

city lights

Established in 1994 - Main Street Church in Brigham City, UT (www.msbc.org) - No. Four online edition - Summer 2017



"I am no longer anxious about anything, as I realize that He is able to carry out His will for me. It does not matter where He places me, or how. That is for Him to consider, not me, for in the easiest positions He will give me grace, and in the most difficult ones His grace is sufficient."

– James Hudson Taylor (1832–1905). Taylor served 51 years as a missionary to China

This issue of *City Lights* is the fourth online edition since its inception in 1994 as *The Fellowship*

Summer 2017
Lessons Learned

“For whatever was written in earlier times was written for our instruction, so that through perseverance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”—Roman 15:4

Cover Photo

Heaven’s Promise

Marsha McLaren—Woodland Park, Colorado

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Sharing Your Lessons Learned

“But you are the ones chosen by God, chosen for the high calling of priestly work, chosen to be a holy people, God’s instruments to do His work and speak out for Him, to tell others of the night-and-day difference He made for you—from nothing to something, from rejected to accepted.” —1 Peter 2:9-10 (Msg)

Editor’s Note: I have had the amazing privilege since 1994 of showcasing and sharing the stories of people saved by grace. This issue of *City Lights* is beautiful example of how the Holy Spirit works in the hearts of those who belong to Jesus. As you read each story, I’m sure you will find a renewed assurance of God’s love and faithfulness, no matter the trial or circumstance. He leads each of us to stay in the Word, to draw closer to Jesus who knows our hearts and what lies ahead, and to trust Him fully. Thank you to everyone who contributed! May this issue be a blessing you can share with others.

City Lights, the bi-annual online devotional journal of Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah, is dedicated to the words of Jesus in Matthew 5:14-16 who called us to let our lights *“shine before men in such a way that they may see and glorify our Father who is in heaven.”*

Our words and creative expressions, besides glorifying God, should also encourage our readers. Therefore, all contributions must reveal our Christ-like love to all men, be biblically based, and focused on a stated theme for each issue.

City Lights ministers within the Statement of Faith and is an extension of the Core Values of Main Street Church (<http://www.msbc.org/statfaith.htm>).

The theme for our Winter 2017 issue is:

**Christ Jesus, My Light
in the Darkness**

“Later, Jesus spoke to the people again and said, I am the light of the world. The man who follows Me will never walk in the dark but will live his life in the light.” —John 8:12 Phillips

To receive a copy of our Writer’s Guidelines, please send an email request. As the editor of *City Lights*, I reserve the right to suggest changes or to disallow publication altogether.

Deadline: November 1, 2017

Contact: Diane at dinahwriting09@gmail.com
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Meditation: God's Instructions & Promises

Collage, Meditation on Proverbs. Dorothy Catlin.



“Give instruction to a wise man, and he will be still wiser; teach a righteous man, and he will increase in learning.”

– Proverbs 9:9

“Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.”

–Galatians 6:7

“Whoever heeds instruction is on the path to life, but he who rejects reproof leads others astray.”

–Proverbs 10:17

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

–James 1:5

“Restlessness and impatience change nothing except our peace and joy. Peace does not dwell in outward things, but in the heart prepared to wait trustfully and quietly on Him who has all things safely in His hands...the deepest spiritual lessons are not learned by His letting us have our way in the end, but by His making us wait, bearing with us in love and patience until we are able to honestly pray what He taught his disciples to pray: ‘Thy will be done.’”

–Elizabeth Elliot

“Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but he who hates reproof is stupid.” – Proverbs 12:1

“Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make straight your paths. Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil. It will be healing to your flesh and refreshment to your bones.” –Proverbs 3:5-8

“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing.”

–John 15:4-5

“And now, O sons, listen to me: blessed are those who keep my ways. Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. Blessed is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors. For whoever finds me finds life and obtains favor from the Lord, but he who fails to find me injures himself; all who hate me love death.” –Proverbs 8:32-36

“Seek the *Lord* while you can find Him. Call on Him now while He is near.

Let the wicked change their ways and banish the very thought of doing wrong. Let them turn to the *Lord* that He may have mercy on them.

Yes, turn to our *God*, for He will forgive generously.”

– Isaiah 55:6-7 (NLT)

“My dearly loved brothers, understand this: Everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to anger, for man’s anger does not accomplish God’s righteousness. Therefore, ridding yourselves of all moral filth and evil, humbly receive the implanted word, which is able to save you.” –James 1:19-21

“Let there be no more resentment, no more anger or temper, no more violent self-assertiveness, no more slander and no more malicious remarks, Be kind to each other, be understanding. Be as ready to forgive others as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.” –Ephesians 4:31-32

Joining and Leaving HP

By Jim Catlin—Main Street Church—Brigham City, Utah

All little boys have heroes. And, overwhelmingly, these larger than life ‘man-gods’ are sports figures. But after reading a single book, a biography, I knew my destiny was to be the next Thomas Alva Edison. Many years later I came across a quote of Edison’s, “To invent, you need a good imagination and a pile of junk.” Was it any wonder then that I dedicated a hallowed spot in my bedroom where batteries, wires, buzzers and magnets beckoned for my attention after school?

My parents looked on cautiously, wondering if any other child considered play-time to be salvaging electrical parts from old radios. While most parents dealt with the benign presence of goldfish in their kids’ rooms, mine had to grapple with the possibilities of electrical fires or, what do they call it? Critical mass?

As luck would have it, we moved to California for my senior year of high school to a place now famously known as Silicon Valley. Here, the transistor was king and computers were just being birthed! Here Hewlett-Packard Company (HP) was king, Intel was just getting its legs, and Steven Jobs had yet to build his first computer in his parents’ garage. The providence of God had dropped me into electronic Mecca.

After six years of college, every day of which was a constant diet of technology, my hunger remained unsated. I attended some on-campus interviews and afterward got a call back from HP! Having passed the phone screening, I was invited for a follow-up factory visit that resulted in eight more hours of grueling technical interrogation from eleven engineers in Research and Development.

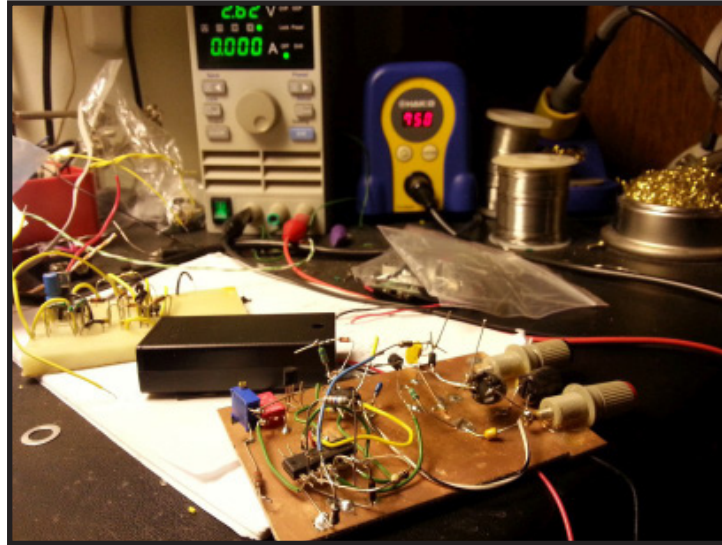
While tiring, I was buoyed through the day by a sort of low-grade euphoria. But when I was shown “lab stock,” I became utterly transported. There in front of me was a holy sight to an engineer: row after row of neatly catalogued electronic parts, overflowing with cornucopian glory! All of my familiar after-school friends were there, and more, assembled in rank and file as a choir to woo the

helpless engineer with their irresistible siren song!

My guide, dramatically sweeping his hand across this vision, spoke enticingly, “All this can be yours to create circuits if you join us.” I stopped breathing and my heart raced, almost as though I had stumbled into Ali Baba’s cave of golden treasures.

Years later my guide, now a close friend, confided that it was a test. Evidently, in that moment, my breathlessness had gotten me the job.

Join them I did, and Dorothy and I found ourselves returning to our Silicon Valley haunts from high school. What a plus it was to find ourselves surrounded by family once again.



Consider All the Possibilities! Photo: Jim Catlin 2017

At work, Edison’s admixture of imagination and “junk” was like a modern alchemy. The stunning spectrum of electronic parts to which I had unlimited access fueled a frenzy of invention on my part for which the company’s customers paid top dollar. It was like gourmet cooking. I would conceive a design, a recipe, head off to the pantry of “lab-stock” to retrieve the ingredients and then return to the stovetop of my workbench to lovingly simmer and stir them together with my soldering iron. I looked up one day with a startling realization! I was finally Edison.

During these first few years in Silicon Valley, working full-time at HP, I also found my church involvement strangely changing. Dorothy and I became fast friends with another couple who, like ourselves, were quite musical and we formed a music group. Before we knew it, we were spending most of our weekends singing at large Christian events and retreat centers.

At concerts in between musical sets I was doing most of the relating to the audience. It was surprising to me to discover how comfortable God had now made me in speaking before hundreds of people. *How had that happened?*

During that same time, I was recruited to volunteer with Young Life, a Christian ministry to high school students. Our weekly meetings were high-spirited and zany, sharing the Gospel with lively songs, silly skits and candid talks. And

here it happened again. Nearly every week I found myself standing in front of this incited tribe of teens explaining God's love in five minutes or less. *Where did this come from?*

To cap it off, I suddenly found myself at church in front of over one thousand people hosting the worship portion of the Sunday service. The pastor responsible for worship had seen something in me and based on a hunch (leading of the Spirit?) he asked me to "try" hosting this portion of the Sunday morning service. Oddly, I was at ease and strangely suited for the job! For a teen who had been so plagued by nauseous aversion to social interaction, this was a strange development indeed.

In the midst of all of this increasing busyness, we had decided to start a family. However, we despaired being financially able since Silicon Valley's real estate was sky-rocketing in value, the fastest rise in the country. When HP offered me a transfer to a newly formed division in Spokane, Washington, we investigated.

After a brief visit to Spokane, the Holy Spirit led us to leave our families behind in California and strike out on a new life in Washington. When the locals kept telling us that Spokane's best feature was that, "It's a great place to raise kids," we took the hint. We left Silicon Valley and our first child arrived nine months later in Spokane.

Over the next decade, God filled out our home with four delightful children. I continued to advance and enjoy my work at HP. Dorothy and I became increasingly involved with music at church. I was hosting the Sunday morning services every week in front of hundreds of people. We had even taken a lead role in founding a new church in the Spokane Valley. God was good to us and everything was perfect.

Then late one spring, we got the rare opportunity to leave the kids at home and take a brief escape to the Oregon coast, an oft-visited locale for our family. We had really needed the rest.

One thing about the Oregon coast, which newcomers find somewhat unsettling, is the preponderance of signs warning about Tsunamis. I have always chuckled at the posted uncommon advice: "Walk to higher ground." Little did I know that at this beach, during this visit, I would encounter my own Tsunami, which would eventually sweep me away from HP and into full-time ministry.

After a lovely day at Cannon Beach, we were enjoying an exquisitely quiet evening of reading. I must add, the hearts of parents with four young children literally ache for these rare moments. But at the coast, I also love solitary walks on the beach to be still with my thoughts and to pray. I envision God strolling with me as we talk about the things on my heart. And at night, the source of the surf's roar is mysteriously invisible and wonderfully enveloping.

So I closed my book and announced my intention to stroll down the beach to Haystack Rock and back. This iconic rock of postcard fame was a thirty-minute walk down Cannon Beach. Dorothy made note of the time, expecting me to be gone for an hour.

From our hotel room it took a few minutes to cross the dry sand of the upper beach, the part that the tides seldom touch, to reach the easier walking sand nearer the surf. When I felt the firmness of the damp sand underfoot, I turned south following the shoreline to that massive rock which stood like some giant asteroid dropped in the surf. Immediately I was stopped in my tracks.



Haystack Rock—Ecola, Oregon. Photo: Jim Catlin

A voice? But I was totally alone on the beach! The light rain and ever-present winds had kept the less resolute at home.

But in that broad and solitary place, I was arrested by the presence of a message. A message that seemed to originate from very nearby. “You are leaving electronics and entering ministry full-time.”

I am often asked, “Was it audible?” Well, no. But the better question is, “Was it ambiguous?” to which I can reply, “No. It was certainly NOT ambiguous.” Not only did it arrest my feet, but its clarity was unavoidable. In contrast, Christians are familiar with the Biblical phrase, the “*still, small voice*” of God, which implies that you might miss it. But this was not that. Quite the opposite actually. The adjective “unavoidable” is apt, because I felt like it now blocked my way down the beach. I had to negotiate it if I was to move forward.

Of course, I knew the real source of the message. I had no reflex to spin around and catch whoever had snuck up behind me. So, looking up instead, I found my voice and said defiantly, “No!” Head down, I walked around the message, around Him, punctuating my resolve with my deep heel marks in the sand. Even as I marched off, I knew that this would not succeed. This message, His presence, were not so easily sidestepped

To digress slightly, I am plagued with a theatrical imagination so as I recount this story, an image comes to mind that reflects the actual interplay that took place. At one point down the beach I really did abruptly halt and spin around. I confronted Him. In a way, I was demanding more of an explanation but there was only silence. It was as if, and here’s the theatrical imagination, as if I could see His face showing only the barest of smiles. As if He was holding back a chuckle, knowing how fruitless the drama of this moment was. Knowing that years later we would both laugh out loud about the moment.

With a “harrumph,” I lit off down the beach again not knowing what else to say. But a creeping awareness formed in my mind about how successful God is at these kinds of confrontations. Jonah came to mind. Like him, all I really wanted to do in this moment was register my anger, my opposition to the message. Given the similarity of our tantrums and the nearness of the ocean, I suppose I should have feared the possibility of God reusing that great fish to deal with me, too.

I had reached Haystack Rock without a clear strategy to dissuade God. But I knew that in turning back up the beach, the brooding was over and it was now time for me to engage the message and the Messenger.

In my imagination, He was no longer following me but walking backwards in front of me. In this way, He was saying that He was listening. I knew I had His full, undivided attention, so I made my case as we walked.

“Look, I enjoy my few hours of volunteer ministry at church, but I love electronics. I love the challenge. I love the creativity. I love soldering stuff together and watching it come alive. I love the people at work and, moreover, they rely upon me. I love serving them. This is me.” I couldn’t shake the image of that slight smile as my words were received in silence.

Repeatedly, I restated my case. After a mile of impassioned monologue, I was back to the starting point. The exact spot where the message had dropped on me an hour before. I had to leave the firm sand and slog through the dry sand to the hotel. I knew that this was where we needed to “finish” the conversation. So I made my last impassioned pitch.

“Look, this is what I am trying to say. Electronics, engineering, circuit design...all of that. You know. This is who I am!”

Once again, with stunning clarity, He simply replied, “You haven’t got a clue who you are.”

I was speechless because, as I considered it, He knew me better than I. In contrast to hearing, listening is letting the words travel into an inner place. I stood still and listened. And as I replayed the words, I found my first calm moment in the evening. He was right. He knew me. Of course, He knew me! He Psalm-139-knew-me! He could not be mistaken about me, so His plans were guaranteed to fit me. To fit the “me” that He had created, The “me” that I had yet to discover.

So I said to myself, “Jim, don’t be a moron. Let Him do this. You have to pry your fingers off of electronics.” So I took a deep breath and on that piece of sand, I yielded. I am always amazed at this God who desires that we walk with Him toward our best rather than dragging us there instead. In His graciousness, He wanted me to look forward in anticipation and to be confident in His knowledge of me.

Before I arrived at our hotel room, God seemed to assure me that the change would not be immediate. There was method to this. In that delay I understood that He was giving me more time to settle my heart with the plan. I saw grace in that.

I opened the hotel room door and upon seeing me, Dorothy’s face suddenly paled! Her immediate question was, “Are you okay?”

“What do you mean? I asked.

“Well, you look like you’ve been mugged or something. Have you been mugged?”

I thought for a second and chuckled. “I suppose you could say that!” I sat on the bed, shaking my head as I told her the whole story.

After returning home, I was wondering about the onset of these oncoming changes and realized that I wanted some better clues as to the timing of this thing. In addition, the memory of the experience was so distant, so fantastic that I began to slightly question the reality of the event. So in prayer I proposed a solution.

“Look God. I have an idea. Remember Gideon? I have a ‘fleece’ idea.”

Silence.

“Okay, don’t be angry with me, but here goes. You know that I am crazy busy here at HP. I have my fingers in all sorts of pies, and I am relied upon for so many things. It occurs to me that it would be wrong to just abandon all this and leave all these efforts in the lurch. That’s just not right. So here’s my proposal, my fleece. On the day that I have absolutely nothing to do at HP, then I will take it as my cue to resign.”

