

BLESSED LIVING

WOMEN'S E-MAGAZINE

FALL 2014

APPLE,
APPLE,
& APPLE
RECIPES!

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-IN-
FOCUS

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SANCTIFICATION
ROAD

PLUS

NEVER ALONE IN
ANY STORM

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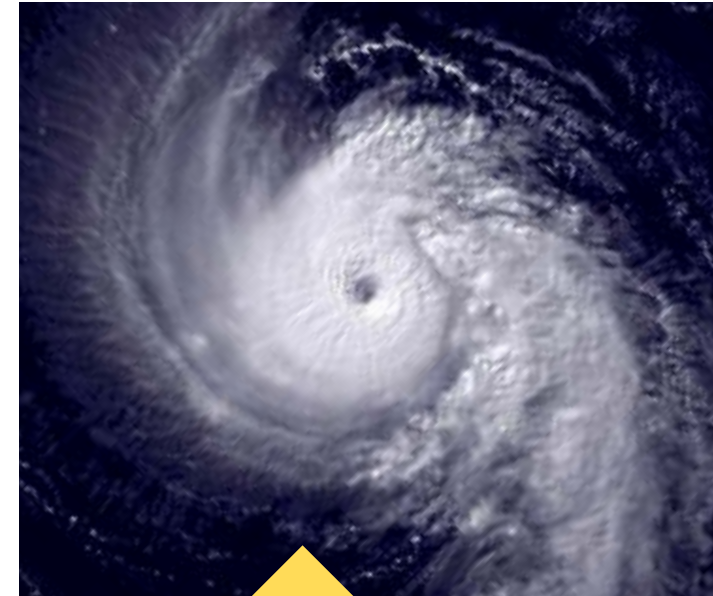
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WRITERS WANTED

Has God been doing a work in you that you want to give Him credit for? Ever have a nudge to put it into words? We are open to submissions, especially for the Her Master's Business and My Witnessing Story. Check with our web page for upcoming themes, deadlines, and submission forms. We'd like to hear how God is magnifying Himself in your life.

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EDITOR'S WELCOME

BLESSED LIVING WOMEN'S E-MAGAZINE JILL PATRICE BOND

Let's admit it. Sometimes life just hurts. Sometimes we're immersed in physical pain. While at others the pain is more emotional. The worst pain to me is always spiritual pain – especially of my own making.

But the good news in all of this is that God provides answers for us. When it is physical pain, through prayer and Bible study we can discern what actions He wants us to take. With emotional pain, as in deep grief, only He can sustain us and get us through it. And with spiritual pain, that amazing, sacrificial blood of Jesus cures it all. That pain, though the worst for some because they seem to cling to it as if it were a lifesaver, can be the cause of so much joy for those who hand it over to Christ. He can take that hurt and transform it to purity, forgiveness, and redemption.

Sometimes the pain lingers, sometimes the pain dissipates, and sometimes it just disappears instantly. But in each and every instance of hurting, God can work a mighty work in who we are as people.

Join our writers in this issue as they learn more about our loving Abba Father who works miracles when our lives hurt. Our Sister-in-Focus, Louise Carson, has triumphed marvelously with a life filled with complications and pain and yet, her praises reach His throne room.

We introduce several guest writers and each have amazing stories of how God not only got them through some really rough times, but how He drew them closer to

Himself and wrought them more like Jesus through it: Donna Conner, Krista Browning, and Emily Kirby.

To give you some emotional white space after so many intensely emotional stories, we add some practicality with apple recipes, soaking solutions, refurbishing examples, bread tie uses, computer fixes, and a custom nativity set plan.

Several of our staff writers are back with encouraging words. Penny shares her delight in how God answered prayers with her son in Penny's Two-Cents Worth and she adds the letter "E" to our learning how to improve our prayer lives. When her marriage was collapsing and the hurt was intense, Abbey Gayle seized the Rock of God and rejoices as she tells of her heart miracle in Mind Your Marriage. Anne Marie reviews two fairy tale movies and introduces us to some Romans Five folks.

We are thrilled to introduce two new members to our staff. Jessica LeMaster had a 180° transformation with a neighbor and used what could have been a civil case into a very civilized turn of events. Southern Belle marvels at the beauty of flowers as our new gardening columnist.

Though we had quite a story ourselves in just getting this issue launched, we know that God was perfecting our walk so that we can honestly say that When Life Hurts, God is the answer.

JILL

All errors are ours.
All Glory is God's.

MISSION STATEMENT:

To bless ladies by showing Jesus fleshed out in the lives of other women by sharing articles of His Presence in their lives that agree with the Scriptures.

COMING UP IN OUR NEXT ISSUE:

PUBLISHING DATE — IF THE LORD WILLS...

November 1st, 2014

THEME: LET'S CELEBRATE...

Final Letter of P.R.A.Y.E.R.
Have a Tech Savvy Christmas
Cleaning Your Kitchen Your Own Way
Recipes to Help You Through the Holidays
Festive-Themed Crafts
And More...

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ADVERSITY

Seven Ways God Uses Adversity in Our Lives

If you had asked me to tell you about the adversity in my life as a sophomore in college, my list would have been pretty weak.

Other than my grandfather passing away, moving one time, and a scene from Mean Girls in 9th grade, my life in Louisiana was pretty problem-free. I have wonderful, godly parents who created a safe, loving environment for me and helped me make right choices in a world of wrong turns.

I entered college as a naïve, unjaded 18 year old who had been sold on the “American Dream” and the pharisaical lie that if you love God enough and obey Him, you won’t have any real problems in your life.

The summer between my sophomore and junior year in college, I felt God calling me into the ministry, and I gladly accepted.

The only problem was the acceptance of that call created the loss of a serious dating relationship, a career change, and serious doubt about the goodness of God.

My whole world had been turned upside down, and since I’m a control freak who has to have a plan, the many changes in my life were almost unbearable. This led to depression

and serious spiritual warfare which included doubting my salvation and even the existence of God.

Did I mention that I was in seminary when all of this was taking place?

A few years later my calling was clarified, I had a career path, and I married a wonderful man. My life was complete. I had made all of the major life decisions that people have to make and was ready to settle down into a consistent and predictable life.

One month later, hurricane Katrina hit.

We weren’t sure how many months we’d be without power, if we’d ever clean up the wreckage in our yard, or if we even still had jobs since we both worked for churches who were hit hard physically and monetarily.

A year and a half later, we moved to my home church and were able to live in the same town as my family.

It was wonderful!

Shortly after, we had a beautiful baby girl, and now life really was complete. However, little did I know that the next 6 years would be one upheaval after another.

My daughter was three weeks old when my husband was diagnosed with lymphoma.

2010 brought two moves and two miscarriages.

2011 brought another move.

2012 brought a wonderful little change into our lives, our son.

2013 brought another move 12 hours from any family, some health problems, an unexpected pregnancy, and then a miscarriage.

So far, 2014 has brought another miscarriage, and I hope I’ve paid my adversity dues for the year.

I tell you all of this to say, adversity and change have become the unwanted guests that won’t seem to leave.

I bet you can relate.

The funny thing is, we all have adversity, but somehow we are taken by surprise when problems strike.

As Christians we should be smarter than this.

Jesus told us in **John** that in this life, we will have trouble; all of the heroes of the faith had problems and calamities; Jesus addressed the lie of a trouble-free life when the disciples asked who had sinned to cause the man to be blind; and we’re probably all familiar with Scripture on dealing with trouble.

I should know better, but I’m still

The destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Photo from FEMA website



caught off guard and sit on my pity pot.

I took a multiculturalism class a few years ago which described values and customs of different cultures. I distinctly remember reading about a certain people group whom the author had starkly contrasted with Americans in one area—expectation and handling of adversity.

The author basically said that Americans expect to have a problem-free life, and therefore do not handle trouble well.

Whereas, the other people group expected adversity, and the curve that life had thrown them was not quite as devastating.

I think there is a lot of truth to this statement. That’s probably why Jesus warned His listeners about the inevitability of trouble.

The other thing I think would really

help is if we understand why God allows adversity and what it can do for our lives.

As I search Scripture, I can come up with seven ways God uses adversity in our lives. I’m sure there are more, but I hope this list will help shine some light on the hurts in your life.

1 **FIRST**, God uses hardship to move us to another place. That may be a new city, job, relationship, or ministry opportunity. The book of Ruth is one of my favorite stories in the Bible. I probably like it because it’s a love story, but it also shows how God can take the most terrible circumstances and turn them into the best situations. In a short amount of time, Ruth, a Moabite, lost her father-in-law, brother-in-law, and her husband. Talk about a tough situation. God used the death of these

men to move Ruth to Israel to become one of His people, marry a wonderful man, have a baby, and eventually be in the lineage of Jesus. What an incredible ending. We often think we know best and that the “death” of something means the death of a good life. However, God knows what’s best for us and sometimes uses adversity to get us where we need to be.

