about the victories, the battles that God fought, and won. The Bible says He has never lost any battle, this God that you love and worship passionately. He pursues us, He follows us. That is the God we serve. When you become a person who is full of gratitude, you become a joyful person. You cannot be a grateful person and still be a begrudging, complaining person. When you are grateful, you think of the good things. You think of the things that the Lord has done for you, or maybe that another person did for you, and therefore you find yourself saying thank you for doing this, thank you for having me, thank you for sending a card. Thank you!

Thanksgiving. It's not a new topic, it's something that we have done for so many years. But I humbly come before you, and I want to remind you of the small things that sometimes we don't realize are blessings. Having been born in Kenya and then coming here, I have seen life in two different ways. I lived a life of not having. I remember when we were young, we used to go fetch water. You start fetching water when you are young and you don't carry just a small jug; it's a big jug, like a 20-liter thing. And you tie it with rope and put it on your back. And I told the earlier group that sometimes I would be in my house, I would be washing dishes, and just having hot water and cold water, all of a sudden, a song would burst into my spirit, and I would start saying, thank you, Jesus! Thank you, Jesus! And sometimes I even put down what I was doing, in fact, my children have it on video. I took a small trash can in my house and I just started beating it and I was dancing before the Lord and saying, thank you, thank you, thank you! And my children, they don't get it, but to me it's saying Lord, you have blessed me so much, so much that I have hot water, right here before me, right here. So, I wanted to come before you to remind you of those small things. I know this is where most of you were born, just like my children. But start thanking God for the heat in your homes. There are people who don't have it. The devil tends to give us a heart of complaining. Oh, it's so cold. Oh, they want me to do this. Oh, I can't do this. But when you shift to being a grateful person, you make a choice. It's a choice to say, I am going to be grateful. And then, when you feel like you want to complain about the weather, you say, oh, but I thank God I have a car and, in my car, I can crank the heat. Oh, I

have a jacket. Oh, I have some boots on. Oh, I have a scarf. And before you know it, you have so many things to thank God for!

I was speaking in the Hempfield United Methodist Church one day. And a woman who was there listening, wrote an article after that. She said, when I was coming to that meeting, I came begrudgingly and I said, I'm just going to sit in the back. And at the end of that meeting, she said that she went home and started thanking God for everything, for everything she has. We are so blessed that even our mattresses, and the beds we sleep in, you know, after a while, you are tired of it, and you switch to a new one. And that is not bad, I am just coming to say let us be grateful. Let us not complain and enter into the presence of the Lord with gratitude that we have been born again. Do you know that there are people that don't know the love of Jesus Christ? Philippians 4: 6-7 says, "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your request to God." With thanksgiving. When you become a thankful and grateful person, you trade fear with faith. Because you remember, if He has done it before, He can do it tomorrow. And if He can do it today and if He has done it today, He will do it tomorrow.

If I would start thinking of all the things to thank God about here, I don't even know if I could finish. Some of the things I struggle with, for you, because you were born here, would not be an issue for you. But for me, you hear my accent, or my English, it's something that I have to fight to be able to communicate. And it is also something that I am grateful about, but it is something that the devil can intimidate me with, and maybe try to stop me from doing the work that God has called me to do.

And so, as the pastor talked about us giving and sharing with people out there, part of my work with UNTO, formally called Gain, Global Aid Network. It is the humanitarian arm of Campus Crusade, and what we do is we share the love of Jesus Christ by giving people the things that they need. Before I forget, you are welcome to come to our warehouse. It is in Mount Joy. Please come and help us serve the Lord! Since the pandemic hit, we have gone very low with volunteers. And as volunteers have gone low, the need is going high, it's increasing. So, would you please consider joining us and helping us to serve the Lord together? There is work for everybody. If you want to sit down, you will get a job sitting down. But when we look at it as something that we are doing, we are doing it all to be able to fulfill the commandment in Matthew 28, "Go therefore and make disciples all over the world."

So, I'm in charge with the Women's Health Initiative. And bear with me because I will talk about what I do and what we do. We make reusable feminine towels, sanitary towels, and this is something that anybody here can help us with. And how do you help us? You probably have towels in your house that you are not using. Most of us, if we open our towel closet, we have some towels that we have not used for years. Or flannels, flannel bed sheets or shirts that you have not used for so long. This is what we are using to make the reusable sanitary towels. I travel to different countries to take these sanitary towels and when I take them to women, I am given an opportunity to share the love of Jesus Christ with them. This past June, I was in Tanzania for a whole month. We were with other people there, and it was amazing to see that even Muslim women come in, and what we do is we eat together with them, we pray together, and we share the love of Jesus Christ with them. And again, I believe in the Word of God. So, I believe as we share the word of Jesus Christ, that seed will grow within them. And my brothers and my sisters, think about this - you and me, we have been called to populate heaven. And time is not on our side. If we are going to populate heaven by giving a piece of towel that you have in your house, why not? Why not? If it is going to be by you coming and joining us, that is part of us showing our gratitude to God. God, you have blessed me, it is overflowing. What do I do with it? I'm going to help somebody else.