Notice that I didn’t ask God to get me fired but to just have me become idle. Given my career experience at HP, this was simply unimaginable. My problem at HP was always in doing too much. I had a reputation as being something of an electronic Swiss-Army-Knife. Once, when the entire engineering staff had received lucrative early retirement offers, mine had been deliberately withheld. The thought of having absolutely nothing to do seemed utterly fantastic. So, satisfied with God’s acceptance of my proposal, I put it out of my mind.

Three years after my encounter on the beach, it happened. My work at HP had dramatically increased, not decreased! I was now feverishly developing new business for HP on an international scale. I was flying to Europe a lot. While the circumstances at work seemed inconsistent with my “fleece,” unbeknownst to me, the change was now at my doorstep. Behind the scenes at HP, reorganization had been in full swing. Change was afoot and poised to emerge.

One morning, I came into work and sat in my cubicle getting ready to plan my day when my boss plopped down in the chair facing me. So uncharacteristic was this that I knew to pay close attention to his next words. Defusing the tension, he assured me that I was not being fired and then went on to say, “Well, I don’t quite know how to say this,

but here I go. I am a little embarrassed to say this, but we have nothing for you to do right now.”

I watched his lips continue to move, but I heard no sounds after that. Those were *the* words! “Nothing for me to do.” With their paycheck assured, most people would receive such good news with an immediate smile on their face.

But so unexpected was the face that I made that I suspect, my boss went away confused. It was indeed a tidy close to nearly two decades at HP, and now no one would see my leaving as abandonment.

My boss got up to walk away and my eyes fell on the empty chair. Okay, here again my theatrical imagination placed a newcomer into the seat. It was the One who had dogged me down that beach and who had granted me the extra time to warm to His plan. I imagined His eyebrows raised high up on His forehead and the corners of His mouth slowly rising into a wide grin. There was a magnificent pause.

And then, without warning, I threw my head back and let loose with the loudest laugh that my cubicle had ever withstood. And somehow I knew that I was not laughing alone.

“You make known to me the path of life;
in Your presence there is fullness of joy;
at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.

—Psalm 16:11

Formally trained as an engineer, **Jim Catlin** keeps pestering the Creator about why He made things the way He did. And for the last four decades, those questions have become more focused on the weightless and enduring issues of the heart and less about the mechanics of matter and energy. Jim and Dorothy just celebrated 40 years of marriage and have four grown children and two grandchildren. He serves as pastor at Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah.





The Hardest Substance on Earth

by David Roper – Boise, Idaho
Used by permission

*“Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all
flesh. Is anything too hard for Me?”*

–Jeremiah 32:27

Until recently the diamond was thought to be the hardest substance on earth, but recent studies have uncovered two minerals that are harder still: wurtzite boron nitride and lonsdaleite. Both materials are four to five times harder than any substance ever measured.

There is one substance even harder—the human heart. It can be the hardest thing on earth.

Do you live with a stubborn spouse, a rebellious teenager, a resentful mother-in-law? God can create a new heart in that person: He can *“remove the heart of stone”* from them and *“give (them) a heart of flesh”* (Ezekiel 36:26).

The heart is that part of us that regulates our desires, thoughts and behavior. It can be redeemed. The most stubborn, obdurate, insensitive heart can become a heart of flesh—soft, reasonable, malleable and responsive.

And how does God melt the human heart? Through His love, a love that can *“cause the rocks to flow.”* And how does God's love reach our adversaries? Through our love. We have to take His love into our own hearts and then show it to them.

Years ago, I saw a cartoon by Charles Addams on the cover of *The New Yorker* magazine depicting an old curmudgeon, clad in rumpled pajamas and robe, barricaded in his room. He had just secured the door for the night with four locks, two deadbolts and a chain latch. Only after the last lock was fastened did he notice a small envelope that had been slipped beneath the door. On the envelope was a large sticker in the shape of a heart. Someone broke through his defenses with a valentine! Love found a way.

Ah, you say, you don't know the heart of the one I live with. He has a heart of stone. No, I don't know that heart, but I

do know this: God once drew enough water for millions of people from a slab of flint (Psalm 114:8). *“Nothing is too hard for the Lord”* (Jeremiah 32:17).

Having written that, may I issue a caveat: I have framed my thoughts in an optative mood, for we can only be hopeful, not certain. God can soften any heart, but He has granted each of us the dignity of self-determination. We can resist His will.

Pharaoh *“hardened his heart,” “hardened his heart,” “hardened His heart”* (Exodus 8:15,32), and so God *“hardened his heart”* (Exodus 9:12), a judicial hardening for which there was no remedy.

*“He who is often rebuked, and hardens his neck,
Will suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy”*
(Proverbs 29:1 NKJV).

God will plead with us, He will wait on us, but if we long resist His wise and loving will, He will give us what we desire. But, in consequence, He will send a swelling emptiness into our souls (Psalm 106:14-15).

David Roper says that he and his wife, Caroline, do clergy support, caring for pastors and their families that minister in very small places around the state. Most of them are overworked, underpaid, and under-appreciated. We try to be there for them to do whatever we can to encourage them in the work that God has given them to do.



Life Without My Old Suitcase

by Joan Ott— Main Street Church, Brigham City, Utah

Growing up, I was part of a family whose religious beliefs were very strong. We all were taught that we needed to do our part, try our best, and fulfill our callings. We were kept busy doing all the things that a religion requires. We felt pretty good about that and were so grateful we had our "faith." The rules, however, seemed to control us, not our faith.

Walking my new Christian path, I realized that I've carried my suitcase full of old beliefs along with me. When I left my religion and started learning about true biblical Christianity, I pulled the suitcase out quite often to examine what beliefs were coming from my former faith and what were actually biblical.

As time went on, I've needed to do this less often. In fact, I thought I'd proverbially "put the suitcase away." But recently I discovered there was one item left. You see in times of stress, fear, or loneliness, a thought would pop into my mind: "You're not born again! You didn't do it right." I've been struggling with this off and on for quite a few years, because where others tell of their born-again experience and know exactly the date and sometimes the hour in which it occurred, I don't have that same assurance.

Recently through Bible study, I learned a wonderful truth: being born-again was never dependent on my works. It is a supernatural work of God through the Holy Spirit. We literally are made into new creatures by His will, so even though I don't know exactly when I was born again, I know that my God is trustworthy and will always do what He says He will! I am not the same person I was nine years ago.

He is taking this jar of clay and molding it into His own creation. My journey is full of joy, and I am able to look at life differently, without a cloud of fear following me wherever I go.

I understand that Christ is yoked to me and makes my burdens lighter. I know the Holy Spirit lives inside me and that I'm never alone. Believing this has given me a peace I never knew before. Evidences? God has given me words to speak and a new song to sing.

My natural inclination is to stay in the background, observing what goes on around me. But now I am in awe that I am able to forget myself and open up more in speaking with others at church, during Bible study, and even in public. This is something God is doing. I can't take credit for it. For many years, only a handful of people knew the real me. I just couldn't open up and talk.

I have always loved music, playing the piano and singing for many years. When I started attending Main Street Church services, I was drawn in at worship time. I literally fell in love with the music. I would cry though almost every song. It was so different than the stodgy hymns I grew up singing. Eight years ago, I could never have imagined that I would be privileged to be part of a worship team!

During high school I sang a lot, but I was always part of a large choir. One time I got up enough courage to try out for a smaller group, but I didn't make the cut. Because of this, I never tried again. So the shy part of me never thought it would be possible to join a worship team.

However, one of my dearest friends was on our worship team. Just before she moved away, she encouraged me to take her place. I prayed about this and talked to my husband. He told me I should try. So I spoke with the worship leader, and she said, "Come to practice to see what it's all about."

I've been going ever since and it continues to be a wonderful journey for me. Through the patience and mentorship of our worship leader, I have learned so much. Some things like syncopation don't come easy to me. But I do know this: worship happens. When I sing, I forget about myself. This is such a mystery to me.

Serving in this capacity has taught me so much. The songs we sing are grounded in the Scriptures and teach God's truth. I have a song in my heart so much of the time and even wake up quite often with one in my mind. I realize now this is God working in me.



So now when I'm vulnerable and feeling low, I can truly be confident in the fact that I am born again, because it's not me who was responsible for this occurrence. I just needed to come to Christ, believing in Him. He has done everything else necessary.

I've unpacked the last item in my suitcase and will never need to open it again!

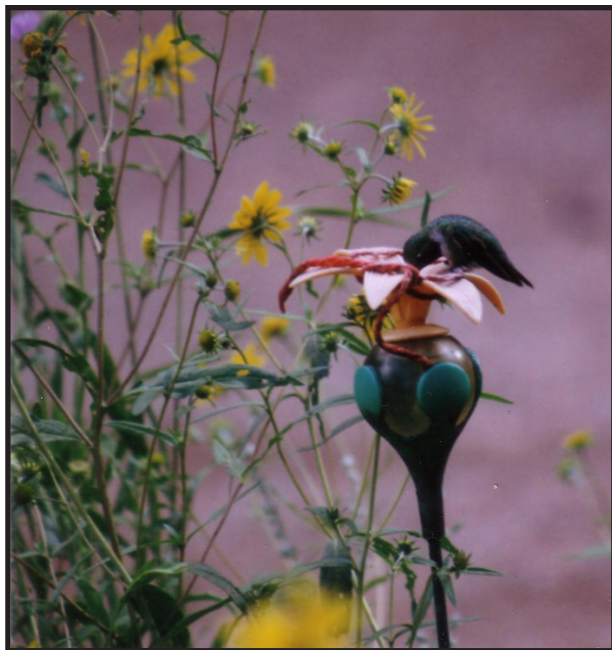
Joan Ott lives in Pleasant View, Utah, with her husband of nearly 36 years. They have four children and five grandchildren with another one coming in June. She works as office manager in their family business. She loves singing, listening to music, planning and hosting parties, swimming, and most of all spending time with her family.



“I tell you for certain that everyone who hears My message and has faith in the One Who sent Me has eternal life and will never be condemned. They have already gone from death to life.”

—John 5:24 CEV

Taste and See. Photo: Marsha McLaren



“Worship is giving God the best that He has given you. Be careful what you do with the best you have. Whenever you get a blessing from God, give it back to Him as a love gift. Take time to meditate before God and offer the blessing back to Him in a deliberate act of worship. If you hoard a thing for yourself, it will turn into spiritual dry rot, as the manna did when it was hoarded. God will never let you hold a spiritual thing for yourself; it has to be given back to Him that He may make it a blessing to others.”

— Oswald Chambers

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Do the Next Thing

By Vaneetha Rendell Risner—Raleigh, North Carolina

www.danceintherain.com.

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I have been barely functional for the last several months.

Participating in a clinical trial for post-polio since the fall has left me exhausted, struggling with crushing fatigue and discouragement. I feel drained and overwhelmed. So many things have been left undone. My desk, piled with things to do, seems too daunting to even approach. Where do I start? Since I can't do everything, I wonder if I should bother to do anything.

As I sat at the table pondering my options, I remembered this advice from Elisabeth Elliot. Advice that has taken me through numerous trials and countless days. Days when I felt inundated and didn't know what to do. Days when it seemed impossible to accomplish anything.

Do the next thing.

These simple four words that have fueled me through the mundane and the monumental. Somehow they brought clarity and strength when I needed it. Direction when I felt overwhelmed.

They provided me a framework after my son died. "Do the next thing" meant take a shower. Write the obituary. Plan a funeral. And after the initial flood of activity, it was invaluable advice in grieving when I still had the daily tasks of life before me. Make dinner. Beg God for grace. Do the laundry. Read the Bible. Call a friend. Take a nap.

And then years later, wondering how I was going to make it as a single parent, I followed the same advice. I was obsessing and lamenting over how our broken home would affect my children. Would they love God? How would they process their pain? How could I even maintain a household in the midst of insanity?

All I wanted to do was curl up in a ball and cry. Give in to self-pity. Make it all go away. But I knew that I needed to face what was before me. I couldn't hide.

I would ask God for strength, and then do the next thing. Make dinner. Drive them to their game. Prepare my Bible study lesson. Pray with them at night. There was no sense worrying about the future. I couldn't control it anyway. I could just do the next thing.



Making Green Tomato Chutney. Photo: Diane Kulkarni

And each time, by just doing the next thing, I was able to make it through. I had just enough light for the next step. But that was sufficient. It was all that I needed. More information would not have been helpful.

I had to do the next thing in the strength that God provided. And trust he would supply what I needed. While the future looked dim and unknown, I knew that everything was under his loving sovereign control. I had to take God's hand in the dark, trust he would guide me and then act on the information I had in front of me.

When I started living that way, I began experiencing tremendous freedom. Somehow the weight of my decisions was lifted. I didn't need to figure it all out. I just needed to be connected to God. To hear his voice. To be still. And most of all, to trust him.

So now when I feel overwhelmed at the enormity of a situation, I begin by tackling the simplest most mundane tasks. And then move to the things that I have been putting off because they are either unpleasant or I don't know where they'll lead. I have discovered that the things I feel inadequate to face fully, I can handle one small thing at a time.

I know I can't think of everything that needs to be done. I can just focus on the next thing I need to do. Sometimes it's just to get up and make dinner. Or write an email that I've

been dreading. Or make a phone call I've been putting off. Each time I obey, God gives me clarity to do the next thing after that.

This simple advice, to do the next thing, has helped countless people. I first read it in Elisabeth Elliot's book, *The Shaping of a Christian Family* (p. 178-79), from a poem her mother loved.

On her *Gateway to Joy* radio program, Elisabeth explained how "do the next thing" had been so helpful to her. Elisabeth and her husband, Jim, had been serving on the mission field in Ecuador when he was martyred, leaving her alone with an infant daughter.

"When I went back to my jungle station after the death of my first husband, Jim Elliot, I was faced with many confusions and uncertainties. I had a good many new roles, besides that of being a single parent and a widow. I was alone on a jungle station that Jim and I had manned together. I had to learn to do all kinds of things, which I was not trained or prepared in any way to do. It was a great help to me simply to do the next thing."

Elisabeth goes on to say:

"I've felt that way <other> times in my life, and I go back over and over again to an old Saxon legend, which I'm told is carved in an old English parson somewhere by the sea. I don't know where this is. But this is a poem which was written about that legend.

The poem says, "Do it immediately, do it with prayer, do it reliantly, casting all care. Do it with reverence, tracing His hand who placed it before thee with earnest command. Stayed on omnipotence, safe 'neath His wing, leave all resultings, do the next thing." (The poem in its entirety is here.)

If you are feeling discouraged or overwhelmed, I encourage you, just to do the next thing. Pray and then do the next thing after that. Trust God with the results. His yoke is easy and His burden is light. He will guide you as you look to Him.

Just do the next thing.

Vaneetha Rendall Risner is passionate about helping others find hope and joy in the midst of suffering.



She is the author of the book *The Scars That Have Shaped Me: How God Meets Us in Suffering* and is a regular contributor to *Desiring God*.

Vaneetha and her husband Joel have four daughters between them and live in North Carolina where she blogs at www.danceintherain.com.

I am Here by God's Appointment

By Andrew Murray, 1895

From the book, Though the Mountains Shake by Amy Carmichael

"Then something painful happened. This is how he [Murray] met it: he was quiet for a while with his Lord, then he wrote these words for himself:

First, He brought me here. It is by His will I am in this strait place: in that fact I will rest.

Next, He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace to behave as His child.

Then, He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow.

Last, In His good time He can bring me out again—how and when, He knows.

Let me say I am here,

(1) By God's appointment, (2) In His keeping,
(3) Under His training, (4) For His time."

Quotations from Amy Carmichael's book, *Though the Mountains Shake* are used by permission of the Dohnavur Fellowship



HOPE IS PATIENCE WITH THE LAMP LIT.
—Tertullian

The Will To Live

by *Bill Sweeney* —Willis, Texas

<https://unshakablehope.wordpress.com>

I almost made it through a whole year without being hospitalized or having any additional health problems. Almost. Then, with just a few days left in 2016, I caught a cold. The “common cold” is not much more than an annoyance for otherwise healthy people, but for someone like me with weakened breathing muscles and only 30% of my lungs functioning, the common cold is much more than an annoyance.

On the morning of the last day of the year, I was having an extremely difficult time breathing, even wearing my breathing mask. In addition to that, I couldn’t keep anything down. I was a mess, more than usual. Mary and I both assumed it was pneumonia again, so she called 911 and within minutes we were in an ambulance en route to the hospital. ALS has brought us one adventure after another over the last 20 years.