2 **SECOND**, God uses trouble to build our character. **Romans 5:3-4** tells us

3 ... We also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; **4** perseverance, character; and character, hope.

Similarly, **James 1:2-4** says,

2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, **3** because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.

4 Let perseverance finish its

work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

There is no greater testing ground or learning curve than adversity. The days when my toddler keeps throwing fits or my car breaks down are perfect opportunities for God to build my character. I'd like to say I welcome it with open arms, but I'm not quite there yet.

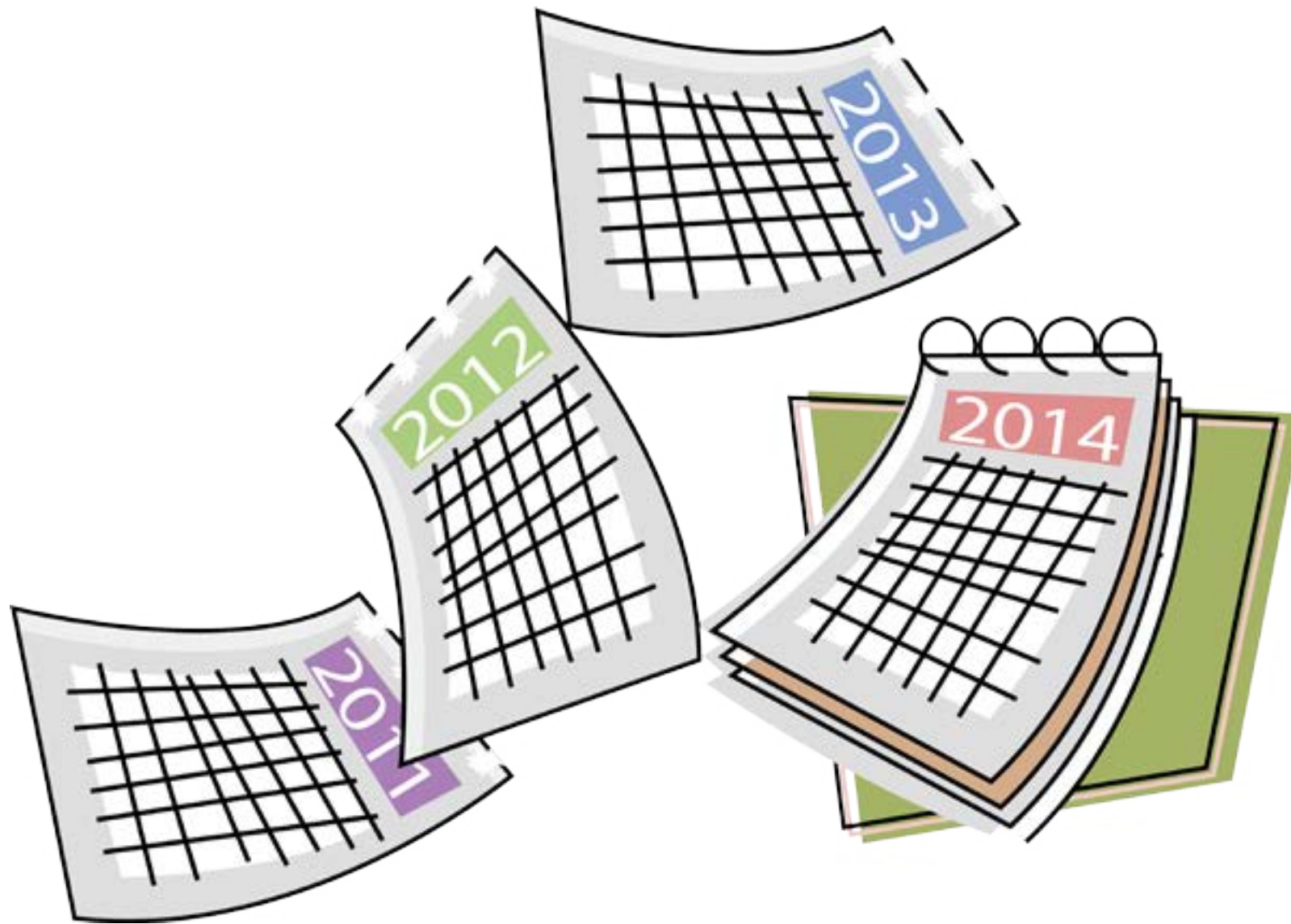
3 **THIRD**, sometimes God uses hardship to build gifts or experiences in our lives to help others.

2 Corinthians 1:3-4 says,

3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort,

4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.

As I said earlier, I became depressed during my first semester in seminary. It was one of the many ways God led me into the counseling field. If I had not gone through a mental disorder myself, I would have no way



of empathizing with my clients who deal with depression, anxiety, and many other conditions. It wasn't a fun time in my life, but I really do thank God for allowing me to walk down that road so I can help others.

4 **FOURTH, 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10** gives us a couple of reasons why God allows adversity. Paul says,

7 ...In order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.

8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

9 But he said to me, "My

grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

In this verse, we first see that God allowed this "thorn" to keep Paul from becoming conceited. Sometimes God uses hardships to protect us—often from ourselves. I can frequently get "too big for my britches" and need

someone or something to remind me who and what I really am. He can also use it to protect us from events that will take place. I often think about those that missed being in the Twin Towers on 9/11. I've heard stories from a missed alarm clock, to traffic, to a sick child. I bet those people weren't happy about their adversity before 9 am, but boy, how God used it!

5 **FIFTH, 2 Corinthians 12:7b-10** shows us that God wants to display His supremacy through our trials. God loves to demonstrate his power in our weaknesses. We and others around us can see that it is God's power and strength that sustains us and not ourselves. It's about Him and not about what we can do.

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Romans 8:28 NIV

6 **SIXTH**, here comes the use for adversity that no one likes to hear—discipline. **Hebrews 12:7** says,

Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as his children. For what children are not disciplined by their father?

Sometimes we suffer because of a fallen world or a bad decision of another, but sometimes we suffer because of our own bad choices. I wish that in saving us, God would take away all of our negative consequences, but He loves us too much to do that. Just as a parent loves his or her child enough to correct detrimental behavior, God loves us too much to leave us in our sin.

7 **SEVENTH**, God can use suffering in our lives to show Himself to others. Our lives are never on display more than when we go through a public hardship—a miscarriage, a death, cancer, loss of a job, or a cantankerous toddler. It's in those times we have an opportunity to witness to those around us by our actions, reactions, and our faith. My life is NEVER on display like when my toddler is screaming in Walmart. It's at that point that I'm able to display the

fruit in my life (or lack thereof).

The key to dealing with adversity is our willingness to be the pliable clay God wants us to be. We can meet trials and suffering with bitterness and resentment and refuse to learn anything from those situations, or we can use every opportunity in life to glorify and become more like Christ.

I wish I could say that I've got a handle on this adversity thing. I wish I could say I always react to suffering with an open heart and mold-able spirit, but I don't. One thing I can say is that God is always *good even when He's not understood* (Faithful, Hawk Nelson, paraphrased).

And if you and I will let Him, He will use every circumstance in our lives for good.

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Emily is a Licensed Mental Health Counselor and has been providing professional Christian counseling since 2005. She received a Masters of Divinity in Psychology and Counseling from New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary and a Bachelor of Arts from Louisiana State University. Emily was born and raised in the New Orleans area. She and her husband, Brad, have 2 children. In her spare time she loves sports, snow skiing, baking, and watching reruns of old TV shows.



ALL THINGS MADE NEW

FROM

TO

Behold, I am making all things new.

Revelation 21:5 ESV

Just like these pieces of furniture, sometimes we can feel worn out, broken and marred by life.

There's a saying in the furniture-restoring world about a piece having "good bones." That basically means it's worth salvaging. I believe that's how God

sees us – worth salvaging. We're worth His time, His effort, even His very Life, to restore us.

Even if you're feeling like parts of your life are trashed, He sees a treasure. That applies to your salvation as well as your circumstances. He longs for you to allow Him to renew your heart as well as

turn the messes in your life into miracles. And He is able.

He heals the broken-hearted and binds up their wounds.

Psalm 147:3

Sanding, painting and varnishing is hard work

and messy. Restoring our lives can be messy, too. Sometimes I've even had to break something completely that was partly broken in order to put it back together properly. Sometimes it's like that in life, too. But the vision of the end result is so worth the effort and keeps me motivated to keep on

keeping on.

Likewise, God sees who we can become and doesn't allow us to stay marred or broken. He desires to rebuild us and our lives. Is that what He is in the process of doing in your life?

"I will seek the lost, and I will bring back the strayed, and I will bind up the injured, and I will strengthen the weak..."

Ezekiel 34:16

Give Him your heart. Give Him the broken pieces of your life. Allow Him to work His restorative power in your life and circumstances.