I told the other service that on Friday I had to send money home to feed my in-laws. The part of Kenya that they are from, it has not rained for two years. Kenyans are struggling with the drought right now and it is a severe drought. So, my brother was driving to go there, and these people, they are called the masai, my husband is a masai, and you could see dead cows and sheep on the road. And this is what they depend on. And I don't know why the Lord wanted me to be here today, but maybe just to remind you how blessed we are. And I need to thank you because you have been blessed and you have also been a blessing. We are blessed to be a blessing! So those people don't have anything. It was interesting that when my brother got there, late in the evening, he said they did not even sleep. It was late, but they came to get food. He couldn't even tell them to wait until tomorrow.

So, what am I saying? Let us learn to thank God. Most of us have a fridge in the kitchen and another one in the garage, right? We are so blessed. So today, would you go and thank God for those small things that you see in your house? You have a freezer full of food. Thank God! When you get a liberation of gratitude, even when you come to the service, it doesn't matter how your voice sounds. Nobody can silence you in front of your God. Worship him, be loud like me! Even when I'm watching football, my husband has to tell me, Tabitha, can you turn it down? And I'm like why? Because I'm passionate and as passionate as I am with football, when I come to worship, I'm worshiping the Lord and it is up to you to think about my voice. But me, I will shout before the Lord!

I also wanted to read for you Psalms 92. The Bible says "It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to the most high. It is good to proclaim your unfailing love in the morning, your faithfulness in the evening." It is good for us to be people that are full of thanksgiving. And that's when you find yourself singing, *Count your blessings, name them one by one. Count your blessings, see what God has done. Count your blessings, name them one by one. So many blessings, see what God has done. Amen!*

Let us be people of God, that know our God; a people that will be full of gratitude. Like I said, gratitude is a choice. When you make a choice, you make a trade, you decide that I'm going to do this. And therefore, you find your heart changing into a heart that is having freedom, a freedom that comes with gratitude. If your child is always asking, asking, asking, and not a single time do they ever say thank you. It's different, but there is a time that they will come and say, thank you Mummy for doing this. And after that, giving is not so hard, because they appreciate it. Let us be a people that appreciate God. Let us not be a people that only thank God on the 24th of November every year. If the Thanksgiving dinner is late, we eat quickly because we want to watch football after that. So, it's like, who is going to load the dishwasher so that we can sit down for football? No. Gratitude should be continuous. It should be something that is overflowing from our heart. When you choose gratitude, you have to let go of something else, like bitterness, anger, complaining, grudges. You trade it with thanksgiving, with joy, with peace, and your life changes. In fact, if you just choose to be a grateful person, even people who are living with you, they will see the difference. They will see the difference.

Even here in America, we have so many things and still, it's so easy to complain. But for me, I look at the hospitals. We have the best hospitals. We are so blessed that we can even be sitting in the comfort of our houses and medication can be brought there. You can even have a nurse at home. So many blessings. I'm just humbly here reminding you of your blessings. God has sent me here to remind you that you have been so, so, so blessed to be in a church like this.

I hope you are understanding me. Last year when we went to Africa, we were trying to show a movie, a Jesus movie, and the church we were in was like a big hall but did not have windows. They were still working on it. It was during the day, so there is bright light coming in. There was no screen, so we had to improvise. And I'm telling you, even with all of that, if you could see the attention these people were paying, listening, and wanting to know about Jesus. If there is a place that should be burning with worship and gratitude, it is America. It is us because God has been good to us. There is a song that I always sing. And it goes like this, *"You have done me well, you have done me well, you have done me well, Jesus. You have done me well, you have done me well, you have done me so well, Jesus."*

That's why even when I go to places like Wal-Mart, I find something to thank God for. I went to Wal-Mart one time and again, please bear with me, if I keep on talking about sanitary towels, that's my office. I went with my daughter, and she was trying to pick which kind she wanted, and all of a sudden, I started saying, "Thank you, Jesus, that we can pick!" And my daughter said, "Mommy, we are at Wal-Mart!" I said, "Wal-Mart needs Jesus to!"

There is something in me that cannot stop but give glory to God, for He has been so good. He has been faithful, even for me to be standing in front of you, it's a miracle, it's an honor. May God bless you as you choose the hat of gratitude, this Thanksgiving from now, henceforth. Let us see if we can - I know we cannot out give God, but can we try? Thank you, Jesus. Thank you, God. Thank you, Holy Spirit. And see what will come out of it. May God bless you and let us be people who are full of thanksgiving, not only in November, but all year long. Amen.