We waited in a small emergency room for twelve hours while waiting for a room to open so I could be admitted. It was during this time that I began thinking about the will to live. I was thinking, “If I didn’t have a sense that God still had a purpose for even a broken-down mess like me, or if I was an atheist or adhered to some other fatalistic worldview, I would have wanted a doctor to give me a shot that would have ended this suffering. It was as if my opposition to euthanasia was being tested.

If you are convinced you’re going to heaven, where the Bible says there will be no more pain, suffering and tears, why continue to go on fighting to live?

Apart from the fact that the Bible teaches that life, including our own life, isn’t ours to take, it’s a very logical question; a question I’ve pondered at length over the last 20 years.

It’s a question that really confuses atheists.

Years ago, I was watching a Barbara Walters special on heaven. She interviewed representatives of many different faiths to get their take on the afterlife. For some reason, her last interview was with an atheist. I remember so vividly the closing sentence of this atheist: (If we believed in a heaven) “we’d all be killing ourselves now.”

But the reverse puzzles me: if atheists believe that this short life is all that there is, why do studies on assisted suicide show that atheists are the most likely to choose that option when facing a terminal illness?

Last year, Mary and I watched a movie titled, *Me Before You*. It was a fictional “love story” about a wealthy self-centered 33-year-old playboy in England that becomes a quadriplegic after a tragic accident. He’s obviously depressed and becomes a recluse in his parents’ mansion. He begins researching assisted suicide and finds a beautiful facility in Switzerland that provides “death with dignity” for wealthy people from all over the world (unfortunately, this facility really exists).

I’m obviously not a movie reviewer, so let me wrap this summary up: his pretty young caregiver convinces him to travel to many exotic locations and they fall in love, but he still goes through with his plan to end their travels at the Switzerland death clinic. Not a very happy ending.

While watching this “love story,” my mind began to wander. I began thinking about a woman I admire so much. Fifty years ago, this woman was a beautiful and carefree 17-year-old swimming with friends in the Chesapeake Bay. She dove into shallow water and hit bottom. This tragic accident resulted in her becoming a quadriplegic, virtually the exact same injury as the man depicted in the movie. Like him, she became depressed, reclusive and also had suicidal thoughts, but. . . .

Joni Eareckson Tada had made a commitment to follow Christ three years earlier while attending a Christian summer camp. It was a renewal of this commitment and the support of family and friends that gave her life new purpose. For 50 years she’s been serving others all over the world while confined to a wheelchair.

She shares the Gospel on TV and radio, hosts summer camps for mentally and physically disabled youth and, a ministry that is so needed, she provides wheelchairs to the disabled in third-world countries. Her ministry has given away over 150,000 wheelchairs so far.

It's really amazing what God can do with broken (humbled) vessels, regardless of our physical state. This year, give God permission to use you – this is the ultimate expression of His gift of a freewill. We are Christ's hands to help a hurting world.

And, as the Apostle Paul wrote, when we're done fulfilling God's purpose for us in this life, it gets so much better:

"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."
-Philippians 1:21

No matter how depressed you might be over your current circumstances, please don't give up, your story doesn't have to have a sad ending.

*"Therefore we do not lose heart (don't give up).
Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly
we are being renewed day by day."*
-II Corinthians 4:16

"The man who patiently endures the temptations and trials that come to him is the truly happy man. For once his testing is complete he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to all who love Him."

-James 1:12 (J. B. Philips Translation)

Bill Sweeney was living the so-called American dream in 1996; he was happily married, had two beautiful daughters and a great career as a Regional Sales Manager for a food manufacturer. Then the family's world was turned upside down when Bill was diagnosed with ALS, "Lou Gehrig's Disease," a fatal neuromuscular disease, and was given three to five years to live.



Gradually paralysis crept in, and he lost the ability to speak. Bill sought God for answers and began to see the world through the eyes of Christ. He realized that he wasn't the only one who was going through a difficult trial.

Unable to type or speak, Bill learned to communicate with a computer that tracks his eye movements. He became an Online Missionary with Global Media

Outreach and later started his blog, <https://unshakablehope.wordpress.com>. Through writing, he shares a message of hope in Christ with people all over the world.

Show Me the List

By Vicki Andersen—Salem, Utah

I'm an avid list maker. Lists give me the illusion of control and organization as I juggle multiple projects and responsibilities. The eight weeks during the summer when I'm not teaching in the classroom, my list-making frenzy kicks into high gear. Multiple strips of paper are taped to a closet door with headings for every area of my life. Each list contains all the goals and projects I wish to accomplish during the summer for home, school, church, personal needs, and family to name a few. When I do something that isn't on a list, I often add it after the fact just so I can experience the satisfaction of crossing it off.

As a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, having a checklist of things to do for salvation was vital. I lived by the checklist: baptism, temple marriage, visiting teaching, temple attendance, paying a full tithe, Word of Wisdom, and more. I was grateful that I knew every requirement of God in order to spend eternity with Him. It was somewhat of a comfort knowing that I could earn my way into heaven by working hard and keeping all my covenants. I just needed to keep every commandment of God and every covenant of the church perfectly at all times and exaltation was mine!

Unfortunately, I wasn't perfect and knew I never could be. There were times when I exhibited anger, impatience, non-productivity, and other less-than-perfect behaviors that I was taught drives away the Spirit of God. Feelings of inadequacies drove my attempts to balance the bad with more good deeds. I knew that God's grace would only kick in after all I could do, so I had to do my part and hope there was enough grace to cover the discrepancy. I didn't want to arrive at the gates of heaven only to be told I was a few good deeds short of living eternally with God!

So, if cleanliness was next to godliness, then I'd keep an immaculate home. (But raising five sons made that an impossible task.) If the Spirit of God was offended by my human emotions of anger, frustration, and impatience, then I'd play the game of Fake It 'Til You Make It. If sacrificing my time, talents, and money to the church would please God, I vowed to never turn



down a request made of me by a church authority or an opportunity to serve someone in need.

And yet, every time I imagined meeting God in the next life, I envisioned Him shaking His head in disappointment and saying, "Did you *really* do all you could do? Don't you think you could have read your scriptures 30 minutes a day instead of 20, and spent a few more minutes on your knees in prayer?" And this, "I know you went to the temple almost every week, but don't you think you could've

skipped your bi-annual movie theater experience for a couple more trips to the temple?" And of course, this huge failure: "How could you expect to be saved if you didn't compile your genealogy and do all the temple work for your ancestors?" The list of how my life was a disappointment to God was endless.

The guilt I felt while envisioning such a possible scenario kept me in an almost continuous state of anxiety and hopelessness. Even with a conscientious effort to perform two or three good deeds for every unkind thought or action, I knew it was impossible to do enough to tip the scale toward my worthiness for heaven. But I kept at it, because I didn't know what else to do. The more I did, the more I hoped to find favor with God. The motivating force behind most of my actions was an attempt to prove to God, myself, and others that I was a good person and worthy of a place in heaven—even though I didn't feel worthy.

Then light and hope came pouring into my soul when I learned the biblical truth of the gospel. The glad news that Christ paid it all removed the ever-present burden of not being good enough. What freedom is had in knowing that nothing I could do could ever add to what Christ already accomplished! Finally, belief in the New Testament trumped Mormon doctrine. It *IS* by "*no other name under heaven given among men by which we are saved.*" Acknowledging who He is and accepting His gift is all that is necessary to live eternally with God. My good works are but "*filthy rags.*"

And yet, it didn't stop me from inquiring about a Christian Checklist! Where is the list that tells me how to gain God's approval now that I'm a Christian? Now what do I need to do to earn a place in His Kingdom? Letting go of the idea that I have the ability to work my way into heaven has been a bit of a challenge.

It's a relief to know Christ has paid the debt of my sin, but it also leaves me with a feeling of vulnerability that I can't earn extra credit toward salvation with my good works.

I'm constantly reminding myself that the price of admission into God's presence has already been covered. I am His because of *HIS* goodness, grace, and love. The motivation behind any good I do now is to be a vessel through which God's love is manifested.

I still have days where the anchor of truth regarding my salvation tends to wobble. I often stop myself and check the motivation behind my actions to ensure that I haven't fallen back into the old way of thinking that good works earns me brownie points in heaven. God rescued me from a fruitless life of anxiety and self-deprecation, and I show my gratitude by being willing to be used by Him as He sees fit.



Seeking the Son. Photo: Marsha McLaren

Singing hymns help me remember the truth of my relationship with God. I recently sang with the worship team, "Jesus paid it all, all to Him I owe; sin had left a crimson stain, He washed it white as snow." Yes, He paid it all and doesn't need me to add anything to help cover the cost.

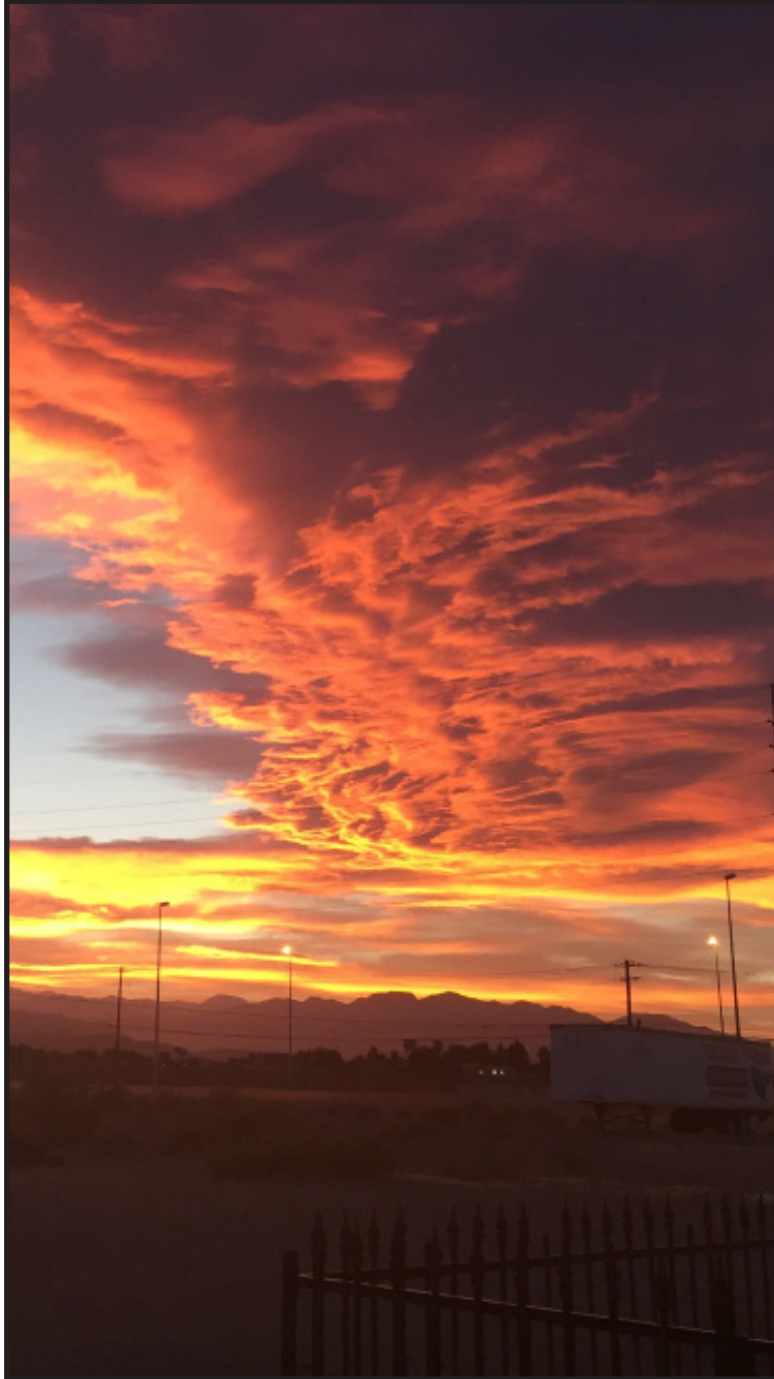
I still make multiple lists of things I need to do. But earning salvation is no longer a part of any list, as it's already been accomplished by Jesus Christ. I find great comfort in the last words spoken on the cross by the Savior, "*It is finished.*" And so it is.

Vicki Andersen was born in Mesa, Arizona as a fifth-generation Mormon and the oldest of nine siblings in a blended family. She attended BYU for three semesters prior to marriage and motherhood. With the exception of a couple of years in Las Vegas, she remained in Utah and raised a family of five sons, four of whom are married and have provided her with 11 grandchildren in less than four years and the 12th due in July.

God led her back to college when all her boys were in school fulltime. A Master's degree in Elementary Education and an Early Childhood Endorsement have given her the ability to support herself by teaching Kindergarten for the last 14 years. Little children, music, quilting, and writing are her passions. Walking with God according to His will is her lifelong quest!

"But even though we were dead in our sins God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love He had for us, gave us life together with Christ—it is, remember, by grace and not by achievement that you are saved—and has lifted us right out of the old life to take our place with Him in Christ in the Heavens. Thus He shows for all time the tremendous generosity of the grace and kindness He has expressed towards us in Christ Jesus. It was nothing you could or did achieve—it was God's gift to you. No one can pride himself upon earning the love of God. The fact is that what we are we owe to the hand of God upon us. We are born afresh in Christ, and born to do those good deeds which God planned for us to do." – Ephesians 2:8-10 (J. B. Phillips Translation)

Desert Declaration. Photo: Chris Chase



“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of His hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge. There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard. Their voice goes out into all the earth, their words to the ends of the world.” -Psalm 19:1-4 (NIV)

DESERTS UNCLUTTER THE SOUL

by Dr. Alicia Britt Chole—Rogersville, Missouri

From the Prologue of *40 Days of Decrease: A Different Kind of Hunger. A Different Kind of Fast.* by Dr. Alicia Britt Chole. www.40fasts.com

The sabbatical started more suddenly and violently than anticipated. A high fever, a few scans, multiple masses, possibly a lethal abscess. . .the specialists convened, conferred, counseled me to cancel all engagements, and began cutting.

The reduction had begun.

Though the masses, thankfully, were all benign, my body did not respond well to the invasion.

The area's organs went into hibernation and for the first time in my life, I became familiar with breathtaking pain.

The experience redefined that word for me. It hurt to be awake. It hurt to see my children's fear. It hurt to hear, "We don't know why." In time, it would even hurt to hope.

Reductions, it seems, have blurry release dates. Days stacked upon one another in vain like whisper-thin blankets with no warmth to offer. Though technology blinked, beeped, and buzzed noisily around me, the organs slept on. This healing simply would not be hurried. The wound was evidently too great to risk haste.

After eight days in the hospital, the doctors sent me home and my entire recovery-time "to do" list vaporized in the desert heat of pain. All I could do was sit and be loved—a need that my family filled extravagantly. Little did I know that the pain was under assignment: it was making room in my life for another operation well beyond the reach of any surgeon's scalpel.

I would not trade that desert of pain for the world.

Deserts unclutter the soul.

The hot desert sun vaporizes all manner of luxuries. Then the cold, shelterless nights expose the essential guts of life. I needed to eat, to sleep, to be protected, and to not be alone. God asked me to fast mental and physical strength. He invited me into holy weakness.

As the days blurred into weeks and months, helplessness

exposed the contents of my heart. My eyes were opened to see an invisible danger that had been growing within me. Prior to surgery, God was not absent. The challenge was that self was so very present. Though I had purposed to live simply, clutter was collecting around my faith. I was becoming more vulnerable to sin, but sin of a slightly different strain than in earlier years.

We all guard against sins of commission and we are vigilant

toward sins of omission. But achievements—even in small doses—can make us vulnerable to sins of addition: adding niceties and luxuries to our list of basic needs; adding imaginations onto the strong back of vision, adding self-satisfaction to the purity of peace.

Years later, the pain from that surgery has, thankfully, disappeared. The fruit of pain's assignment in my soul has, thankfully, remained. My desert decrease was divine.

Throughout our *40 Days of Decrease* journey, let us rest assured that when Father God calls us to fast increase, decrease will purify our souls.

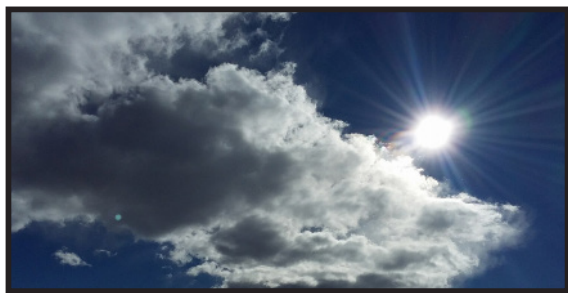


Desolation. Photo: Sharmila Felix

Alicia Britt Chole is a speaker, author, leadership mentor and the founding director of



Leadershipii.com, a non-profit devoted to the soul care of leaders. Whether spoken or written, Alicia's messages address both head and heart and are often described as grace-filled surgeries. Alicia and her husband, Dr. Barry J. Chole, direct a prayer retreat home called Rivendell and parent their three children in the Ozarks of Missouri where the stars shine brightly and their dogs bark loudly.