...to grant to those who mourn in Zion—to give them a beautiful headdress instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, the garment of praise

instead of a faint spirit; that they may be called oaks of righteousness, the planting of the Lord, that he may be glorified.

Isaiah 61:3

This takes time and patience, tireless effort, and sometimes painful work. But it can be done with His help. He makes all things new, and He makes all things beautiful in His time.

He has made everything beautiful in its time.

Ecclesiastes 3:11

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Penny's hobby is restoring old furniture and accessories. She loves finding someone's throw-away and seeing it come to life again. Trash to treasure – just like Jesus does with our lives.

BLWE

All scriptures are ESV



Divorce Decree
 PETITION FOR DISSOLUTION OF MARRIAGE
 HUSBAND VS. WIFE
 MARRIAGE IRRETRIEVABLY BROKEN



PEACE IN A TURBULENT MARRIAGE

"Marriage irretrievably broken." That's what the divorce papers said.

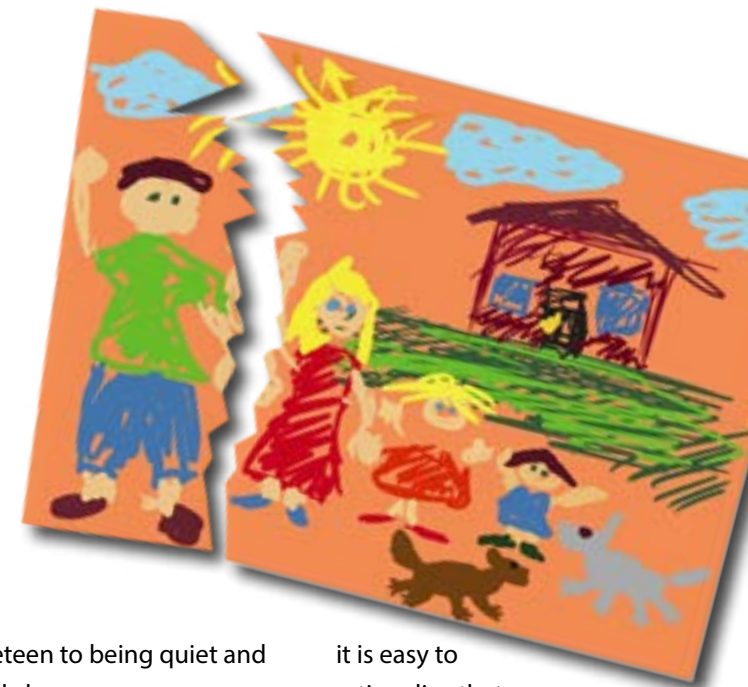
My column this month picks up from the column in our previous issue that had the theme Resting in Him. I wrote about the circumstance that brought me to the lap of God – the perfect place to peacefully trust while awaiting the outcome of my broken marriage.

Here's a brief recap: After fourteen years of a stressful marriage, things had finally reached the breaking point when I realized my husband was involved with another woman that he had met on his second job. He told me that he would have coffee with her on their breaks. Our entire family found ourselves in the ugly, painful, ravaging throws of divorce, with each of us reacting in our own unique way. Life was definitely hurting.

I had been a total, desperate mess – that is until I was flooded with the peace of God right in my attorney's office. That experience affected a radical change on my outlook, my behavior, and my resolve even though I had to wait three long weeks until the actual divorce mediation.

I was no longer a crying, clinging emotional weakling, but now was operating in the strength of my LORD with His supernatural strength being made perfect in my weakness.

We are all faced with a series of great opportunities brilliantly disguised as impossible situations.
 – Charles R. Swindoll



And He has said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.

2 Corinthians 12:9

Believe me, this was a very noticeable difference. My husband had moved out of the house and was renting a room from a coworker. Instead of crying and clutching onto my husband when he would come to visit the children, begging him to try and work things out, I would arrange to be out whenever he came to the house. I didn't break down at the dinner table in front of my children anymore either, and I actually was able to eat more than just (ironically) Cheerios.

Was I still hurting? Of

course. Terribly. Deeply. I felt like I had lost half of myself, and given that my husband took his dresser and nightstand with him when he left, the empty spaces in our bedroom served as a constant reminder. Just knowing my husband was having coffee with another woman felt like an arrow piercing my heart. I couldn't even let my thoughts or imagination go beyond that relatively minute reality.

When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Your consolations delight my soul.

Psalms 94:19

As I alluded to earlier, I was not the only one hurting.

Our three daughters each reacted in their own varied ways. Our oldest daughter went from a bubbly and carefree

preteen to being quiet and withdrawn.

Moreover, she never really bounced back. I have heard that that is an especially sensitive age for children to experience trauma in their lives, and trust me, divorce is traumatic for our children.

Our middle daughter was already struggling with self-confidence issues. When she became upset by the unpleasant circumstances her life had been caught up in, her big brown eyes welled up with tears until they would begin to overflow.

Our youngest daughter was the comedian in the family – trying to bring laughter into a home filled with hurt and despair.

As parents, we can become so consumed with our own emotional trauma and selfish desires that we do not consider first and foremost the harmful effects of our actions and choices on our children.

In the midst of a storm

it is easy to rationalize that you are doing what is best for them just by getting them out of the tempest even if it means dismantling your family unit.

My husband essentially did not appear to be hurting at that time, although on some level I'm sure he was. He was actually conducting himself in a quite cold and detached manner towards me.

I mentioned this to a Christian counselor that I briefly continued to see after my husband and I separated. He explained that this behavior can be typical when one spouse becomes involved with someone else outside the marriage – they muster up feelings of extreme dislike toward their spouse in order to justify their affection for someone else.

Yes, that hurt, but I was still resting in God and operating under His strength even though



circumstances seemed to be rapidly and steadily declining.

God is our refuge and strength, A very present help in trouble.

Psalm 46:1

I was still being encouraged by the prayers and support of many others and through Christian programming. Some of that programming even began to convict me.

Although I had no doubt that my husband was messing up terribly when it came to our marriage, I started to get revelation about my input into its deterioration as well.

The night before our scheduled mediation also happened to be our daughter's birthday. My husband came to the house to have cake.

For this occasion, I did not leave while he was there.

After the birthday celebration was over, I noticed him scouring the house, and asked him what he was doing. He informed me that he had been informed by his attorney to note any last minute possessions he wanted included in the final settlement.

Okay. I lost it. I screamed. I shouted. I pushed him out the front door pounding my fist on the door, screaming, and crying even after he was long gone. Things were not looking good for mediation at the attorney's office the next day.

However, while I was sleeping (or trying to) that night, there must have been a bona fide battle going on in the spiritual realm. Absolutely nothing humanly perceptible had occurred in those brief hours between that ugly scene the night before and the hours leading up to the mediation.

For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.

Ephesians 6:12

After getting our daughters off to school I began to get ready to leave for the attorney's office. I wore a skirt and top that day and had the thought to stick two Tylenol in the pocket of my skirt for my husband. He had frequently popped



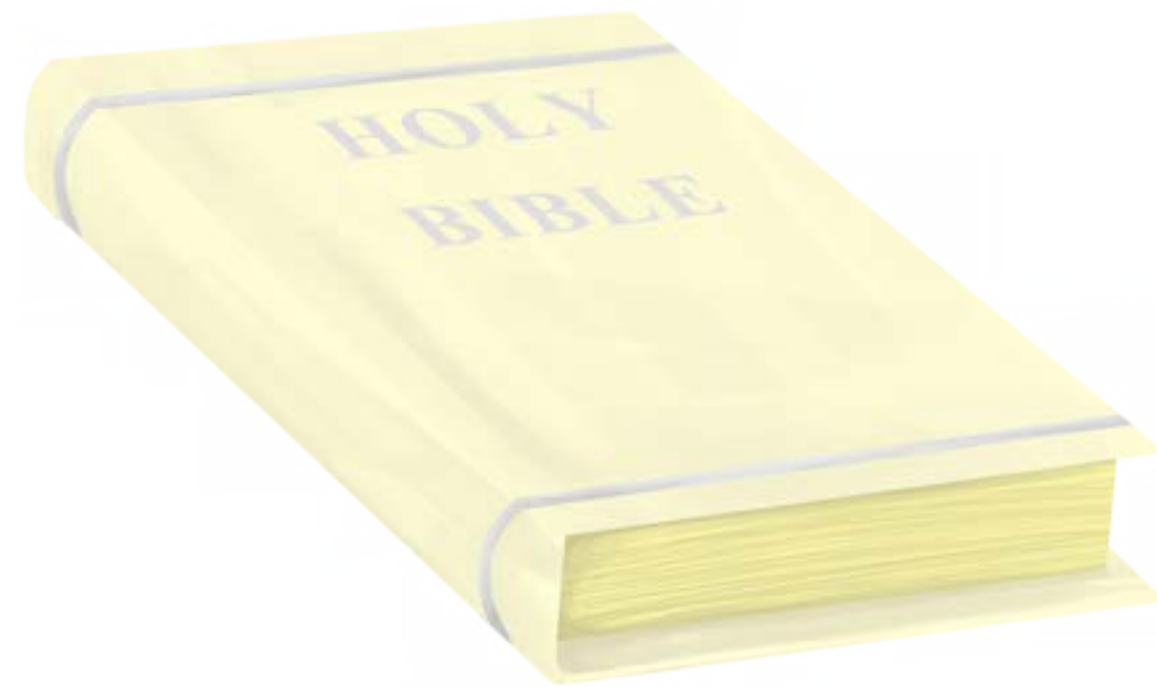
them for headaches, and I was sure that he would have a headache that day.

I got into town where the attorney's office was and drove into a park until it was time for the appointment.

Sitting there in my car, I pulled out an itty bitsy scripture booklet that I carried in my purse and had probably never looked at since sticking it in there. I read through it, and felt strengthened, comforted, and loved.

At this point, though, I can't say I was really feeling hopeful. I felt like I had no control over the circumstances and that I was just doing what I had to do. The important thing was that I knew the One who did have control.

In the waiting room and in the first half of the mediation process, things were moving along smoothly and remarkably amicably. Even the conversation between my husband and me included sentiments



such as "Hon."

Maybe the attorneys sensed something that wasn't yet obvious to me. They called for a short break. Back in the waiting room with my husband, I offered him the Tylenol, and he graciously accepted.

After the break, we continued the mediation, peculiar pleasantries and all. Since my husband's attorney had been pleading for my husband to get our house and full custody of our children in the original papers I had been served, I remember being grateful that the settlement at least seemed fair. Now all that was left was to sign the final papers when they were prepared.

Evidently, the battle in the heavenlies was still going on. The next day, still "doing what I had to do" to meet the requirements of

the settlement reached, I received a phone call from my husband late in the day.

I sensed that maybe he was having second thoughts and asked him if he wanted to talk. He

re- assured me that he was, and we made plans for him to quickly return to our home and family. spond- ed affirma- tively, and we set up a time to meet the following day.

We talked for two hours. We talked about reconciling. Obviously I wanted to know everything about my husband's affair with the other woman – and that he was definitely willing and ready to end it. He

assured me that he was, and we made plans for him to quickly return to our home and family.

Of course there were still kinks to be worked out. We both agreed to resume counseling. It was wonderful to go home and give our children, our extended family, and our friends this great news.

To God be ALL the glory! I learned so much through this experience and recognized God's faithfulness and provision all throughout. My relationship with Him grew by leaps and bounds. I was and still am so thankful.

"I love You, O LORD, my strength."
Psalm 18:1

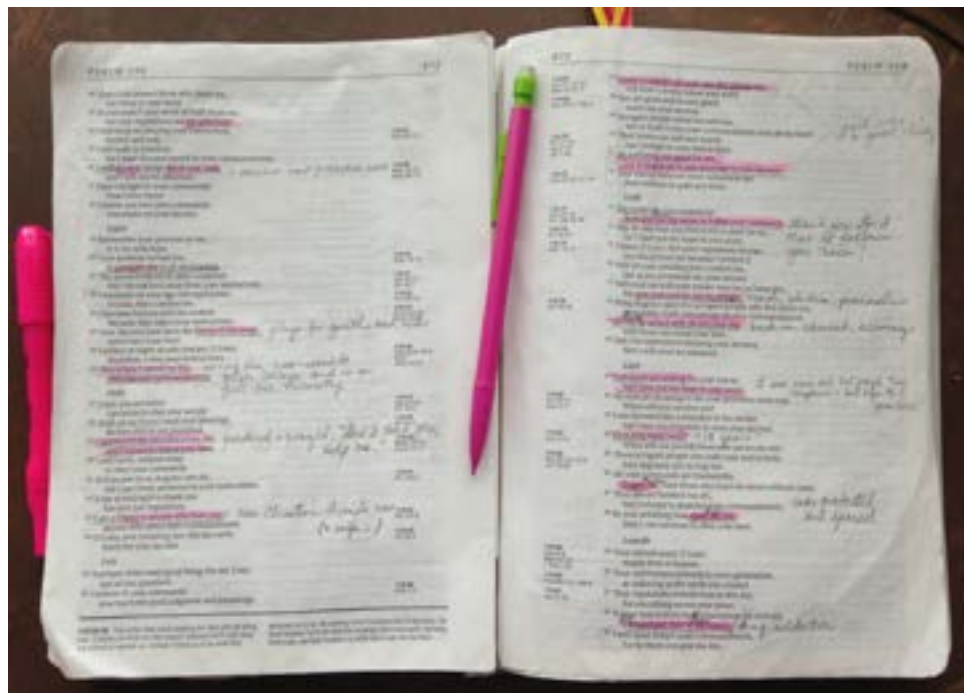
The next day was my birthday. Talk about a celebration...



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PURSUING P.R.A.Y.E.R.



I love you Lord, because you have heard my voice and my prayer for mercy. Because you bent down to listen, I will pray to You as long as I live. Death wrapped its ropes around my loved one and fear overtook me. I saw only trouble and sorrow. Then I called on the name of the LORD: "Please save him!" How kind you are LORD! How good you are! My God is so merciful!

Psalm 116:1-5 (personalized)

E – EXPRESS

Have you ever used God's Word to worship and thank Him, to confess your sins, or to make supplication to Him?

In the last three issues of this magazine, we've discussed an acrostic for prayer in order to help guide us into a more disciplined and structured pattern of prayer.

We've discussed many aspects of prayer, and I've quoted others' thoughts on the subject, which can be interesting, encouraging, and challenging. But God's Word is powerful. God's Word is life changing.

So that is what we're going to talk about in this article - using God's Word to pray.

Many times our minds wander during prayer and we can become distracted. Sometimes we can even feel in a rut in our prayer life, or we just don't even know what to pray or we can't find the words.

That is when God's Word is so useful in prayer.

Romans 8:26 says that we don't know what to pray for as we should, and **Isaiah 55:8** says our thoughts are not His thoughts, and His ways are not our ways.

So why not use His thoughts to guide us in how to pray?

In **Psalm 77:4b** Asaph said he was so troubled that he could not speak. The **NLT** version words it,

I am too distressed even to pray!

He was expressing his heart to God. And when life hurts and we are too distressed to pray, we can use the very words in the Bible to express our hearts in prayer.

We can turn much of Scripture into a prayer, personalizing it by changing pronouns where appropriate. However, this does not make it a magic formula.

The following parts of prayer must be in place, much like Jesus taught in the Lord's Prayer (**Matthew 6:9-15**), which is what the prayer acrostic is based on.

The earnest prayer of a righteous person has great power and produces wonderful results.

James 5:16b NLT

Let's look at a few specifics using the prayer acrostic as a guide.

First, the "P" is for being Proactive about prayer. We first must Purposely and actively seek His Presence.

Seek the LORD and His strength; Seek His presence continually!

1 Chronicles 16:11 ESV

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you.

Psalm 63:1 ESV

"R" is for Remember who God is and what He has done, and Respond in worship. It is the "Hallowed be Thy Name" part of prayer.

I will remember the deeds of the LORD; yes, I will remember your wonders of old.

Psalm 77:11 ESV

This is a good time to recount in prayer what God has done in your own life. **Psalm 103:1-5** is a great scripture to use in prayer for this:

Bless you Lord, O my soul, let all that is within me, bless your holy name!

Bless you Lord, O my soul, I will not forget all your benefits, you forgive all my iniquity, you heal all my diseases, you redeem my life from the pit, you crown me with steadfast love and mercy, and you satisfy me with good so that my youth is renewed like the eagle's. (personalized)

"A" is for Acknowledge sin and Ask forgiveness, Adding forgiveness for others. It's the "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us" part of prayer.

If I had cherished iniquity in my heart, the LORD would not have listened.

Psalm 66:18 ESV

I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.

Psalm 32:5 ESV

"And whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father also who is

P. PROACTIVE

R. REMEMBER

A. ACKNOWLEDGE

Y. YIELD

E. EXPRESS

R. REST

in heaven may forgive you your trespasses."

Mark 11:25 ESV

"Y" is for Yearning for God as well as bringing our yearnings (supplications) to Him.

My soul yearns for you in the night; my spirit within me earnestly seeks you.

Isaiah 26:9 ESV

For He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.

Psalm 107:9 NLT

Yearning includes the, "Give us this day our daily bread" part of the Lord's Prayer. But it is important to note also that Jesus called Himself "The Bread of Life" (**John 6:35**). So when we talk about using God's Word to pray, it is assumed that we're having



our "Daily Bread."

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly...

Colossians 3:16a ESV

In order to use God's Word to pray, we must first be in the Word. The more we know God's Word, the more we can use it in prayer and the more natural and automatic it will become.

This brings us to the E in the acrostic:

Express your heart with God's Word.