The Ignatian Method of Meditation

by Phil Collins—Taylor University Center for Scripture Engagement
in Upland, Indiana

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Each time of prayer and meditation in the Ignatian method follows the same basic pattern:

Begin—Take time to consider God’s presence and love for you. Kneel, sit, bow, however you wish to be comfortable for your time of prayer.

Preparatory Prayer—Offer God your time and focus. Ask for any grace you need during this time (peace, consolation, hope, focus etc.).

Contemplate the Biblical Story: Choose a story from the Bible and use it to do the following:

Read the text: Read the text slowly, truly taking time to understand what is happening in the story. Take time as soon as you are done to recall what occurred in the story.

Place yourself inside the text: Use your imagination and place yourself in the story. Pretend you are one of the characters or place yourself in the story as an independent character that interacts with the others in the text.

Participate: Become part of the scene. Talk to the other characters in the story and interact with them.

Observe: Look around. What is happening around you? Where are you? Think about the sensory experience during this time. What does the place, feel, sound, look, smell like? Try to really imagine it. Also, gain a sense of who these people are. Why are they here, what are they doing, and what does that tell us about them? Remember, ground your imaginings in the text, but feel free to explore it. This takes practice, but becomes easier with time.

Dialogue with the characters: Ask yourself: What are those around me saying, to each other and to me? What do I say to them? What is our discussion like?

Notice what is going on inside you: Ask yourself what you’re feeling as you interact with the text in this way. Are you happy? Joyful? Full of sorrow? Peaceful? Confused? Full of love?

Colloquy: Have a short personal conversation with Jesus. Pretend that He is right there next to you and you are having a face-to-face conversation with a close friend.

Closing Prayer: Conclude with a prayer of your choice. You may stand, kneel, bow, raise your hands, etc.

When you have finished this practice, review what you have experienced. Journaling is a great way to record your feelings and to help you remember what you experienced. Decide when you finish when you will engage in this practice again and look forward to it. Prepare for your next encounter and decide what passage you will use as well as where you will spend your time.

General Guidelines

Many people find it helpful to begin this practice with stories about Jesus from the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John). You can do it with any biblical story, but the Gospels are a good place to start. *If you get distracted during this process, do not be frustrated. Ask God for help and focus, and set your mind back on the text. It takes practice to become good at these kinds of things.

Remember to gain your facts from the text. Think about what it says about what is happening, and make sure that your imaginings line up with what the Bible actually says. Your imagination is a tool to help you experience God’s Word, and God’s Word must always be primary in this practice. Enjoy yourself. The imagination is a rich, wonderful vehicle or tool for exploration. Feel free to get lost in the beauty and truth of the biblical stories.

“The Bible includes us, always. Our lives are implicitly involved in everything said and done in this book. In order to realize this, we must enter the story imaginatively. We must let our conversations and experiences and thoughts be brought into the story so that we can observe what happens to us in this new context, thorough this story line, rubbing shoulders with these characters.” —Eugene Peterson

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[*CL Editor’s note: From personal experience, having a blank piece of paper next to me to note down any concerns I have before beginning and whatever occurs to me during my meditation frees my mind to focus and concentrate on the Word and my reflection on it.]



“One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the LORD, and to meditate in His temple.” –Psalm 27:4

with friends; a book on prayer by Philip Yancey; messages by my pastor and others; and especially, an idea that had grabbed my attention a couple of weeks earlier. I’d read an article by Theresa Ceniccola called, “What’s Your Life Verse? (And How to Choose Just One).”

<http://www.theresaceniccola.com/whats-your-life-verse-and-how-to-choose-just-one/>

She asked a pertinent question at the beginning that started my search: “Have you ever been asked what your ‘life verse’ is? You know, the scripture quote that seems to speak to you directly – the one that holds a personal meaning for you.”

Eventually, I settled, not on one word but on five taken from instructive Scriptures, which God had highlighted over the past years. Assembling my list with the dates brought a sense of wholeness and joy as I considered His gifts and the actual training He’d given me for each instruction. Not only training as a freelance writer and in my English degree, but also hands-on experience that showed me the value for others.

In the process of writing, I gained a clearer picture of His will for me. So after finishing the first draft, I followed Ceniccola’s suggestion and created a Spiritual Vision Board as a reminder of God’s purposes for me. Seeing that come together was a profound experience.

Behind each central word and the passages from which each is taken, there is a much broader story of God’s work: the how, when, where, and sometimes the why. Answering those questions has prompted the writing of my memoir, not because *I’m* something great, but because *He* is Something Awesome, and His works in my life are worth remembering and sharing!

Below is the condensed-soup version to inspire you to consider your own journey and write about your key verse or verses. The last page of this publication has plenty of blank space for your story, so please print it out and begin.

What I have learned in writing this meditation and others is that God instructs all His children in the way we should live, and if we receive and conform to His instructions, we are so blessed and are given His own strength to meet each day’s challenges.

*“Make me know Your ways, O Lord; Teach me Your paths.
Lead me in Your truth and teach me,
For You are the God of my salvation;
For You I wait all the day.” –Psalm 25:4-5*

The Five Words That Matter Most

by Diane Kulkarni—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

On Facebook recently, I found an interesting photo of a metal circle with a stamped word on it and followed the link to www.myintent.org. After surfing a bit, I watched the short video about the business that creates custom jewelry with a word that means something to the client.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aN2vBMpyiFo>

Not only do they create an unusual item to be worn—which will be a conversation starter as well as a daily reminder—the company also invites their clients to explain why they chose the word they did. In the video, I saw a bulging basket of letters with what matters most.

I am always encouraged to explore my history with God, but how to settle on one word to describe 52 years? Because this idea interests me, I shared the link with several of my friends, wondering what word they’d choose.

Here are few of their comments:

- “BREATHE or LAUGH to not take myself too seriously.”
- “I would choose CARE.”
- “One word: BELOVED.”
- “I would choose HOPE and PURPOSE.”
- “HAPPY and KIND keep coming to mind.”
- “My word would be WAIT— the best has yet to come. Wait, this too shall pass. Wait upon the Lord. . . .”
- “PEACE because I know it’s always within me, body, spirit, soul. I can always get to it, even when it’s stormy.”
- “I would choose LISTEN. I need to work on hearing and heeding God more in my life.”
- “From watching the bracelet video, only one word captured me, JESUS.”

When I find myself thinking about something like this, I know there have been other forces at work that begin to connect: insights from my Bible study in John; discussions

1) **1974: REMEMBER** – Remember God’s work in my life and write a memoir to pass on as a faith legacy.

“For the Lord your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. These forty years the Lord your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing.” –Deuteronomy 2:7 (NASB)

“And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that He might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not.” –Deuteronomy 8:2 (NASB)

2.) **1981: WAIT** – God’s specific instructions and promise have been repeated and underscored throughout the years.

“The thought of my suffering and homelessness
is bitter beyond words.

I will never forget this awful time,

as I grieve over my loss.

Yet I still dare to hope

when I remember this:

The faithful love of the Lord never ends!

His mercies never cease.

Great is his faithfulness;

His mercies begin afresh each morning

I say to myself, ‘The Lord is my inheritance;

therefore, I will hope in Him!’

The Lord is good to those who depend on Him,

to those who search for Him.

So it is good to wait quietly

for salvation from the Lord.

And it is good for people to submit at an early age

to the yoke of His discipline.”

–Lamentations 3:19-28 (NLT)

3) **1988: WRITE** – Reflective writing allows me to join God’s dialogue about His Word and to cooperate in His mind renewal project.

“Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.”

–Romans 12:2 (J. B. Phillips Translation)

“And the Lord said to me, ‘Write My answer on a billboard, large and clear, so that anyone can read it at a glance and rush to tell the others.’” –Habbakuk 2:2 (The Living Bible)

4.) **1996: REJOICE** – Rejoice in the Lord Jesus always, not in my circumstances. Pray with a thankful heart.

“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, rejoice! Let your gentle spirit be known to all men. The Lord is near. Be anxious for nothing,

but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” –Philippians 4:4-7 (NASB)

5. **2015: DWELL** – Dwell in Jesus and celebrate by writing *DwellingNotes* to encourage others.

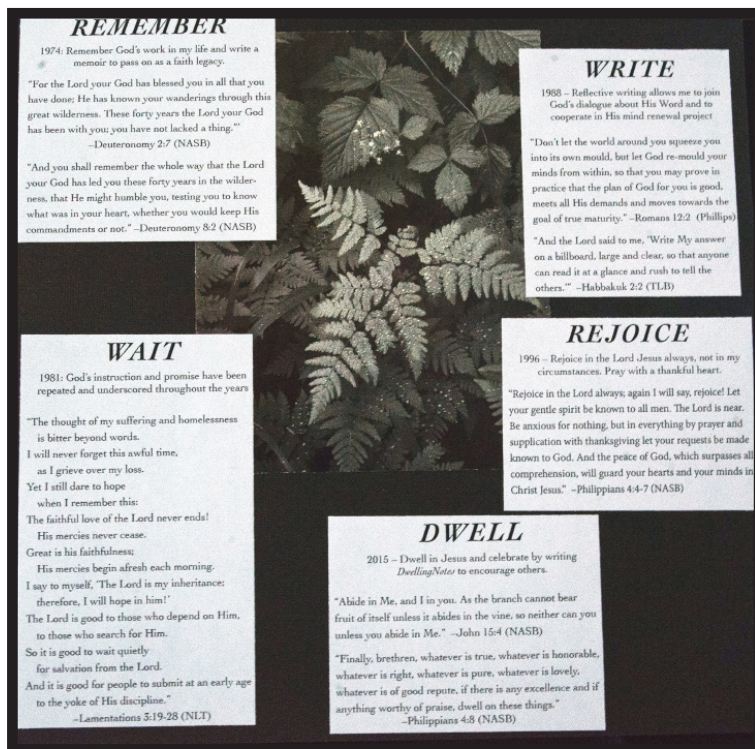
“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in Me.” –John 15:4 (NASB)

“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.” –Philippians 4:8 (NASB)

Conclusion: However we choose to remember God’s amazing work in our hearts each day, the living-it-out-with-truth-and-love-lifestyle is most important.

“May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my Rock and my Redeemer.”

–Psalm 19:14 NLT



Diane Kulkarni has been a freelance writer and editor since 1967. She writes for God’s glory and the encouragement of others. Since 1994, she has edited *The Fellowship*, which is now Main Street’s online magazine, *City Lights*. She is married to a rocket scientist, an Indian immigrant, and they have two daughters, two grandchildren and a multitude of grand-pets.

Just Kneel

By Dorothy Catlin—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

“Come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker.” —Psalm 95:6

I’ve been learning about kneeling. Maybe you all are way ahead of me on this, but I’ve never been much of a kneeler. There has always been a connection in my mind between kneeling and prayer, but I confess to more theory than practice. I’m not very good at “getting low.” It’s uncomfortable. All you can really see is what’s right in front of you. It’s not a powerful position; you can’t get away very quickly.

When I was growing up, it was the tradition in our church to kneel for communion. There was a padded step below a rail at the front of the sanctuary, and row by row we dutifully stepped forward and lowered ourselves. It was never a particularly holy moment for me as a child. I was usually in the company of my siblings or friends, but on my best behavior because both of my parents were seated in the choir loft with a direct view of my potential misdeeds.

I remember studying the little round holes in the wooden railing as I waited, head properly bowed, for the minister to pass by with the silver plate bearing the communion elements.

I was always fascinated by the empty cups left by those who had been there before me, with lipstick marks on the edges, and purple rings in the bottom. When our own empty cups were deposited into the holes, we filed back to our seats as the next row moved into place behind us. And that was that. My knees may have been bent, but not my heart.

There wasn’t a lot of kneeling going on in the 70s when I was saved. It was the height of the “Jesus People” revival, and though we knew that the “saints of old” had knelt, the new tradition was to sit cross-legged on the floor. We sang with eyes properly closed, or stood swaying in time to the music, sometimes holding hands or linking arms.

Those were holy moments; I was coming to understand worship as an outward expression of praise, a corporate celebration of salvation. I adopted the posture of those around me. Our hearts were bowed, but we didn’t kneel.

Many years later, I’ve discovered (rather later than I should have) that kneeling is essential to a well-tended garden. Getting at the low-down weeding and thinning requires good knee pads, and it hurts too much to linger very long. When I’m down there, all I can really see is what’s right under my nose—stuff I could have easily ignored if I hadn’t bothered to get low. There’s theology here.

One day it occurred to me that if I was going to be on my knees anyway, I might as well pray while I was there. Since that time, the garden has become a holy place for me, and I’m often on my knees out there.



Photo: Dorothy Catlin

Though I’ve never made a regular practice of it when I’m not in the garden, there have been plenty of times when I’ve been driven to my knees to pray. Overwhelming need for guidance or provision, painful circumstances and events, loss of loved ones, these have all found me kneeling to cry out for help.

But I guess I’ve been growing, because unrelated to any of those, I’m finding myself kneeling much more often these days, kneeling to listen rather than to speak. I’m finding it good to get low. I don’t know quite how to describe it, but occasionally I find a sense of call—rather like an invitation—so I retreat to a solitary place, bend my creaky knees in silence, and wait. I just kneel.

Coming in from the wet garden a few weeks ago, I slipped on the tile floor and went down hard on one knee, then flopped over sideways onto my right hip.

Feeling stupid and a little dazed, I sat there gazing at the sudden change of view. It's amazing how different things look when one can only see the undersides of tables and chairs.

Considering how quickly I'd gone from full-speed-ahead to flat on my rump, I was astonished that I didn't seem to be hurt. "Okay, Lord," I thought, "What's this about?" When He said nothing, I thanked Him aloud and lumbered to my feet.

Two days later I fell again. This time I didn't land sitting up, but went sprawling. Full frontal flat, face to the floor. It's a mystery how I avoided knocking my teeth out on the tile. Still aching from the previous tumble, I was in no hurry to get up. Besides, I'd never had such a clear view of what's under the refrigerator.

"Okay, Lord, You have my full attention now." Again, He said nothing that I could detect, but I had a strong sense of His nearness; it aroused in me a listening that lingered over the next few days. The soreness in my body resulting from those jolts reminded me of how quickly I might be brought low, and I felt a hush in my spirit.

So I've been learning to kneel not only when driven by painful need, but simply because my Maker calls me. Or I fall. Sometimes I can't tell the difference, so I just stay down there and listen. Prone is not a powerful position, and getting there can be painful. But when I'm there I see things differently, so I don't want to waste it. I'm learning to kneel.



Photo: Dorothy Catlin

Come, let us bow down and get low;
let us bend our knees before the Lord, our Maker.

Dorothy Catlin lives in the top of Utah with her husband of 40 years, Jim. Their four adult children are scattered from Alaska to Georgia; with no grandchildren nearby, when she's not



studying the Word or making music, Dorothy's usually in the garden with the chickens.

Hope Changes Everything

By Erika Currier-Springfield, Massachusetts

“Then some little children were brought to Him, so that He could put His hands on them and pray for them. The disciples frowned on the parents’ action but Jesus said, ‘You must let little children come to Me, and you must never stop them. The kingdom of Heaven belongs to little children like these!’”
—Matthew 19:13-14 (Phillips)

The two little boys were silent—a stark contrast to the non-stop chatter that had taken place in the car ride to the hotel where they lived with their mom, stepdad, and two little brothers. The strong smell of smoke was difficult for me to handle and my eyes were still adjusting to the darkness of the hotel hallway. We had taken a van full of kids from the hotel, which served as a homeless shelter, to our church for a children’s event and had now driven them back. The mothers of the other kids had met us at the back door, but these brothers’ parents were not there.

I had walked them to their room and knocked on the door. The six-year-old moved closer to me. We waited with no response and the eight-year-old, trying to sound responsible said, “I know they are here because their car is outside!” We knocked again. I could hear a baby crying loudly from inside. After waiting and knocking for a few minutes, the door finally opened. The smell from inside the room was worse than the hallway. The stepfather opened the door and looked like he could hardly stand. He leaned against the doorframe for support. Looking into the room with the curtains closed, I could see the mother on the bed—she wasn’t moving and her eyes were closed. The baby continued to cry. The boys looked up at me. Tears were coming to my eyes, so I hugged them quickly and told them we’d see them in a few days.