Hebrews 4:12 describes God's Word as sharper than any two-edged sword.

We must realize how important, how powerful, and how necessary prayer is. Even as we met for coffee to edit this article, a friend from church came in and talked about how she's not in prayer enough for the many things that are going on in her life. Why is that?

Prayer is one of the pieces of the spiritual armor we are commanded to put on. Ephesians 6 speaks of taking the Sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and praying at all times. The Message paraphrase of **Ephesians 6:13-18** says:

Be prepared. You're up against far more than you can handle on own. Take all the help you can get, every weapon God has issued, so that when it's all over but the shouting you'll still be on your feet. Truth, righteousness, peace, faith, and salvation are

more than words. Learn how to apply them. You'll need them throughout your life. God's Word is an indispensable weapon. In the same way, prayer is essential in this ongoing warfare. Pray hard and long. Pray for your brothers and sisters. Keep your eyes open. Keep each other's spirits up so that no one falls behind or drops out.

What a weapon – God's Word and prayer combined!

Furthermore, God's Word is not bound (**2 Timothy 2:9**); it does not wither or fade but stands forever (**Isaiah 40:8**); and it does not return void but accomplishes God's purposes (**Isaiah 55:10-11**).

If we can live by every Word that comes from the mouth of God (**Matt 4.4**), then we can pray every Word that comes from the mouth of God. They are His words, and when we pray them back to Him, they will not return void and will accomplish what we ask.

1 John 5:14-15 says that we can have confidence that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us and we have what we asked of him. How could anything be more in line with His will than His own Words?

Hebrews 4:12 says that God's Word is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces the soul and spirit and discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

Again, the Message paraphrase says,

... Nothing and no one is impervious to God's Word....

Hebrews 4:12-13 MSG

Nothing. God's Word is alive and active and is able to pierce through our situations when we pray it.

When my son was addicted to drugs for 13 years, after a while I just didn't have the words to pray anymore. It seemed like I had said everything I could say and asked everything I could ask a million times. That is when I started praying scripture for him. I believe it is the most powerful reason he is doing so well today.

I am worn out waiting for your rescue, but I have put my hope in your Word.

Psalm 119:82 NLT

God did far more abundantly than all I could have asked or imagined (**Ephesians 3:20**). I didn't even realize the magnitude of what I was praying when I prayed it. So I'd like to share just a few of the many verses I prayed from **Psalm 119** and how God abundantly and specifically answered.

v.54, 171-172– that Your decrees would be the theme of his songs; let Your praise flow from his lips; let his tongue sing about Your word. (personalized)

My son went from playing secular songs on his guitar to worship songs, even leading worship in rehabilitation and later for youth and kids at church.

v.59 & 147– that he would ponder the direction of his life and turn to follow You; that he would cry out for help. (personalized)

As he thought about his life one morning realizing he had nothing, he asked God for help and soon after he was arrested which led to his healing.

v.18, 111, 159– that he would open his heart and mind to Your wonderful Word; that Your laws would be his treasure and his heart's delight; that he would love Your commands. (personalized)

He began reading his Bible, journaling, and even went to Bible college.

Another passage I prayed is **Psalm 80:19** from the NLT:

Turn him again to Yourself, O LORD God of Heaven's Armies. Make Your face shine down upon him. Only then will we be saved. (personalized)



One time when my daughter was praying with her small group for my son (just arrested), one of her friends told her that God gave her a vision of angels fighting with swords for him. I later learned about the warrior archangel Michael in **Daniel 10:21**.

In Beth Moore's Bible study on Daniel, she suggests we have no idea what unseen activity surrounds us. She imagines Christ saying to us one day, "Take a look at this scene with me, Child. I want you to see what was going on in the heavens when you were going through that crisis. Look at all that happened in your behalf. Gaze at that great cloud of witnesses cheering you on to victory."

(Read what my son says about that now at the end of the article *Same Problem, Different Pain*.)

God's Word, sharper than any two-edged sword, went out to fight for my son as I prayed it. It makes me think of the question I asked in the first prayer article, "What prayers go unanswered because we do not pray them?"

You may wonder why God doesn't answer the first time,

why it takes so long sometimes. We are in a spiritual battle, whether we like it or not. Some battles are bigger and take more time and cause us to have to fight harder and longer. We must not lose heart or go to war without our shotgun loaded!

I have used parts of Jesus' prayer for His disciples (**John 17**) to pray for all of my children. And what a comfort **Psalm 16:5b** has been,

Lord, thank you that You guard all that is mine. (personalized)

Another scripture I pray regularly for my family is **Psalm 119:15-16**:

I pray they will study Your commandments and reflect on Your ways, that they will delight in Your decrees and not forget Your Word. (personalized)

How about **2 Thessalonians 3:5** when praying for someone's salvation:

May the Lord direct _____'s heart to the love of God and to the steadfastness of Christ. (personalized)

Oh, there are so many others. We can use God's Word to worship and thank God, to confess, and to make supplication.

Expressing your heart with God's Word in prayer helps you:

(For the sake of the length of this article, I have only included the references to the following verses. Perhaps you'd like to make it your own personal study, turning these verses into prayers.)

Entrust your situation to Him— **Psalm 56:3-4, Proverbs 16:20**

Envision what you're waiting for — **Hebrews 11:1, Mark 22:24**

Endure the fight — **Romans 5:2-6, Colossians 1:11**

It also helps to:

Expel fear — **Psalm 56:5, Isaiah 41:10**

Excel faith — **1 John 4:18, John 4:41**

Experience peace — **1 Peter 5:7, Philippians 4:7**

Finally, we need to:

Exercise listening — **Psalm 46:10, 1 Samuel 3:20**

Express gratitude — **Philippians 4:6, 1 Thessalonians**

5:18

Exalt God — **2 Chronicles 29:30, Psalm 138:2**

What verses have been your favorites or particularly meaningful to you in your life? Have you ever turned them into prayers?

I encourage you to look through Psalms and find verses that particularly speak to your life. What or who in your life can you pray those verses for?

16 Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for my soul.

17 I cried to him with my mouth,
and high praise was on my tongue.

18 If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.

19 But truly God has listened;
he has attended to the voice of my prayer.

20 Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me!

Psalm 66:16-20 ESV

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Penny's prayer is that wherever you are in your prayer life, you will go deeper. Our families and our world need it. Look for her final letter of the P.R.A.Y.E.R acrostic in our next issue.

BLWE

SISTER IN FOCUS

FEATURE



LOUISE CARSON SANCTIFICATION ROAD



Imagine holding on to the bars of a hospital bed crying and begging for your parents, "Please don't leave!" Then crying yourself to sleep.

Louise Carson's life has been full of challenges, but she always felt God's hand on her, as you will see, and she remained steadfast in the fires. She knows very well what it's like when life hurts from the many challenges she has had to face.

But she has always known God was with her, loving, guiding, and healing as He chooses. I hope the story of this faithful sister blesses you as it does me.

When Louise Carson was only four years old, her legs became very weak and she had trouble walking, falling down a lot.

Her parents took her to several doctors and specialists, and she was in and out of hospitals for testing for many months, sometimes a week at a time.

One day in particular stands out. Though she didn't know exactly what was going on, she could see the doctor speaking to her parents through a window in her hospital room. She remembers seeing her parents wiping their eyes and hugging each other.

A diagnosis had finally been made. She had a sister disease similar to Muscular Dystrophy. Her parents were told

there was no cure, to take her home, and that she would not live to the age of 13.

Although her parents did not tell her for a long time what was wrong, she thought it must be pretty bad because they bought her a gift, a robe and slippers, and she never received gifts unless it was a birthday or Christmas because they had little money.

Louise was then put in leg braces and her mother was given directives to assist in physical therapy, as one leg was significantly shorter than the other. At one point for several weeks, she had to be carried from room to room because her muscles were so atrophied.

It was difficult for her to be so limited in her physical activities at such a young age. Even short times of playground fun were not often possible for her.

Louise's maternal grandmother was the only believer in her family. She prayed with and for her often, took her to

church, and even made sure Louise watched a TV preacher with her upon each visit.

Louise recalls her grandmother putting one of her hands on the TV and one hand on Louise, when the preacher would ask if anyone needed healing. One day, her grandmother even sat her on top of the TV.

When she was seven years old, she came to know Jesus as her Lord and Savior and was given a Bible to commemorate the date. From then on, she always felt the Lord's presence in her life. Shortly after that, she memorized the 23rd Psalm and has fond memories of the significant value of God's Word, although without discipleship she really wasn't sure why it filled her with such peace.

Eventually, Louise's legs got stronger and stronger until she no longer needed the braces. And age 13? Well, it came and went. And now? You'd never even know one leg was ever shorter than the other.

As she approached the age of 13, her parents sat her down and explained why this birthday was very significant, telling her she had been healed and was not expected to live to 13.

Louise was born on "Good Friday," the 13th. Her Dad never failed to call her every Friday the 13th and

tell her it was the very best day of his life, because it was the day she was born. It made her feel very special.

Fast forward to her adulthood, around 1984, Louise was asked to give a talk at a women's retreat and felt led to talk about her healing from the muscular disease. In preparation, she called the hospital that she had spent a lot of time in as a child to get the medical records mailed to her so she could be specific and accurate.

As she read through the physician's notes she read, "Without a miracle from God, this child will not live to be 13 years old." This was confirmation for her of the healing God had done in her as a child.

Alcohol was a big part of her parents' life. This lifestyle led to Louise's parents being divorced and remarried to each other several times. It was as though they couldn't live with each other, but couldn't live without each other either.

There weren't many happy times in the home, yet Louise always felt loved.

Her Daddy was a hard worker and always worked more than one job. One of his side jobs was delivering newspapers on an early morning route. She would often get to go with him and remembers it being a



special time. Even though getting up in the middle of the night wasn't always her favorite thing, she would go just to get to spend time alone with her Dad.

One time while she was with him on his route, she got up the nerve to ask her dad if he had ever accepted Jesus into his heart as Lord and Savior. He evaded the question for a long time that morning along the route. But she persisted.

Finally, he put the car in park and looked straight at her thoughtfully and said, "Yes." Satisfied with his answer, she relented.

Her Dad died at the age of 60 from a massive heart attack. However, two weeks prior to his death he told Louise and others that he had asked "that old gentleman upstairs" to allow him to just sit under an old oak tree when it was his time to go and just go to sleep...and that is exactly how he died.

Louise spent a lot of time alone because her mother also worked. As a

little girl, she would put her parents' albums on the record player and sing along over and over as she routinely helped her Mom by cleaning the house. Soon, people began to discover that she had a beautiful country voice.

Often when the family got together, while her aunt played the piano she would say, "Come on over here and sing." Louise didn't think her singing was anything great, but her father would tell people how good she could sing and he was sure she was going to become famous.

At age 13 (how about that), she won a talent contest at the county fair, which opened the door for more singing opportunities. She was asked to sing at many venues across the state. Soon she began to open for names including Mel Tillis and Jerry Lee Lewis.

Later as an adult, she was to be picked up by Columbia Records. However, she realized she would

have to leave her husband and two small children behind too much, so she declined the offer. And that was that.

She since has devoted herself to sing for the glory of God. She has sung in many churches, and now prays to bless God and assist in leading others to worship while serving on the worship team at her church.

Louise began dating John in her senior year in high school and they married shortly after she graduated. Colleen came three years later, and Jennifer two years after that. Approaching 40 years of marriage soon, Louise says John is still the love of her life.

John was saved at a Billy Graham crusade but wasn't disciplined until he was an adult. He has been a faithful follower of Jesus ever since. Upon attending a church service where he grew up, John told Louise he had a vision of dry bones and skeletons sitting in the pews. He told her

after the service that they would not be going back there. He knew there had to be more to his faith.

As a family, they have always enjoyed family time together through things like camping, scuba diving, and harvesting lobster. They also enjoyed working on many household projects as a team.

Prayer has always been a big part of their family. Their daughters learned early that prayer works. For example, they prayed for their dad to stop smoking, and he did. They were so excited and seemed surprised to actually see God's faithfulness and see the answer to their prayer.

Still, Louise and John know pain well. John has had back problems (Degenerative Disc Disease) ever since they were married. That combined with additional back issues have all gotten progressively worse over the years.

Just before their daughter Colleen's wedding, one of his discs blew



out and penetrated the lining of his spinal cord. In spite of excruciating pain and very strong pain medication, he attended her wedding and made sure he danced with his girl.

Two days later John had his first back surgery, which was followed by ten additional surgeries with nine different doctors over fifteen years. He is still in constant pain. Doctors give little hope and just want to prescribe more pain medication. You can imagine this has really put a stop to any fun, projects or much social life. People just don't know how to deal with him being in pain all the time so they stay away.

However, in spite of the pain and no matter what kind of night he's had, he still gets up and reads the Word and prays together with Louise in the morning.

Many times John has to stand in church because he can't sit for very long. Yet he says if it is at all possible, he would rather be in the house of God than not because...

Better is one day
in Your courts than a
thousand elsewhere.
Psalm 84:10 NIV

They know God has been faithful, even in and through the pain. He can no longer work or play, but John has a lot more free time and remains thankful he has been able to devote more hours to being in God's Word.

One night a church elder and his wife went over to their home and prayed for John. As they

Her most important goal in life is for people to see Jesus in her, and I believe they do.

were laying hands on him, he felt heat and heard popping in his back, which everyone else felt and heard also. Though he still has pain, that part of the pain in his back has never returned. With the remaining pain comes the continued strengthening and building of his faith.

Louise has had her share of health issues as well. At age 50, she had a stroke. She recalls getting up one morning and things looked like they were moving in slow motion.

The next thing she knew, she woke up and couldn't figure out why she was on the floor. She tried to get up, but couldn't, as one side of her body just wasn't working. She

remembers laughing to herself and thinking "I've fallen and can't get up." She tried to call for John, but he couldn't hear her because she had closed the door, not wanting to wake him up. She didn't want him to hear her making a surprise special breakfast for him for their anniversary.

He finally did hear her, and came in to find her on the floor with one side of her face drooped, and the left side of her body paralyzed. He couldn't understand anything she was saying.

Panicked and knowing he couldn't pick her up because of his back, he called their daughters.

Louise had no idea what she looked or sounded like and thought he was over-reacting, and she didn't want him to upset the girls. She thought *he* had taken too much pain medication.

Jennifer, their youngest daughter arrived and after much coaxing, convinced Louise she needed to go to the hospital. On the way, they held hands and prayed, believing that God was instantly there to help. They prayed and read one of their favorite verses:

19 "Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by My Father in Heaven.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Matthew 18:19-20 NKJV

Though the doctor said it was a good-size stroke with permanent damage that would have significant effects, she believes God saved her from worse damage as she has very little effects.

Six months later, Louise had another stroke with no effects. And a few years later, a heart attack. Tests revealed an aneurysm and a hole in her heart that likely caused the heart attack and strokes.

There have been many other trials as well, such as the death of John's mother at the age of 44 after a long eleven-year battle with cancer throughout her body. Only eight months later John's father died when his house caught on fire, just two days after Jennifer, their youngest daughter was born. Louise's mother has had dementia for the past six years.

Through it all, Louise says there's one thing she has seen over and over, that "God is faithful, so faithful." She calls it the *Sanctification Road*.

Nuggets from the Word keep her going as she hangs onto verses she may have known all her life, but depending on the circumstances, will hear in a whole new way.

One of her favorite verses



1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty.

2 I will say to the Lord, "My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust."

3 For he will deliver you from the snare of the fowler and from the deadly pestilence.

4 He will cover you with his pinions, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness is a shield and buckler.

5 You will not fear the terror of the night, nor the arrow that flies by day,

6 nor the pestilence that stalks in darkness, nor the destruction that wastes at noonday.

7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you.

8 You will only look with your eyes and see the recompense of the wicked.

9 Because you have made the Lord your dwelling place— the Most High, who is my refuge—

10 no evil shall be allowed to befall you, no plague come near your tent.

11 For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.

12 On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.

13 You will tread on the lion and the adder; the young lion and the serpent you will trample underfoot.

14 "Because he holds fast to me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows my name.

15 When he calls to me, I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble; I will rescue him and honor him.

16 With long life I will satisfy him and show him my salvation."

Psalms 91 ESV

LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR



Over 200 wood/spray painted orange fence posts installed by our neighbors around the property.

HOME FRONT MISSION FIELD

Recently my husband and I went through one of the most trying, yet exciting, years of our life.

We purchased our dream home where we hoped to raise a family.

However, within two days of completing the purchase, our dream turned into a nightmare.

It is common to give people the title of missionary only if they are sacrificing modern day conveniences to live and serve the Lord in foreign places. I encourage you not to allow that misconception to sidetrack you from God's call on your life to be a missionary in your everyday life.

The owners of the property surrounding ours began disputing boundaries and easement rights with

us. Although we knew the previous owners had experienced similar disputes with that neighbor, we thought we would be able to settle the issues once we took ownership.

Unfortunately, we were in for a rude awakening! The neighbors went to great lengths to drive us from our home by photographing us, and our guests, while in the yard, painting red lines in the middle of the driveway, and cutting off our access to phone and Internet.

The torment would not stop and we were beginning to live in fear of what would happen next.

The property dispute led to lawsuits, anxiety, and tension in our life and marriage. We knew God was at work, but it was still difficult to

identify where the boundary of defending our rights ended and loving our neighbor as God teaches began.

We experienced spiritual warfare at its finest. Our neighbors repeatedly made every effort to trap us in our own home, trying to make it as undesirable as possible. They even went as far as attempting to defame our character in our workplace.