After the door closed, the tears spilled. *Lord*, I prayed silently, *I can’t leave them! I can’t let them stay there!* My heart ached for those boys so badly! I stood there not wanting to leave, but not knowing what to do. At that moment, I felt like God gently spoke to my heart. He said, “Erika, I have an idea. Why don’t I go in there with them and you can go home. I will stay. I won’t leave them alone.”

Those words from God have stayed with me over the last three years since Hope for Kids began. Leaving children in a harsh environment was not a one-time thing. It is now a regular occurrence. Each time it happens, I remind myself of God’s promise (not just spoken to my heart, but also written in His Word!) that He will never leave or

forsake them. He is what they need!

Hope for Kids began in my husband, Matt’s heart in the fall of 2013. He was working with a children’s organization whose goal was to get an after-school Bible club into every public elementary school. It is an amazing organization, but the problem (that was brought to our attention through a God-ordained trip into the inner city) is that there is an extremely large number of children who do not have the opportunity to stay after school since they rely on the bus and have no other means of transportation. Thousands of kids were unable to hear the Gospel through this method of after-school clubs. Matt wanted to reach those children, starting with the ones in the city of Springfield, Massachusetts.



After weeks of prayer and hours and hours of the two of us talking, praying, writing, and planning, we decided to launch Hope for Kids. Our mission is to provide help and hope to kids in need through physical relief, spiritual renewal, and authentic relationships. Matt describes it like this: on one side is the physical which is tangible, such as food, clothing, school supplies, birthday gifts, etc.; on the other side is the spiritual, which is intangible: the Gospel! The relationship aspect is the bridge between the two sides.

We began by reaching out to families who lived in a hotel. Initially, we recruited volunteers and used vans and cars.

We called parents, arranged to pick up kids, and took the kids to church and AWANA. However, it quickly became chaotic. The church was neither prepared nor equipped to handle the number of kids we were bringing, and the behavioral issues were many. Something needed to change. That's when we introduced Club Hope.

Club Hope is church for inner-city kids. We rent school buses, drive into the projects and shelters, and with parental permission in writing, we take the kids to a church that allows us to use its facilities. We serve the kids a hot meal and break them up into groups by age to have the following: praise and worship time, a lesson from God's Word, small group time for discussion and prayer, and game time. This is all run by volunteers. (At the moment, due to finances, we have this one Saturday a month. As we increase in financial support, we plan to have weekly Club Hope.) In between times, we pair up families with volunteers to reach out to them. Volunteers will take the kids out for ice cream, to church, the park, dinner, the zoo, and other such activities in order to be an example of Christ to these families and to share true Hope with them: the Gospel!



Last summer we began a new part of our ministry. We brought 15 teenagers and young adults into our home for a full week. Run as a camp, we held classes each day where we taught the students how to share the Gospel with a child; the distinctives of urban ministry; how to teach a Bible lesson, song, and memory verse; how to canvas neighborhoods and engage children in games; how to work as a team; and how to grow in their walk with God. After the training, which included many study halls and evaluations, the team was ready to go. We then spent three weeks in six different neighborhoods and shelters performing week-long Impact Clubs at each location. In just those three weeks we reached two hundred children and saw numerous salvation decisions! We immediately began follow up and now, months later, many of those children come to Club Hope and are paired with volunteers who regularly minister to them.

God is doing an incredible work in the city. Hope for Kids

has about 75 volunteers, three staff members (who are actively trying to raise their support), an administrative assistant who donates her time and work, and more opportunities than we can say yes to.



As part of the dream that Matt and I had at the beginning, our whole family is involved. Our oldest daughter, Brianna, who is married and lives out of state, is our volunteer coordinator. She makes sure each event is fully staffed and each volunteer is properly screened. Our oldest son, Cameron, is on staff raising support. He is the Director of Family Relations. He is the go-to person for all of our families. If they have a need it goes through him first. He arranges visits and pairs volunteers with families. He also teaches the Bible lesson for the 4-9 age group at each Club Hope. Our 17-year-old daughter, Alissa, runs a girls' group at our events. Our 15-year-old son, Caleb, goes to the HFK office one day a week to write to kids who are hurting, have a birthday, have been sick, or have asked for prayer. He also works with a boys' group as a verse teacher at Club Hope. Our 13-year-old son, Andrew, does counseling after the Bible lesson for kids who want to know more about how they can have a personal relationship with God. Our eight-year-old daughter, Leah, and six-year-old son, Micah, join in with the city kids and befriend them, often inviting them over to our house so they can be an example to them and help point them to Jesus.

Hope for Kids is still new. We have vision and God is growing this ministry through new volunteers, resources, and countless children. One challenge we face has to do with the fact that we are faith-based. Going into the projects in nice weather is easy—we just set up right outside and kids come from all over. However, when it is rainy, cold, and gets dark early, we cannot have Impact Clubs outside. We have requested the use of different community centers, but are turned down once they hear that we will talk about God.

We are super excited about our new idea that would

take care of that issue. We are calling it Mobile Hope. Imagine a huge coach bus, with the seats removed and the inside transformed into a kid-friendly meeting place. We envision mats on the floor, a huge monitor on the back door, a couple of long tables and/or benches screwed to the floor, a refrigerator (must keep those freeze pops cold), fun lights, a sound system for kids' praise music, and lots of love! This would give us opportunity to reach the kids right where they are.

We can offer Impact Clubs, tutoring, music lessons, pizza parties, art lessons, prayer meetings, and anything else that our volunteers desire to contribute. Sadly, there was a shooting in a neighborhood recently, and a young teenage girl was killed. If we'd had the bus we could have come by to offer grief counseling and prayer. The possibilities are endless. God alone knows how and when this can be accomplished, but we are faithful in praying and expecting that He will provide!

Those little boys that I left—not alone, but with God—back in the early days of Hope for Kids have lived through some unimaginable trauma since then. The circumstances surrounding the events were a result of sinful choices on the part of their parents. I am so thankful that God brought those children into our lives, that they heard the truth of how much God loves them and cares for them, that He doesn't leave them ever, and that they both accepted Christ as their Savior. We gave them each their own Bible and we taught them that the Bible is truth.

We have no way of knowing how their lives will turn out, if they will follow in their parents' footsteps, or if they will choose to follow God. We rest in the fact that we were faithful to do our part and most certainly God will be faithful to do His! Hope for Kids...Hope Changes Everything. Because true Hope is Jesus.

Erika Currier was born and raised in New Hampshire and married her high school sweetheart, Matt, 23 years ago. They have seven children, ranging in age from 21 to six. They have been in full-time ministry since 2007, and now live in a small country town outside of Springfield, Massachusetts where they serve inner city kids.

www.hopeforkids.net



Now That You Mention It, Erika

After my father died without a will in 1953, Mom, my two-year-old sister and I (age seven) moved from our big house where we'd been so happy to the tack house next to the barn. That's where we kept all the gear for our four horses. Because my father's estate was in Probate, Mother lost most everything he had worked so hard to give her, but she had retained one small house a few miles away that was better than the tack house. After she remarried two years later, we moved there. I was *not* looking forward to going to a new school in the fall.

We'd always had a lot of room to roam and play on our property, enjoying our horses, cats, dogs, chickens and the big vegetable garden, but in Edgewater, we were suddenly crammed into a tiny house with two bedrooms on a corner, postage-stamp lot. I really missed my father and my animals..

One day, a flyer from the Methodist Church was left on our screendoor. It read: "The Bible Bus is coming to your neighborhood every Friday morning this summer! Hear Bible stories, meet new friends. It's time for adventure!" So on Friday, when the white school bus pulled up, I eagerly climbed aboard.

Everyone on the bus was a stranger at first, but the pastor and his wife were kind, and all the kids were happy to experience the planned adventures. Besides listening to Bible stories, having a snack, and playing games, we memorized the books of the Bible and also several Bible verses. The very first one I learned, and could recite without a mistake, was John 3:16. *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."*

The lasting memory I have of that summer was what happened on the last Friday before school started. For our participation, each of us received a white King James Bible with Jesus' words printed in red. Inside the front cover, I found a blue ribbon with a list of the verses I'd learned, and a card inviting me to Sunday School. I'll never forget the sense I had, that in spite of my many losses, God loved me and I would be safe with Him. *-CL Editor*

Now Unafraid To Say

By Madeleine Felix—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah



Encountering High Water. Photo: Sharmila Felix.

“My faith is something that makes up a huge portion of my character. I was born and raised a non-denominational Christian, and this has ended up being my safe place time and time again. But for awhile it was something I was ashamed of. Growing up in a state that is predominantly another religion, I have had countless friends tell me that our relationship could no longer continue if I was not going to convert to their faith. This was hard, especially in sixth grade when my entire group of friends said the same thing.

Nevertheless, I let go those whom I called my friends and carried on boldly in my faith. I am now unafraid to say that it is God whom I serve.

Last summer, I went on a missions trip to San Diego and La Jolla, California. I don’t know how to describe the relief and revelation that came from that trip and the One behind it, but I am eternally grateful. The power of Jesus to save us is definitely something I believe in, and it leaves me speechless.”

—Excerpted from her “Letter of Defense” for 8th Grade Passage presented before a panel of judges and invited guests at Venture Academy in Marriott-Slaterville, Utah. 10 May 2017.

Longing to Understand

by Georgia Herod—Liberty, Missouri

What a challenging email! I thought as I walked to the dining table, my usual place of study. The Bible lay open before me, inviting me to feast on “every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.” What would I learn today?

A friend who is a relatively new believer in the Lord Jesus Christ had sent along a really hard question. A BIG question. She was seeking answers from more mature believers. As I began reading John 16, the focal passage for my Bible Study Fellowship lesson, her question and her longing to understand swirled through my mind. Perhaps today God would open my eyes in regard to her question.

I’m in the midst of what is sometimes called “the Upper Room discourse.” It’s really Jesus’ “last will and testament,” so to speak, before He’s going to the cross. Though the disciples really didn’t know what was about to happen, I do. As a result, I’m reading . . . slowly, imagining that I’m sitting among the disciples, intent on Jesus’ face as He speaks.

¹⁶ Jesus went on to say, “In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me.”

¹⁷ At this, some of his disciples said to one another, “What does he mean by saying, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me,’ and ‘Because I am going to the Father?’” ¹⁸ They kept asking, “What does he mean by ‘a little while’? We don’t understand what he is saying.”

¹⁹ Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, “Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, ‘In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me’?”

²⁰ Very truly I tell you, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. ²¹ A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world. ²² So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy. ²³ In that day you will no longer ask me anything. Very truly I tell you, my Father will give you whatever you ask in my name. ²⁴ Until now you have not asked for anything in my name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete.

I read and reread that passage—those disciples are confused; they don’t understand; they are questioning one another. Then I turned to the related study question:

“What is your response when you do not understand something God says?”

That definitely got my attention. Almost without thought, I dashed off my answer.

I’m often just put off—I stumble over it; I may even ignore it, pretending it isn’t there—or that it doesn’t apply to



Photo: Diane Kulkarni

One Step At a Time. Photo: Marsha McLaren



me. Sometimes I'm just thrown into confusion like the disciples. That may last for minutes—or for seasons, or for years! In the waiting, I wrestle like Jacob. I don't want to let go until I have some resolution. Sometimes I've even tried "correcting" Jesus like Peter did when *"he took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him"* (Matt. 16:22).

Oh, how I want to understand! I've learned that our hunger to understand is in our DNA; it goes back to Adam and Eve. But I've also learned that to understand doesn't change the circumstances.

At some point, I remember how limited my puny brain and experience are, and I "ponder" the questions in my heart. I realize that I am often responding emotionally. And then I remember He is God and I am not!

In the days following the above lesson, I continued to think about my response when Jesus tells me something I don't understand. I thought through my process. I lay out my questions and confusion. I go back to the text. I read and re-read. I cross-reference. I try to find other places

in Scripture where He says the same thing or gives more info—for example, *"ask whatever you will and it will be given to you."*

Well, how many times have I asked and not been given what I asked? Or so I thought! So there has to be more to the command. Like my friend, I've also sought answers from more mature believers.

In this process, I've learned not to base theology on my fickle emotions. What is consistent from Genesis to Revelation? For example, God is good; God is sovereign; God is love; God is faithful. The real issue for me is, do I believe those assertions? Based on my limited experience, my emotions, my ability to understand? If not, why not? I have a choice to make.

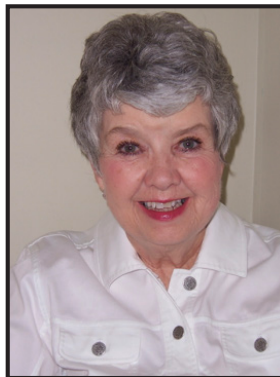
Job comes to mind—Job had lots and lots of questions. God doesn't give answers to those questions; rather, God gives Job Himself, His presence. And Job sits in silence before Him.

When I was a much younger believer, I wanted absolute answers for every question. I wanted everything nailed down. Over the years, I've found myself pulling out the nails because I've learned more of God's Word and His ways, more of His plan and purpose.

And with that, I'm learning to live with unanswered questions. I'm learning to sit in the silence, waiting, remembering to *"be still and know that He is God,"* waiting on the Holy Spirit to guide me into all truth.

"You will never waste time in God's Word."
—Beth Moore

Georgia Herod has for the first time during this past year introduced herself as a writer and editor, though she's been enjoying those roles for several years. She is delighted to share *City Lights* space with Joanne Smith and Paula Romang, two women who have been very significant to her. She is humbled by the load of sorrow and pain, grace and glory they continue to bear. She and her husband James live in Liberty, Missouri, where they are often busily surrounded by children and grans.



Suffering –

“What’s the Difference?”

by Joanne Smith-Ogden, Utah

Looking back, I wondered what happened between the years when my daughter was sick and I was angry at God, telling Him to leave me alone, and the day when my family and I faced the most tragic, and painful loss imaginable and I ran to the loving arms of Jesus and stayed there. What made the difference?

I was a cradle Catholic. My parents taught my sisters and me about Jesus and His love for us, His sacrifice on the cross for mankind, how to pray and to strive to live a life pleasing to God. When I was sixteen years old, I began to understand what a personal relationship with Jesus could be. I rededicated my life to God and fell in love with Jesus all over again. One of the most wonderful things that happened was gaining a deep love for God’s Word. I couldn’t get enough of reading Scripture. I read it every moment I could. The Lord was first in my life.

In 1975, I married my high school sweetheart, Larry. (actually we met in the third grade). Larry was raised Baptist and even though I was Catholic, we married in a Baptist church and started our lives together. In 1980, we had a beautiful baby girl. We named her Rhonda Beth.

At 14 months old, Rhonda got sick and ran a high fever. Because of the fever, she had a seizure. I’d never seen anyone have a seizure and I thought she was dying. I prayed and prayed for God to help her. I was told this was a febrile seizure brought on by a high fever. More than likely she would be just fine once the fever came down and the infection was gone. She did get better, but with every infection, virus, strep throat and fever, the seizures returned. Every once in a while, she would have a seizure for no apparent reason. She would sleep for hours after she had one, but she pulled through. At the age of three, she needed speech therapy and did this for about five years. At the age of six, she needed physical therapy and this lasted for one year.

Throughout those years, my husband and I prayed for her healing. When she would have another seizure, I cried begging God to heal her. The seizures scared me to death! I became so sad at times seeing Rhonda suffering and I couldn’t do anything to stop it. I hated the word seizure. This became a cycle. I prayed, got angry at God, and told Him I didn’t understand how He could allow this to keep happening! She would get better, and I wasn’t angry anymore.

I was unsure of the road ahead. This path was one of such loneliness.

Caption and photo hoto from “*But God . . .*” by Joanne Smith



The years went by and still the seizures came. The Lord did answer my prayers about protecting and keeping Rhonda safe. The handful of times when she was alone and had a seizure, God brought her through each one. When Rhonda was about 13, she had a particularly hard grand mal seizure. I had to take her to the emergency room. When we got home, I put her to bed and sat on the couch in the living room. I wanted to stay close so I could hear her if she had another seizure.

I took my Bible and started to pray. But the words on the page were just a blur. I had no words in my heart to pray. I was so tired from crying and being emotionally drained. I got so angry at God and told Him just how angry. “I know you as my Provider and Comforter. I know You as my constant Companion. You are my Peace and Joy. Yet there You sit and do nothing when I cry out for You to heal Rhonda from these seizures. I stand up and proclaim in public that I know You could heal her. I have fasted and prayed. I proclaim healing verses right from Your Word! But here we are! You have disappointed me time and time again! Do You remember when Rhonda stood up in front of a group of people and declared, ‘I used to have seizures. But I don’t anymore, because Jesus healed me!’ That faith was from a young girl’s heart, declaring what she knew was true. So, here we are—another trip to the emergency room, because You won’t heal her! I don’t know You as my Healer! So until you heal my daughter, leave me alone!”