Finally, the day came when I listened to the Holy Spirit's voice that said, "Be still and know that I am God." At that moment I realized that taking matters into our own hands was completely ineffective, and we would have to rely fully on God to resolve the conflict.

Through it all, Louise says there's one thing she has seen over and over, that "God is faithful, so faithful." She calls it the *Sanctification Road*.



You want to fix it, but you can't. You just have to trust. You just have to surrender." They know God is in it and hope to bring Glory to His name through it all.

Louise feels the sieve of conviction by her husband's trust in the Lord even though he is in pain 24/7. She asks herself, "What would *my* walk be if *I* was the one in constant pain?"

In retrospect, she can look back over her life and see God's hand, even though while forging through the path it didn't always seem evident.

"Trust isn't something that all of a sudden one day you have it and you're good to go. It's a daily surrender at every new turn."

That's the *Sanctification Road*.

to hang onto is **Isaiah 40:31 NIV**,

... Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.

Another favorite passage is **Psalms 91**.

The timing of many familiar verses are what pull her through life's circumstances. "It's trial by fire, and you come out stronger and see how God's hand worked through it all, if you're really walking the walk." And she is walking that walk along with John.

They both have had to learn over time how to trust as they deal with John's pain. She says, "Sometimes it is more difficult than others and it puts your trust to the real test.

“... Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth.”

Psalm 46:10 NIV

“Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD.”

Leviticus 19:18 NIV

During my prayer time, I was convicted to change how I was praying.

Initially, I was praying that somehow God would be glorified through this trying time in our lives. Then one day as I was praying the Holy Spirit spoke in what seemed to be an



Neighbors construction debris – just feet from our front door.

audible voice that said, “Wait, are you giving Me the Glory?” At that moment I knew that rather than hoping that God would receive glory, I was to give Him the Glory in the middle of our circumstances.

10 Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.

11 Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s

schemes.

12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.

13 Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand.

Ephesians 6:10-13 NIV

After our neighbors cut the phone lines, the telephone company informed us that we would have an unserviceable address as long as the



Neighbors attempted to illegally relocate our easement access to our home, causing massive amounts of flooding when it rained.

neighbors refused to allow access to the power pole on their property.

Rather than becoming angry or fearful, God enabled me to love my neighbor with a selfless love that comes only from Him and to pray for the very ones who had hurt us so deeply.

Once I responded to God’s call to give Him the Glory, our situation began to change.

When I called our neighbor in an attempt to seek resolution, she agreed to meet me for breakfast.

What multiple days of mediation with attorneys and the court system had been unable to resolve, God began to change during that four-hour conversation.

Thankfully, we are now living in the light at the end of a very dark tunnel. Our circumstances changed as I accepted God’s invitation to serve Him by praying for our neighbors and by responding to His call to love them as I love myself.

That required us to surrender ourselves completely to waiting for Him.

... “What I am doing you do not understand now, but you will know after this.”

John 13:7 NKJV

God alone receives the credit for turning our impossible situation around. We recently

purchased the property from our neighbors and no longer have issues with an easement. We are now expecting our first child and plan to live happily ever after in our home. Our neighbors have moved out of the area and have invited us to be guests in their home any time. We do plan to keep in touch with them.

Have you ever had a dispute with a neighbor? Have you been called to love someone who has hurt you or who is very difficult to love?

If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you are a missionary and God has put people in your life that He wants you to love on, minister to, and serve.

Although it is easy to allow life’s turbulence to derail your focus on Him, stand firm on the Word God has given you.

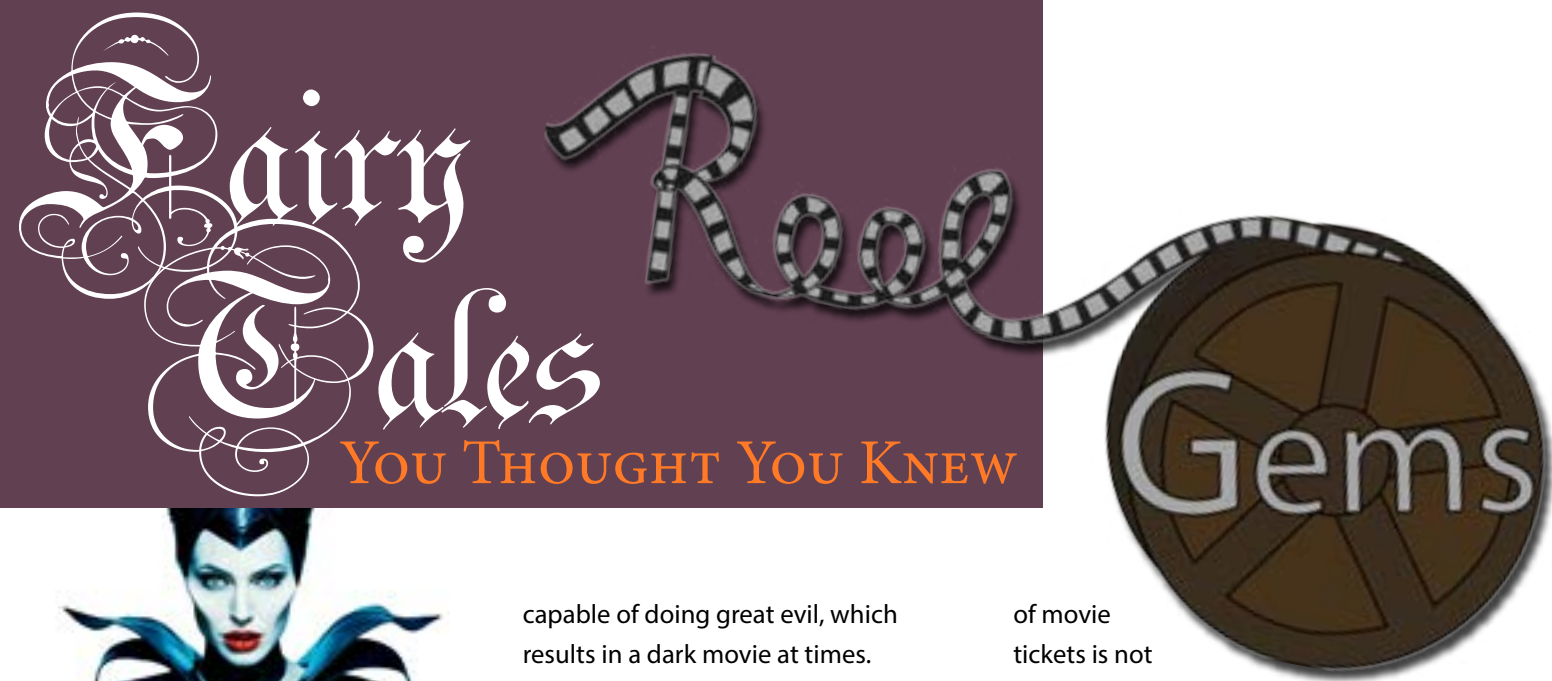
Be on guard. Stand True to what you believe. Be courageous. Be strong. And everything you do must be done in love.

1 Corinthians 16:13-14 NIV

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As a result of God’s work in Jessica’s life through the situation with her neighbors, she is passionate about using the property and their home as a ministry to others.



Chain Link Fence neighbors installed in the easement.



KRISTA BROWNING PHOTOGRAPHY

wedding & natural light | portrait photography
baby | children | senior | family



MALEFICENT (2014)

When I was growing up and we were treated with the rare gift of going to the movies, it was always easy to tell the good guys from the bad guys because the line between good and evil was never blurred.

You also knew that Disney classics could be trusted for wholesome family entertainment.

Now as I raise my children, all the rules about movies have changed. Maleficent breaks most of these rules, but thankfully Disney seems to have returned to its family friendly roots.

The live action film gives a new twist on an old tale by revealing the story of "Sleeping Beauty" this time from the evil fairy's point of view. Maleficent is, as her name suggests,

capable of doing great evil, which results in a dark movie at times. However, because of incredible special effects and a change of heart, the movie is equally fanciful and captures the delightfully fun time of Disney's original 1959 animated classic. Though some might see her character as devilish, I chose to see her as a person redeemable.

Maleficent was well worth the price of admission, and all three of my children (ages 15, 17 and 20) loved it. In fact my oldest daughter declared it was her new favorite Disney movie!



EVER AFTER (1998)

If you are looking for a fairy tale to watch with your family and the price

of movie tickets is not in your budget, then you might want to consider my favorite movie of all time, Ever After.

Like Maleficent, it is a live action movie that revisits a classic tale but adds new twists.

Although this version of Cinderella does not have the latest computer generated effects, the sets, costumes and cinematography are absolutely stunning.

What makes the movie so endearing, however, is that the film takes the time to establish each character but does it so skillfully that the audience feels like only a few minutes has passed before the movie reaches its delightful conclusion. No matter how many times I have seen Ever After, I am always spellbound by the tale and am smiling the entire time.