And with that, I threw my Bible across the room. My beloved Scriptures lay on the floor, pages crumpled and the cover bent. I stood up, turned and went down to bed. I stopped going to church. I stopped reading my Bible

and the only prayer I would pray was, “God, I can’t and won’t pray and ask You for anything, because You will do whatever You want anyway.”

It was months before I began to read Scripture and pray again. The only reason I went back to church with my family after two weeks was because of my children. I couldn’t live with myself if my children turned away from the Lord because of my actions. My husband and I had to set the example. I truly wanted my children to love the Lord and put Him first in their lives. I would be the first to tell them that even though we have trials and suffering in our lives, we need to have a strong foundation in our faith and to trust God, a lesson that I obviously hadn’t learned well enough. I let my emotions, anger, and fear take over.

This was a very sad and confusing time for me. The first few mornings I’d come upstairs, get my coffee and walk over to my chair to read Scripture and pray. With coffee in hand and taking a sip, I stopped. My Bible wasn’t in its usual place. I’d put it out of sight. “Oh, that’s right. I’m still angry at You!” I told the Lord and walked away to do something else instead. But my heart was so sad. I was missing my quiet time with the Lord. I began to wonder if God would ever forgive me. This frightened me. The spirit was willing, but the flesh was weak. It was a very lonely and frightening time.

One day at work during morning devotions at the Christian school where I taught, we bowed our heads to pray. For weeks I went to morning devotions only because it was expected that everyone come. So I went through the motions. But this particular morning a change came over me. I felt God ask me, “Joanne, where are you?” It sounded like God asking Adam the same question in the Garden of Eden after he’d been deceived and ate the fruit from the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God knew exactly where Adam was physically. Where was Adam in his relationship with God? He had to answer that question.

God was asking me where I was. I told Him, “Lord, I miss You. I miss my quiet time with You. I still love You. But as Saint Teresa said to You once, ‘It’s a wonder You have any friends at all.’ I feel the same way.”

Then I sensed Him ask me, “Would you love Me even if I called Rhonda Home? Doesn’t she belong to Me?” This question reminded me of God asking Abraham to offer his son, Isaac as a sacrifice to Him. Abraham didn’t question. He trusted and obeyed. His son was given back to him just as God provided a ram, a substitute sacrifice.

Peace washed over me. “Lord, if you choose to take our Rhonda, I know she would be safe in Your arms and I would see her again.” He asked me another question.

“You’re hanging on too tight. You dedicated her to Me when she was just a baby. I love her. She’s Mine. Do you trust me enough to give her back to Me?”

Hesitantly at first, then slowly with my head in my hands, I began crying. “Yes, Lord. I give her back to You. She belongs to You. I trust You to watch over her and take care of her. And Lord, please forgive me for pulling away from You in anger. Please help me to trust You more. And thank You for never letting go of me when I let go of You.”

The next morning before I left for work, I took my Bible off the shelf. I held it in my hands like a long, lost friend. O, my beloved Scriptures. God was patient with me and wooed me back to Himself. My mornings were once again filled with prayers, Scripture reading, and a warm cup of coffee.

The years passed and still the seizures would come. With each one, I told the Lord, “I trust You. Please be with her and help her.” When she was 22 years old, she ended up in ICU because we couldn’t get the seizures under control. I sat at her bedside and just prayed, “O, my Jesus, help us!”

One day a doctor came by her room. I hadn’t seen him there before. He was abrupt, businesslike and matter-of-fact. He walked over to the other side of Rhonda’s bed, looked at her chart and said, “She would be a good candidate for the VNS implant.” (Like I knew what THAT was!) He explained that a VNS—Vagus Nerve Stimulant—was a small, thin device designed to prevent seizures by sending regular, mild pulses of electrical energy to the brain via the vagus nerve. Two wires would be attached to the vagus nerves at the back of the neck, just below the brain. The small implant would be placed in the chest, on the left side.



Rhonda Smith

In the days ahead, as we gained more information, we decided to pursue the implant. It worked almost immediately. We were told the device would have to be replaced every seven to ten years. It was replaced when she was 29. She is 37 years old now and living on her own. She doesn’t drive, so she takes the bus to and from work and school. She is very independent. In the last 15 years, she has had only a handful of seizures and is doing great. There was an answer to prayer!

On October 29, 1985, God gave us a beautiful baby boy we named Russell Brandon Smith. What a joy watching him grow up, loving life and loving God. Every day was a new adventure for him. He grew to be an amazing young man and we were very proud of him. His smile lit up the room. In a crowd, when Russell showed up, the good times started. He was kind, caring and would do anything for a friend. His friends knew Russell would be there for them if ever they needed to talk. He would stick up for the underdog and put a stop to anyone who bullied special-needs students at his high school. He was extremely protective of his sister, Rhonda.

Lesson Learned – “Now I Know”

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”– Proverbs 9:10

What I know about God is that He is all-knowing. He is aware of every pain, every suffering I go through. He bottles all my tears. God planned every single day of my life before I was even born! He loves me more than I love myself. He loved me so much, He sent His own Son to die on the cross for my salvation. He would not permit anything to happen to me or those I love that would not lead to our ultimate good. He can and does bring good out of evil. He turns ashes to beauty. God permits suffering for many reasons. One is, perhaps, for a bigger purpose in my life.

Trying to figure out our sufferings and trials, depending on our own understanding will only leave us confused, angry, and misunderstanding who God is and what He desires for us. I believe there are unseen circumstances at work in the spiritual realm that Almighty God has set in motion on our behalf.

What I have learned and continue to learn is God our Father desires us to know Him, not only as the One who forgives sins, but also, as the One who wants us to grow in our spiritual walk with Him. The faith-stretching situations that God allows in our lives is a way for us to have a more intimate relationship with Him. So, when trials and suffering come, and they are beyond human strength and wisdom, we should seek God through His Word and in prayer. Rather than go it alone, we trust that He will work through our obedience in a mighty and awesome way.

No one loves us like God does. Trust Him when suffering comes. Run to Him. Only then, safe in His arms, will you find comfort and true peace.

How thankful I was that God had sought me out and drew me back to Himself. Through other trials that came my

way, I was soaking up His Word. I was learning to trust Him more and more, even though I didn’t understand the trial I was facing. Little did I understand just how significant that change was going to be a decade later—on what began as a very normal day.

Sunday, June 21, 2015—Father’s Day. Larry, Rhonda, and I had just returned home from a weekend camping trip. We wanted to get back home early to celebrate Father’s Day. I called Russell and left him a voice message; “Happy Father’s Day, Russell! You are an amazing Daddy. I wanted to just call and let you know we’re home. Stop by anytime. I love you.”

The hours went by, with no word from Russell. I called and texted him and Shawna, our daughter-in-law, all day. This was not like Russell not to at least call his Dad to wish him a Happy Father’s Day. I was getting concerned, but Larry reminded me that Shawna’s father was home for the weekend and they were also having a big family reunion. Her dad was working out-of-state on a construction site and came home on weekends when he could.

But as the day wore on, I had an uneasy feeling. Something wasn’t right. By 9:00 pm I called Shawna’s brother and asked him if he had heard from Russell or Shawna. He said, “Shawna, Tylee and Blake were supposed to have come by at 4:00 pm. I haven’t heard from them.”

“I’m concerned something is wrong! I’m going over to their house to check on them.”

He said, “No, I’ll go over. I live closer.” I asked him to call as soon as he got there. A few minutes later the phone rang.

“Their cars are in the driveway and the lights are on in the house. I rang the doorbell, but no one is answering. Should I use my key and go in?”

“Yes! Something is wrong! Stay on the phone with me.” I said.

A few seconds later, I heard him screaming out Tylee’s name. He became hysterical and I couldn’t understand a word he was saying. “Call the police! We are on our way!” I shouted. Larry and I rushed over to our son’s home. When we arrived, it was surrounded by police cars, ambulances, and K-9 Units. We jumped out of the truck and ran toward the house. The authorities saw us and asked who we were.

“Russell’s parents! What’s wrong?” They told us to stay back and a police officer took us to the other side of the fence next to the house. We couldn’t comprehend what was happening. I just kept thinking that Russell would eventually come out of the house and everyone would be

okay! What seemed like hours later, a detective walked over to us and said, “I’m sorry to have to tell you this. There are four confirmed dead. We are so sorry for your loss. We’ll have you come to the police station.”

This was NOT happening! Larry and I clung to each other in disbelief and shock, crying out in pain and agony, the likes of which we have never experienced before.

Our son, Russell, daughter-in-law, Shawna, our precious granddaughter, Tylee, age six, and precious grandson, Blake, age two, were dead.

I cried out to God, and in my spirit, I RAN to Him and the comfort of His arms. There was no place else to go.

In that moment, I realized just how much my relationship with the Lord had changed. I am so very grateful for that. And yes, I am even thankful for the trials and suffering we experienced as God stretched our faith. Through trying circumstances, He brought me to this place where I wasn’t angry at Him, nor would I turn away, but instead I took shelter in Him and remain there today.

*“Whoever 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 trust.’”*—Psalm 91:1-2



Tylee, Russell, Shawna, and Blake, 2015.

“Come to me. Get away with Me and you’ll recover your life. I’ll show you how to take a real rest. Walk with Me and work with Me—watch how I do it. Learn the unforced rhythms of grace. I won’t lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with Me and you’ll learn to live freely and lightly.”

—Matthew 11:28-30 (Msg)

Joanne Smith was born in Binghamton, New York and has



been married to Larry almost 42 years. They have one daughter, Rhonda, and one son Russell, who passed away with his wife and two children in 2015.

When their family passed away, God gave Joanne something new to do: "Hope And Healing Ministries." Through their tragedy, they share with others the hope that only God can give. It is a message of healing and hope for the future.

Joanne made a little booklet entitled, "*But God...*" based on

the healing God gave her in the very early stages of grieving the deaths of their son and his family. She loves to share it with others. Her hobbies are reading, painting, photography, crafts. She enjoys motorcycles trips with her husband, camping and traveling, and loves to read and study Scripture.

The Beginning of Hope and Healing Ministries

<http://hopeandhealingministries.org/>

Most my life I have kept a diary/journal. I journaled just about everything. I also love to take photos. As I got older I always thought about doing a daily devotional and use my photos. Nothing came of it, but I kept journaling and taking pictures.

When my son and his family passed away, I kept journaling. When I read Scripture and I was feeling afraid, or alone, or hopeless, it seemed every single time, I'd read a passage that started with the words, "*But God. . .*" Grief was raging within me, *But God* led me beside still waters. (Ps. 23:2) And there, He gave me His peace. The fog of despair closed in when I thought of the future without my loved ones. *But God* reminded me of a better future with my loved ones with me. The path was so lonely. *But God* told me He would never leave me. And on it went.

I told the Lord that this tragedy could not be for nothing! I asked Him to please give me a work to do. A work that would bring Hope and Healing not only for me, but also for others who are grieving the loss of a loved one.

I asked Him to turn these ashes to beauty. God led me to Jeremiah 29:11, "*For I know the plans I have for you. Plans to give you a hope and a future. Plans to prosper you and not to harm you.*" This became my life verse. I saw it everywhere!

My first project was a little booklet called *But God. . .* I put photos and Scripture verses in it and have shared it with others. As the anniversary of my family's death approached, I put together a slideshow/presentation and invited friends of Russell and Shawna, our friends and neighbors, and co-workers. I saw how touched they were and some told me later they were so encouraged because they had given up hope on a situation, and if we could get through such a tragedy, they could get back on track and face their own situation again, with hope.

Some of Russell's friends thanked me for giving them hope about the future. They were still in shock and just couldn't wrap their heads around what happened. No one saw this coming! I believed God meant for me to share this message. And not just with those who are grieving the death of a loved one, but with those who have lost hope for any reason or any situation in which people have given up and feel there is no way out: the loss of a job, health, a child who has run away, a divorce, etc.

After the presentation, using my journal entries and photos, I put together another slideshow/presentation and was asked to come and share it in New York and Pennsylvania. I presented to a Bible study group at St. Patrick's Church, in Binghamton, New York, the very same Baptist Church where Larry and I were married; at a home Bible Study group; two at a jail in Pennsylvania, one with the men and one with the women. And I presented my message at a Celebrate Recovery group. With each group, I emphasized that no matter their circumstances, there was hope because God has a plan and a purpose for each of them.

Last fall, I was asked to speak at a Women's Fall Fling, at Alpine Church in Riverdale, Utah. There were over 300 dear women in attendance. The topic was "Emotional Idols." You can see this video on my website: hopeandhealingministries.org as well as the first anniversary presentation, a video on "What Not to Say to Those Who Are Grieving," and "The Grieving Process as I Understand It."

I have been asked to come back to New York and do five speaking engagements and to go to the jail again in Pennsylvania the end of April. God is mighty to save from any raging storm!



The Blessing in the Battle

By Carolyn Roper—Boise, Idaho

It happened this way. God’s people were feeling vulnerable and distressed as news came that an overwhelming enemy was advancing to take them out. Danger was on the move. Jehoshaphat got the news first and he *“was afraid.”*

detail seems overwhelming.” “I’m feeling impatient.” “Fear is crouching at the door about...” “How does ministry fit in here?”

So often our battles begin in our distressing thoughts, don’t they? For at root all our battles are spiritual battles. Especially then I want to remember the battle is the Lord’s. It’s His battle to calm my thoughts as I ask Him to do so. I certainly can repeat His promises and that can help. But ultimately the battle is the Lord’s. I count on Him to show me His ways, enable me to think right and to do right. Then I can rest on a platform of peace.

Often a lot of waiting is involved. Sometimes I am like Winnie-the-Pooh and have a bit of fluff in my ears and don’t readily hear the words of the Lord. I sometimes don’t focus on Scripture. But the One who is mighty is the One who so loves me and is infinitely patient and always available when I turn to Him for help.

The same is true when I think of those I love and the “enemies” they face. Whether family or friends, the battle is the Lord’s! I do not have to helicopter in with my plans to rescue them. I can love and I can call on the Lord to help them as I pray for them. I can listen if He directs and leads me in His paths to help, but praying and waiting are often the most real help I can give. He will show me His ways. My love can care and reach out in ways the Lord directs, but it cannot control. The battle is the Lord’s.

I encourage you to remember that whatever enemy you or those you love face, the battle is the Lord’s. Certainly there will be skirmishes and I will have to continually come back to my mantra, my battle cry. Still, I can have peace in the process as I remember and count on the battle is the Lord’s.

I can also do as these folks did and go out singing and praising God for who He is and what He will do. The battle will not always go as I think it should. But then I can rest in God’s mysterious love that moves Him to be at work on my behalf, often in ways I cannot fathom.

The battle is the Lord’s. Will you please pray for me to embrace this truth today and each day? I will pray the same for you, for I know He cares about you, too.

[*FYI: 2 Chronicles 20: 1-25 records the account of this battle]

At this point, he gathered the people and did the responsible and wise thing. He *“turned his attention to seek the Lord.”* He cried out to the Lord in his distress, acknowledging God’s power and might and His past faithfulness to deliver His people. Then came the familiar words that are often so relevant to me and to you. *“Lord, we don’t know what to do, but our eyes are on You.”**

At this point the Spirit of the Lord instructed Jahaziel to address His people. His first word to the people was, *“Listen! The Lord has a word for you.”* Yes, there would be a battle. Yes, the enemy was mighty, too mighty for them. Nevertheless, they need not fear or be dismayed.

Really? Put away our flight or fight mechanisms? Really? How can this be?

And here is the blessing in the battle. The Lord also said, *“The battle is not yours. The battle is the Lord’s!”* The battle is the Lord’s. The battle is the Lord’s. Some days ago, this became my mantra for all the “enemies” facing me in the big picture of my life and in the daily days. As I wrote a note for my Blessing Box that day, I counted as a huge blessing this promise: The battle is the Lord’s. I decided right then to ask the Lord to help me remember this truth in four broad areas where my enemies pop-up: Health, Family, Feelings, Aging.

Each area has various facets, but none are too big for the Lord. Nor are any too small. Some of my “enemy” thoughts in different areas have been, “What do we do next?” “That hurt!” “Will she be okay?” “I don’t think I have the strength for . . .” “I need to forgive.” “I’m burdened about his spiritual health.” “One more daily

Carolyn Roper partners with her husband, David,



in the work of Idaho Mountain Ministries, a ministry of clergy care to pastors and pastors' wives, which the Ropers launched in 1995. Previously, Carolyn was Pastor of

Women's Ministries at Cole Community Church in Boise, Idaho where David was lead pastor. There she wrote numerous Bible studies which are still available.

Currently she writes and sends out thoughts on email called *Morning by Morning*. Carolyn's desire is to see others move closer to the God who so loves them as they listen to His word and talk with Him. She says spending time each morning reflecting on God's Word is like chocolate to her. Spending time with David, spending time with their three sons and their families, and spending time in mutual mentoring relationships with other women, especially pastors' wives, are her priorities and her joy. She also loves to read, to laugh, to watch football and to welcome guests into her home.



Windblown Artistry. Photo: Marsha McLaren

"Their strength is to sit still." –Isaiah 30:7

In order really to know God, inward stillness is absolutely necessary. I remember when I first learned this. A time of great emergency had risen in my life, when every part of my being seemed to throb with anxiety, and when the necessity for immediate and vigorous action seemed overpowering; and yet circumstances were such that I could do nothing, and the person who could, would not stir.

For a little while it seemed as if I must fly to pieces with the inward turmoil, when suddenly the still small voice whispered in the depths of my soul, "Be still, and know that I am God." The word was with power, and I hearkened. I composed my body to perfect stillness, and I constrained my troubled spirit into quietness, and looked up and waited; and then I did "know" that it was God, God even in the very emergency and in my helplessness to meet it; and I rested in Him.

It was an experience that I would not have missed for worlds; and I may add also, that out of this stillness seemed to arise a power to deal with the emergency, that very soon brought it to a successful issue. I learned then effectually that my "strength was to sit still."

–Hannah Whitall Smith, 1893. *Every-Day Religion, Or the Common-Sense Teaching of the Bible*

Wait

By Valerie Gail Markowski—Beautiful Gate in Cape Town, South Africa

“Your latter years will be greater than your former years and your house will be filled with peace.” —Haggai 2:9

Apparently, there is this new jewelry thing going around where you can request one word to be put on a bracelet or necklace. I was asked by a friend, “What would *your* one word be?” I responded, WAIT.

Not that I am especially good at waiting but rather that I seem to find myself in this place of waiting very often. I serve as a missionary here in South Africa and waiting is a word that I had to become accustomed to hearing. After 14 years here, it still is hard to hear. I have been called to the land of “hurry up and then wait.”

It has gotten easier as time has gone by, but every now and then, my lack of patience rises up within me. Then I need to just take a breath and exhale slowly, very slowly.

We have just celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord, Jesus. This year the holiday was the hardest three days for me. There is a saying, “Friday is here BUT Sunday is coming.” It refers to the harshness, the terrible time of Good Friday when Jesus was crucified on the cross. Or in our lives, the terrible time we are presently going through. BUT, then the resurrection of our Lord Jesus, the fulfilment on that glorious Sunday, when prophecy was completed when Jesus rose from the dead. Again in our present day situation, it represents the answer to prayers, the reason for our hardship, hope restored when it looked like there was no hope, our SUNDAY.

Yes, it is hard to wait. This past Easter was a particularly rough one for me personally. I was overwhelmed with loneliness even though surrounded by many people. It is one of the hardships that I face being a single person here. Wait is what I had to do this long weekend. It is not easy for me in this area, to ask to be included. Sometimes I want to WAIT to be asked to join in a holiday celebration. Sometimes it happens, and sometimes it doesn't.

So THIS past Easter, the WAIT that swirled around me was: just wait, this too shall pass. And it did. I made it to the other side, comfortably back at my work place. It

doesn't happen often, but when that storm of WAIT comes, I have to hold onto my anchor of HOPE that I will make it through to where joy and peace reside.

Here is an excerpt from my most recent prayer update and my views on the word WAIT:

Wait for the traffic to clear. Wait for sleep to come at night. Wait for an answer from an interview. Wait regarding a doctor's report. Wait for that money to hit your account.

Wait for that special person to come into your life, or for him to leave. Wait for that acceptance letter. Wait for a friend to come to visit. Wait for morning to come. Yes, wait can sometimes be a nasty four letter word for some of us.

But just to let you know there are other four letter words that work well along with wait: There is HOPE. There is PRAY. There is LIFE. Yes,

these words all blend together to help us walk through some difficult situations and joyful ones as well.

I have not been back in the states since 2014, and will be arriving in May 2017 for a two-month visit. I'll have to WAIT in many airports in many queues getting through security, then wait hopefully for all my checked luggage to arrive. Yes, waiting is a skill that is honed in that other hard word to hear, patience.

So as you go on with your day, and no doubt are given many opportunities to WAIT, I pray peace over you.



After School

Because your Friday may be here, BUT Sunday is coming.

Valerie-Gail Markowski has been serving at Beautiful Gate South Africa in Cape Town for 14 years. She began missions work at the tender age of 50, standing on Haggai 2:9:



“Your latter years will be greater than your former years and your house will be filled with peace.”

She is blessed to have her mom in New Jersey, two sisters and one brother, eight nieces and nephews

and 12 great nieces and nephews; and scores of children in South Africa who know her as Mama Val.

If you'd like to stay in touch with her, you can, via her e-mail: bg4thechildren@yahoo.com or become her friend on Facebook.

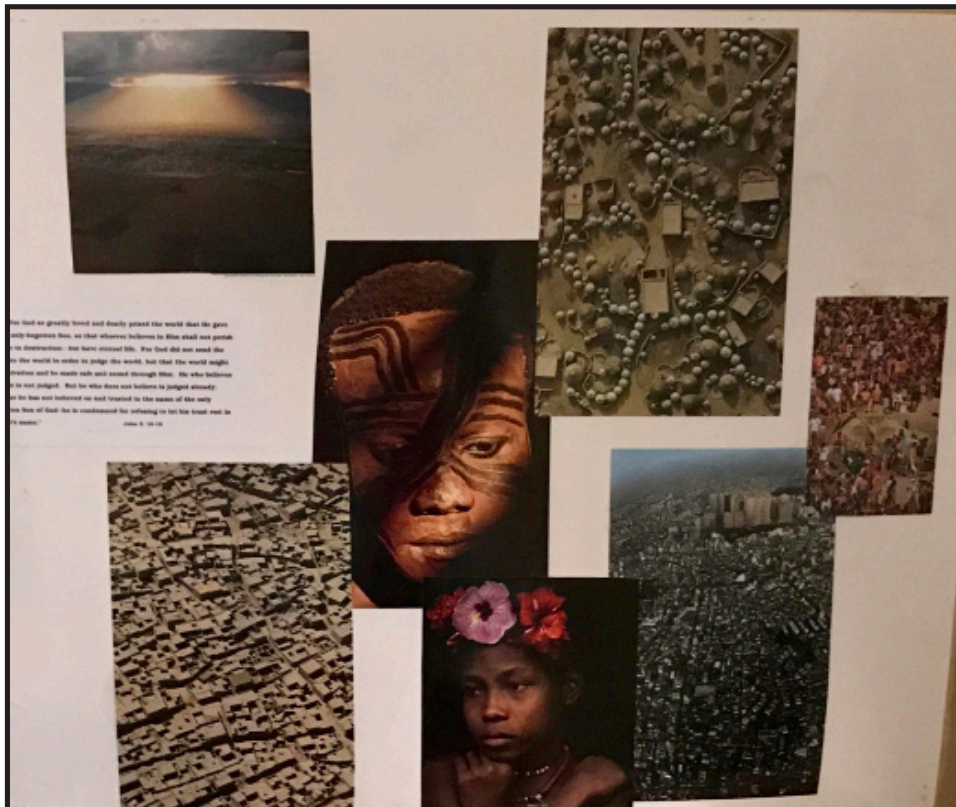
“Wait on the Lord’ is a constant refrain in the Psalms, and it is a necessary word, for God often keeps us waiting. He is not in such a hurry as we are, and it is not His way to give more light on the future than we need for action in the present, or to guide us more than one step at a time. When in doubt, do nothing, but continue to wait on God. When action is needed, light will come.”

—*Knowing God* by J. I. Packer, Copyright © 1973. Used by permission from InterVarsity Press.



Holiday Club where each child learns about the love of Jesus and has fun at the same time

“This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, His one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be destroyed; by believing in Him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life.” —John 3:16 (Msg)



Meditation on John 3:16

Full Armor of God Guy

By Stana Martin-Liberty, Missouri

I've wanted to be "that guy." The one who stands with burnished Full Armor of God on, muscled thighs and stout physique. Who—when God calls out a cry to storm the Gates of Hell—pounds on his breastplate of righteousness with his sword of the Spirit and belts out a defiant roar of victory as he charges after God.

Strong. Obedient. Bold. All muscular thewed and brave heart.

But I'm not that guy. I know that. So instead, I imagine myself as this guy: when God swoops by shouting the charge, I am there (at least with all my armor pieces in the right places) shouting back, "You go, God! Lord of Hosts! Lamb of God! YOU GO! Lion of Judah, I got Yo' back!" See, I may not be strong thewed . . . but at least I am courageous and willing.

But, most of the time, I am not that guy either. I am the infantry guy who shows up with his breastplate slightly tarnished and slipped to the side where I forgot to strap a buckle. My belt of truth, which is supposed to protect my vulnerable underbelly from doubt, I have strapped like a hobble around my leg because I have become more than a little legalistic with it. My sword of the Spirit, I dropped somewhere along the march—possibly because I realized I was a danger to myself and others waving it around, but more likely because it was heavy and I thought I could run better without all that weight.

Whatever the reasons, I show up in disarray. God says, "You stand there and love that person," or "You go there and say these things to those people," or even "You do nothing right now and wait on Me." And do I—all in my disarray—obey? Oh noooooo.

The Lord of Hosts gives a command and I cock one hip out stubbornly, raise my hand and wave to get His attention. "Uh, Lord . . . are You certain that is a good idea? Because I was thinking . . ."

God, by rights, ought to just smash me flat and remind me who is sovereign. But instead He slows down to crouch near me and hear out all my fears and doubts and objections. And when I am done vomiting it all out, He reaches to tighten the strap on my breastplate. And while He is positioning my belt of truth correctly, He says, "I love seeing you all dressed up in My armor. You're looking cute."

He adjusts the way I hold my shield while He reaches back for my sword and puts it securely in my other hand and says, "Now, which of us is Sovereign? You or me?"

"You," I sniffle.

"And which of us has the power to accomplish all that I ask and say and do?"

"You," I say with more confidence.

"So your job is to keep My armor on and stand where I put you while I do the miraculous thing, right?"

"Yep. That's right. That's my job."

"Okay then," God finished with immense gentleness, "you go stand there and love that person. Okay, we good?"

"We're good." And I straighten my spine and march off in His armor that is really just a little too big for me yet.

That is the person I am, the raggedy foot soldier in a line of raggedy infantry who—because I am fearful and selfish and imperfect yet—argues instead of obeys, speaks in arrogance instead of humility, and needs to be gently reminded that God is The Sovereign, that I am bought and paid for, and that I am servant . . . one who is supposed to be obedient.

But I am also loved. Deeply, immensely and more-than-I-can-hold-in-my-head loved by the Alpha and Omega, The One who was and is and is yet to be. Because of His Love—and because apparently I look cute in His armor—I WANT to go stand where He puts me, cheer when He wins and try to grow into His armor.

Dr. Stana Martin owns an agency called Mrs. LT, Inc.



that specializes in long term care insurance (both helping clients shop this type of insurance as well as help people file claims). She has a PhD from the University of Texas at Austin in communication, technology and gender.

She is a member of Pleasant Valley Baptist Church in Liberty, MO. She has one son, no pets, and a penchant for riding her bicycle all over the place. She also plays blue grass music and enjoys gardening. And all—all of it—for the glory of The One.



“Turn toward me and have mercy on me,
for I am alone and oppressed! Deliver me
from my distress; rescue me from
my suffering!” —Psalm 25:16-17

Winter and Spring

By Paula Romang—Liberty, Missouri

My crocuses bloomed this week! As I stepped out my front door, they greeted me from a warm pocket of afternoon sunshine. Unfurling their golden petals, they heralded hopes of an early spring. Not every tender shoot braving chilly spring mornings is destined to frostbite. Warm afternoons drenched in sunlight are a reality of springtime even when winter has been dreadfully long and brutally cold.

I'm beginning to walk in the sunlight of spring now. The winter in my soul has been bleak, its intense cold and brutal wind have cut deeply. At times, I have even lost sight of the possibility of spring's return. I have spent the past fifteen years in the brutal cold and howling wind of a long winter. Yet, here I stand in the sunlight gazing in disbelief at the golden crocus blossoms nodding cordially near my doorstep.

My husband, Mark, and I are the parents of twin boys. Matthew and Luke were born six weeks early via urgent Caesarean section. Luke weighed in at four pounds 14 ounces and Matthew followed at four pounds 7 ounces. Matthew was whisked away to the NICU and Luke quickly followed; Luke remained in NICU for ten days and Matthew stayed for two weeks. Early prognosis from the NICU doctor: Luke would progress normally and Matthew would have profound special needs and struggle all his life.

Our boys came home with an exhausting feeding schedule, wearing heart and apnea monitors. I began caregiving around the clock; sleep became a rare commodity, and I had little contact outside the home. Luke began to

meet his developmental milestones with ease. Matthew struggled with the basics of eating, sleeping and holding up his head. He had his first seizure at 18 months old. That began the 12-year saga of countless 911 calls, neurology appointments and hospital stays.

One rainy spring evening, Matthew's seizures escalated once again and we called 911. I stood in the driveway watching the EMTs load my tiny son into the ambulance. As the red and blue lights flickered and reflected on the wet pavement, this thought dropped into my mind: *This faith-thing better work as I've heard it does. It better be strong enough to carry me through tough times, because right here is where the rubber hits the road!*

I knew the road ahead was a steep, uphill trek, more so than anticipated. I considered myself a strong Christian, yet my faith remained untested. Now, a true crisis had arisen, forcing my faith into action. If I intended to survive this arduous journey, more would be required of me than faithful church attendance and possessing Bible knowledge.

Battle-tested saints I'd encountered throughout my church-life spoke of faith, trust, and prayer at depths I'd never experienced. I desired that strength and depth, yet hearing them speak of "*fiery trials*" made me uncomfortable. Surely there was a route to such depth without the "*fiery trials*." The ambulance in my driveway was His answer.

At this point I was confronted with a few options. I could choose to sink beneath the weight of this burden, resulting in self-pity and despair, and in so-doing become

ineffective as a wife and mother. On the other hand, I could choose to rise up in God's strength and draw upon the faith planted in me by godly parents. Standing fast upon that foundation of truth, I could work to build an impenetrable faith, strong enough to carry me through what lay ahead. Weariness and desperation were all I had, yet He offered me His strength if I would simply pursue it. Matthew and Luke needed a strong, godly mother caring for their needs with compassion and skill.

Jesus offered strong, authentic faith through life-giving dependence upon Him. Choosing Him was my only viable option, so I engaged in an all-out pursuit of the strength He offered. Scripture became my lifeline and my prayer life was transformed into a soul-sustaining connection to my divine power source. The Holy Spirit became my tutor, Scripture became my textbook, obscurity became my schoolroom and heartache became my schoolmaster.

Through the practice of spiritual disciplines, I cultivated the skills of a faith-warrior. He taught me to defend the fortress of my mind and heart by wielding the sword of His word with power and by waging war in prayer. This became my way of life.

Matthew's needs were intense; his care was hands-on and exhausting. He was incredibly sweet and affectionate, yet his abilities peaked at a two-year-old equivalency. He was very busy, and like a baby, put everything into his mouth. He required my spoon feeding, dressing and bathing, and remained non-verbal throughout his life. He lacked safety awareness of any kind that required my constant vigilance to keep him safe. The exhaustion and isolation that accompanied life with a special needs child forced my reliance upon prayer. My only source of strength was Jesus; however, when Jesus was all I had, I found that He was all I needed.

My prayers, however, were not hushed whispers fit for stained-glass chapels aglow with sunlight. My prayers were intensely real—tearful rants, anguished pleas and wrestling matches. During the long days of care-giving, I prayed as I worked. I prayed for strength and Matthew's healing. In 12 years of praying, Jesus gave me one answer: *"My grace is sufficient for you, for My power is made perfect in weakness."*

I bristled at His answer, and our conversations went like this: *That's all You have to say when Matthew is suffering? You care for "the least of these"?! Here we are—a special needs boy and his heartbroken mama! If You're planning to show up, now might be a good time!* Patiently, He'd point me back to this scripture. I'd love to say I was blessed by His answer, but that would be a lie. I was exhausted, lonely

and overwhelmed. Watching helplessly as Matthew suffered broke my heart, often driving me to tears. Yet, in my heartache, I learned to trust the heart of Jesus, His wisdom and sovereignty rather than lean on my own understanding.

I am a singer of songs, holding hymns in high regard; their depth challenges and moves me. My prayers melded with the hymns I loved and became my on-going heart-cry. When the boys were tiny, I decided to sing hymns as their lullabies as a way to pour truth into them early in life. As it was most often Matthew I was trying desperately to get to sleep, I would sing hymns as much for my own benefit as his. As I sang, I would sink my roots deeply into the truth contained in the hymn lyrics and apply the truth to our situation. How often I wept and worshipped in the darkness while rocking Matthew on my lap. I knew that God promised to show up when we praise Him. I certainly needed His presence, so I sang softly in the darkness trusting Him to hear my heart-cry.

By the summer of 2012, Matthew's needs had increased to the point that both he and I stayed inside all the time. To pass the long, hot afternoons, I would often sing for Matthew. He loved the familiar hymns I had always sung for him and he enjoyed my singing, so I sang. He would often climb into my lap or sit beside me, listening intently or doing his best to sing along. As I sang, I prayed. I prayed for his release from his special needs, yet I knew, with a silent ache, that his release would likely be in Heaven.

As summer faded into another school year, Matthew's seizure activity increased. He went from morning and evening breakthroughs to constant seizure activity. Even though he was on several heavy medications, the seizures refused to stop. Had I not cultivated this life-giving dependence on God during the early days of our journey, I would have certainly collapsed under the weight of what proved to be, the final leg of Matthew's journey.

During Matthew's last hospitalization, a team of doctors adjusted and readjusted his seizure medications to no avail. Like many times before, I was alone with Matthew in a hospital room, but this time was different. I stood beside Matthew's hospital bed staring down at him, lying motionless under heavy sedation. In my heart, I had known this day would come, but I never expected it to be this day.

Matthew had always been in God's hands from Eternity Past; the same was true now. This Jesus, Who had become my strength and song through countless desperate night-watches, would prove Himself faithful once again. Where Jesus led, I would follow. Wherever He was, I would be,

too. Within hours, the options that remained failed, and the doctors were left with one last-ditch effort, a medically induced coma. As the neurologist explained what sounded like a dangerous procedure, I stood in stunned silence. The neurology team gathered and the decision was made to begin the process. They transferred Matthew to the PICU where the procedure began. A friend stayed with me as I sat, numbly staring.

My sisters came to visit, but before they left, they requested we pray. In the dimly lit waiting room, we pulled our chairs together and cried out to the God of Heaven. Our tears flowed; my sisters held me as I prayed with heaving sobs. As they held me, I heard myself repeating, “No God, not my Baby! Please no, not my Baby!” We said our “amens”; my sisters left. Following that prayer time, an image dropped into my mind. Jesus stood with His hand outstretched over an expanse of churning, black water. He wordlessly beckoned me to follow. I knew what He meant. He wanted my absolute trust as He took Matthew home. His silent promise: “. . .when you pass through the waters I will be with you. . .”

Heart-sick and physically ill from the grim reality ahead, I took up my post, a green vinyl recliner in the corner of Matthew’s unit. I settled into my PICU routine, each day more nauseating than the last. Doctors explained in brutally raw terms the end-of-life issues before me. I was reeling end over end in a sickening nightmare that was bearable only because of the kindness of church friends and family. Their well-wishes became compassion as their kindness showed up in tangible ways: a latte and a listening ear, a Panera salad and prayer, Advil and open arms. Mostly friends came to listen, comfort us and help shoulder our impossibly heavy burden. The loving kindness of our Lord had shown itself once again as family and friends became the hands and feet of Jesus, bringing comfort in unbearable circumstances. Matthew simply lay motionless in his coma, barely visible beneath the vent tubing, tangle of wires and the bundle of EEG probes pasted to his head.

The PICU days became a week and Matthew’s eyelids began to flutter, his hands began to move; he was coming out of his coma. As he slowly gained consciousness, his seizures returned, but they were coming ten per hour rather than continuously. The doctors deemed the procedure a moderate success and made plans to stabilize Matthew on a regular nursing floor. We would transition him home on hospice.

As we executed that plan, Matthew made remarkable gains. Within a few days, he was sitting up in his wheelchair,

eating and attempting a few wobbly steps. He also came back from his coma knowing how to give hugs and was fond of giving them to Luke and me. Early in December, we returned home on hospice with an overwhelming medication schedule, orders for home health equipment and private duty nursing. The equipment invaded like unwelcome guests, a grim reminder of what hospice means. We arranged private duty nursing in a valiant effort to allow me a full night’s sleep. Though Matthew had made remarkable progress, his brain and body were completely overloaded by his regimen of seizure meds, new caregivers and his recent coma. For two weeks, he spent his nights yelling and reeling wildly as he tried in vain to stand. Most of the nurses stayed only one shift and never returned.

Within ten days at home, Matthew’s progress amazed the nurses, making hospice seem absurd. We began arranging for him to return to school a few hours per day at semester. I was even able to take him to his school’s Christmas party, allow him to walk in his gait trainer and ride his adaptive bike, truly amazing, considering where he’d been just weeks before.

After Christmas, Matthew began to regress. He could no longer stand even with assistance, and he seemed to be in pain. The hospice nurse immediately recognized what was happening. He had made his stellar comeback, and now his body was winding down. Matthew was dying. We began oxygen, and did our best to keep him comfortable, as a suffocating death pall settled over the house. My head pounded, my stomach clenched into a knot, but with quiet resolve to follow Jesus into that “churning black water,” I extended my trembling hand to His and stepped into the icy black waves. By 10 that evening, Matthew’s passing was upon us.

I gathered Mark and Luke, and we settled down on Matthew’s bed prepared to stay with him until he passed into eternity. How could we not be there when he needed us most? How could we miss such an awful, yet beautifully holy moment as Matthew’s passing? So, there we were, holding his hands and walking with Matthew as far as we could toward Heaven’s gate. Our tears flowed; I sang the same hymns I had always sung for him, as his frail body slowly faded. He opened his eyes halfway, his clouded gaze rested momentarily on Luke and me. He closed his eyes and in a few moments passed into eternity. His battle was over! He was finally healed, whole and free—the seizures had stopped! The countless prayers I’d prayed for his healing were finally answered. I blessed the Lord for Matthew’s release, yet was crushed by the loss. I would never be the same again. Yet, I knew, this same Jesus, who

had carried me through countless desperate days, would carry me through this profound loss.

The days that followed Matthew's passing were raw pain. Standing in the funeral parlor looking down at your son's lifeless body is not an experience for the anemic of soul. As Mark, Luke and I stood there in silence, our hearts screaming with pain, it was as obvious then as it had been the moment Matthew passed: ". . .to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord."

Matthew's life had been a struggle from his first breath to his last. I could only feel relief and joy for him. Matthew's special needs were costly for me--exhaustion, helplessly watching as he suffered and the final tearing asunder of my very soul as he died.

Yet, I bless the uphill journey, for where else but in desperation would the Lord of All Creation stoop down to walk with me? Where else but in pain would the Suffering Servant carry my impossibly heavy load? Where else but in loneliness could I find such a Friend? Without the pain, I could have never known Jesus as I do, so I bless the uphill journey, for by it the Almighty One has become my strength. The Sovereign Lord has become my peace and the Gentle Shepherd has become my comfort and the healer of my broken heart.

With Matthew's funeral over, and friends and family back to work, a thick swirling fog descended upon my soul. Had I not cultivated life-giving dependence on God early in our journey, I would surely have become disoriented, plunging into the grayness, wildly grasping for the solid ground that lay beneath my feet.

Despite the emotions that pulled me toward the fog, I crouched low on the solid rock of truth, for there I was safe, despite the disorienting grayness that threatened to swallow me. There I stayed for innumerable days.

"But let all who take refuge in You rejoice; let them ever sing for joy. Spread Your protection over them, so that those who love Your name may exult in You." - Psalm 5:11



One day I felt warmth, rather than pain, and roused to note a change in the thick fog. It had become a gray-whiteness and was pierced with silvery rays of light. To my amazement, the fog was lifting. Beyond the grayness that swirled away in the silvery light, there was a blue expanse and a shining golden orb. Its rays warmed, yet confused me. My soul had lived so long in winter, springtime had become a wispy dream.

Nodding, golden blossoms caught my eye and their delicate beauty amazed me and echoed the promise of new life and resurrection. I silently vowed to honor Matthew's life with a profusion of flowers, and so remind myself that out of death bursts new and glorious life.

On Matthew's birthday, I planted crocus bulbs in his honor--the very ones blooming in the sunshine near my doorstep. They raise their golden trumpets and announce to this brutal world that, just as spring has burst forth from winter's icy grasp, so Matthew is more alive and free than his best day on earth. Our joyful reunion is just as sure as the return of spring.

Paula Romang is a long-time resident of Liberty, Missouri. She



received a B.A. in English from Bryan College, Dayton, TN and a M.A. in English from Northwest Missouri State University, Maryville, MO. Paula enjoys writing, singing, cooking and gardening. "My greatest joy is using my gifts and talents to

make an eternal impact for God's glory." Paula has been married to Mark for 21 years. Their son Luke is 16; his twin, Matthew, is with the Lord.

*“You make known to me the path of life;
in Your presence there is fullness of joy;
at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore.”*

– Psalm 16:11

Jolee’s Desire

By Jeff Glover—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

In life, there are occasions when we wonder why we are having a certain experience. The obligatory thoughts often revolve around the “Why God?” question. As the Lord reveals His hand and purpose for allowing our circumstances, the answers and lessons come from the most unlikely sources. I had such a time and situation not so long ago. It was 2009, and the economy had deteriorated significantly. I was laid off from my job for the second time in three years as the Space Shuttle Program came to an end, setting many of its workers free. I’m a grab-the-bull-by-the-horns sort of person; I don’t spend much time lamenting my circumstances, nor waiting for a miraculous fix. I started moving forward by searching for work, taking charge of the domestic front via cleaning, cooking, and tackling a few honey-do projects, such as framing and wiring part of the basement. I figured I had found my niche for the time being. And I was totally unprepared for some of the incredible and unexpected experiences I would encounter in the months ahead.

*Lesson Learned: My provision for the family takes many forms
and goes well beyond the paycheck.*

With extra time on my hands, I started working on a 50th birthday celebration for my wife, Patti. I put together a plan to honor her with an ice cream social, which would include a slideshow tribute of her life accompanied by a music score. I began plowing through the numerous picture albums we had accumulated over our many years together, as well as reviewing old familiar songs that could beautifully depict her story. I expected this project to go fairly quickly, and I was surprised not only by the length of time it took, but also by the reason it ended up consuming so many hours and days. This seemingly menial task was so packed with nostalgia and passion that I lingered over each picture and song with relish.

Unexpectedly, the Lord gave me a renewed sense of appreciation and an even greater love for this woman with whom I had spent decades. It seemed as if those feelings, though not gone, had been somewhat buried by the sands of time and the daily busyness of life. I saw a renaissance fueled in our marriage as daily distractions were set aside exposing the sweetness of our relationship; a relationship in which I desired to invest. In an effort to rediscover our marriage and life together, I was spurred on to read numerous marriage books and listen to many *FamilyLife* radio programs focusing on the marriage relationship. As my core of knowledge grew,



so did my desire to help others discover how to have healthier, fulfilling, and God-honoring marriages according to His original plan. I was able to put this new knowledge, coupled with my years of experience, to work in the lives of others, and that has been very rewarding.

*Lesson Learned: My marriage although good, got lost in life’s
chaos and could be great and a testimony to the Lord.*

I have a heart for investing in marriages and helping to develop strong healthy families according to biblical principles. As my search to find work continued, we were subjected to testing of another sort. We had moved to Utah from Pocatello, Idaho in 2005, after wrestling long and hard with God over the issue. My job had been shipped over to Asia, and we were looking both locally and countrywide for work. Utah was not on our short list of desired places, but we began to experience numerous promptings in this direction. In short, God closed all doors, except for the Utah door and once we acquiesced and started looking to locate to Utah, all doors were flung open wide with unexpected blessing.

Now fast forward to 2010. From very unusual and unexpected sources, we had opportunities set before us which would either take us back to Eastern Idaho or down south to Arkansas. It seemed as if God was asking, “Are you following Me for what you want and need from Me or are you following Me simply in obedience to Me?”

We wondered if we felt in a very small way as did Abraham when asked to sacrifice his son Isaac. Although not excited about prospect of leaving Utah and our daughter and granddaughters, we decided to follow what seemed to be the Lord’s leading while asking Him to not send us away. God honored our requests to stay in Utah and shortly brought a new job our way.

*Lessons Learned: Obedience to God’s call does not necessarily mean
that there is an inevitable result contrary to my heart’s desire.*

Trust in God and His provision.

Be content and wait on the Lord’s perfect timing and plan.

It did not take long for my daughter Erica, having found out about my layoff from Thiokol, to ask if I would watch

her 18-month old daughter, Jolee, while she was at work. I jumped at the chance, and watching this little girl gave me an intense sense of purpose and passion for my life during that very difficult time. My life suddenly became very full with feeding, washing, dressing, playing with and loving this precious child. It was reinforced for me that provision for my family went well beyond the paycheck, and extended to the toughness and joys of raising children at home. I never would have experienced this incredibly rich opportunity had I not been let go.

In hindsight, it ended up being hands down the most important and meaningful job I ever held! This alone was an amazing lesson, but God was fostering an even greater work in me. Something extremely profound was missing, and I would soon discover it through my interactions with my precious granddaughter. Her most significant impact was my learning how to have a TRUE desire for God; a desire that was simply rooted in the joy



of His presence. Many times, as I was setting up lunch in front of her, this articulate little girl would “remind” me, with great fervor, to “pray Papa.” Her desire for the Lord was so essential to her being that it took my breath away. This child who did not yet understand a lot of things about life, demonstrated a deep understanding of what God’s role should be in the lives of all believers. Her actions were reminiscent of what Peter said in 1 Peter 1:8-9: *“Though you have not seen Him, you love Him. Though you do not now see Him, you believe in Him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.”*

For years, I had allowed myself to become so overwhelmed by the day-to-day concerns that I had forgotten the simple joys of being with the Lord. Daily, we should approach our heavenly “Papa” with such simplicity, innocence, and enthusiasm, to simply take joy in Him and bask in His presence. For the most part, I had approached God from the Hebrews 4:16 standpoint, and approached the throne of grace with confidence.

However, I was completely missing the more important concept of: *“The joy of the Lord is my strength.”* This comes from book of Nehemiah as the Jewish people are directed to recognize God’s holiness by partaking in the joys of His presence, provision, and deliverance during the Feast of Tabernacles. While absorbing and internalizing what Jolee

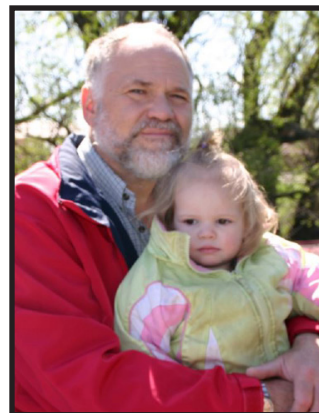
was exhibiting, the Holy Spirit knocked me upside the head and pointed me to an uncomfortable reality. Although I had learned many lessons regarding my shortcomings, obedience, and provision, I had nearly missed the most important lesson He had prepared for me: to revel in the joy of Him and Him alone, simply for who He is in relationship with me. This was the childlike faith spoken of by Jesus. Jolee painted a beautiful picture of that concept for me. I learned to slow down and better understand verse 17 of Romans 14 *“For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.”*

Lesson Learned: God seeks a childlike joy and faith in Him.

The bottom line is this: There are many difficult circumstances, a job loss is just one of a multitude of possibilities. We all know life is not perfect, and we’re bound to encounter many of these unfortunate experiences as we live out our days. Despite this fact, if we open our eyes, minds, and hearts, the Lord has blessings, provisions, and lessons beyond measure in store.

Many of these will transcend our immediate understandings of our circumstances, and no matter where we are in our journey, the most important concept to master is simply remembering who the Lord is, and to bask in the joy, contentment, and peace that comes from our personal relationship with Him.

Jeff Glover has been a Christ follower for 35 years. He was raised in a non-believing home and started on a search for a creator after recognizing the incredible design of the natural world around him. Through various means (primarily Patti who would eventually become his wife), he at age 19 came to know this creator as the one spoken of in John 1:1. Jeff and Patti have been married for nearly 33 years and have two grown daughters, and 8 grandchildren who are all



definitely keepers. In the rare moments when this family is not keeping them happily occupied, Jeff and Patti’s time is filled with enjoying time together in marriage ministry, gardening, enjoying the Lord’s creation, visiting historical sites and exploring the remote corners of the West.



“I will sing of the lovingkindness of the LORD forever; To all generations I will make known Your faithfulness with my mouth.”

—Psalm 89:1



My Story

by _____