© 2014 Anne Marie Trense, all rights reserved
Anne Marie Trense is the queen of her family that includes two wonderful princesses and her noble prince. Together this royal family battles against the tide of mediocrity to find movies that they can enjoy together and that would please their Father, the King of Kings.



What do we do when life throws us a curve? What happens when things are completely beyond our control?

Life can bring joy, happiness, and fulfillment, but it can also bring hurt, sadness, and disappointment. How do we handle things when life really hurts?

I consider myself to be strong, smart, and an independent woman – I mean girl. I still think of myself as a "girl," but we won't talk age here.

I had experienced, what I thought at the time, were great adversities throughout my life, and handled them well. I was in the frame of mind that determination and perseverance could get you through anything.

I am a Christian, and have been for quite some time. And, although I knew I was supposed to depend completely upon my Savior, I still had this "I can do anything" or "I won't let

anything beat me" kind of attitude.

God eventually broke me of that. I ended up in a place that brought me to my knees at His feet, solely relying on Him, and only Him.

I had four miscarriages before I gave birth to a beautiful baby girl, McKenna Grace. She was a miracle really. There were so many complications during the pregnancy, including an emergency C-section and an arrival almost seven weeks early.

I had another miscarriage before I became pregnant again. Because of my history, I had multiple doctors and specialists and had many ultrasounds. At about 16 weeks, I went in for my



Level 2 Ultrasound.

I was excited to find out we were having a baby girl. The excitement soon faded as the ultrasound also revealed many abnormalities including a single umbilical artery, ventricular

septal defect, bilateral clubbed feet, clenched fists, and a cleft lip and palate. Those were just the things they could see on the ultrasound.

An amniocentesis confirmed her condition as

Full Trisomy 18, also known as Edwards Syndrome. This is when there is the presence of an extra copy of genetic material on the 18th chromosome (3 copies of chromosome 18 instead of 2). It was an “incompatible with life” diagnosis.

I was devastated by that diagnosis.

All of my previous miscarriages occurred at 12 weeks or earlier. It never occurred to me that anything could or would go wrong if I could just get past the critical 12-week gestation.

Actually, my thoughts were more like, why would God, after all the miscarriages, allow this to happen? And there is the crux of it: How do we wrestle with why God

allows these things to happen?

I don't remember being angry, as much as just completely heart broken.

Don't get me wrong, I found myself as flat on the ground as a pregnant woman could get, praying, begging for complete healing for our baby girl, Jessica Elise.

I remember thinking, “What if God doesn't heal her?” I even felt like He wouldn't, not because I thought he couldn't, but because that was His plan.

Then, that made me question whether I had enough faith to begin with. It was more emotion and thinking than my little head could handle. I quickly realized that there was nothing on this earth that could change our



Photo by Breann Hollon

circumstances.

No one, including myself, could help my situation.

That is a hard place to be. God quickly made me realize how useless my independence – or rather lack of dependence on Him – was. I desperately needed Him to carry me through this.

The easiest decision was to carry her.

The doctors didn't like our decision and there was pressure to abort. After all, why take on the risks a C-section has for a baby with no chance of survival? I don't believe God makes mistakes, and I didn't know what He had planned for us and our little girl. I knew I needed to muster up the faith to trust God and His plan for us, that He would carry us through, no matter the outcome.

The days and weeks that followed were consumed with discussions about decisions we might have to make. How much or little life support?

Burial or cremation? It became overwhelming and was stealing my joy and stressing my pregnancy.

At this point I began to get lost in what to pray for.

We didn't want her to suffer, but I desperately wanted to meet her, for her to be born alive. I decided to look forward to this pregnancy like I didn't know the results of the amniocentesis. This could possibly be our only time with her as up to ninety-five percent of T-18 babies die prior to delivery, and only ten percent see their first birthday.

I wanted her to only feel love and the hope we had for a miracle. It was within God's power to heal her. I just didn't know if that was His plan for us. He entrusted this precious baby to us and I was going to love her with all my heart, like no one else could.

I knew she was going to be different, and look different. I struggled with the decision to share her. I



mean, who could love her like me, no matter what she looked like? Would they see her as a disease? As a diagnosis? Or as my beautiful child? How was I to protect her from unloving and unsympathetic eyes?

I knew she may not survive delivery and didn't know how long she would be here with us, but I wanted her to feel love every moment of it. Real love. Love that is warm, full and overflowing – unconditional. And that every one of her features was

beautiful. That she had a purpose. That she was supposed to be here, and was not a tragic mistake.

Jessica Elise, was miraculously born alive, at 33 weeks, six days and weighing two pounds, twelve ounces.

I couldn't help but share her. We allowed anyone who wanted to love on her to do so. Some did. Some didn't. And that was okay.

A nurse looking on must have sensed my curiosity. She came over and unwrapped her and told me, “Look at your baby.



Take it all in.”

It is the thing we normally do without thinking – count fingers and toes. Check them out to make sure everything is as it should be.

Everything was not okay – not even close. But she was still perfect, to me anyway. God chose not to heal her, I don't know why. But faith allows me to accept it, even when my chest hurts so badly sometimes I can't catch my breath, even after seven years.

Through it all my faith and hope grew – not necessarily for the things I was asking of God but that no matter the outcome, God would be honored and glorified.

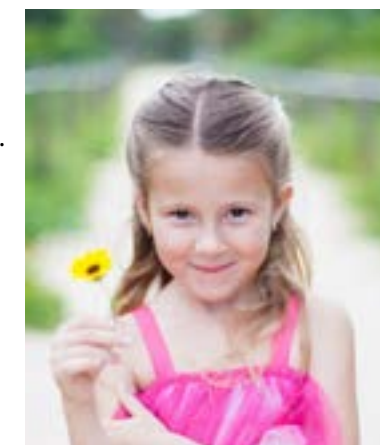
That became my prayer.

This had nothing to do with me. It isn't about us. I don't believe God gave Jessica T-18, but He chose not to heal her. I don't know why. We may never know why God allows

these kinds of hurts in our life. I only know, that out of all of it, I really fully understand God's sacrifice of His son for us.

After seven and a half hours, as she laid in my arms, struggling to breathe, we kissed her and told her it was okay for her to go – to go home to be with Jesus. And at that moment in my arms, she very peacefully did. It was as if she was waiting for us to tell her it was okay to go.

I can't tell you how thankful we were for the time we had with her, and that God was so gracious for giving that whole



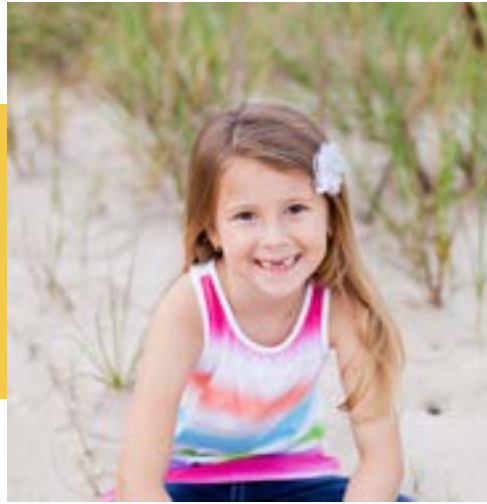


Photo by Breann Hollon

experience to us. A nurse told us, we couldn't possibly understand how Jessica, and the love our family had for our sweet little girl touched her and the staff that day. We were so blessed that God chose us as His trusted servants for His purpose and witness through our precious Jessica. God was glorified!

I understand that the things of this earth don't truly satisfy and will always fall short. What do we do then? My husband said more than once that he couldn't imagine going through something like this without his faith and hope in something more – faith and hope in God for providing comfort, healing, and restoration. God knows our hurts and can give comfort like no one else.

God healed Jessica that day. She is whole and perfect, and in the arms of my Savior. That gives me hope because of the promise of my salvation and the fact that I will see her again.

I have so few pictures of that day. I lived in fear for so long that I would forget what she looked like, smelled like, felt like. That I would forget how I felt, desperately heartbroken, and at the same time joyful for the privilege of being her



mother. That God trusted us with His blessing. That I would forget the friends and family that shared that day with us.

She never cried. She never made any baby noises. The most basic things we take for granted until we don't have them.

This is how Krista Browning Photography came to be. I had always had a love for photography, but this gave me purpose. My husband was just trying to encourage me to get a hobby, but I felt there was something more in it than that. I truly do see beauty in those I photographs. I see it, because I choose to see it.

Everyone has a story. As a Christian, my story is my testimony. A testimony of how God can give us hope when there doesn't seem to be any, and that our hurts and suffering can glorify God, showing people the hope we have.

I clung to one verse in particular.

8 “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD.

9 For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”

Isaiah 55:8-9 ESV

Who am I to understand God's plan? I am grateful He called me to Him, and prayerful that I will be obedient and give Him honor and glory in all that I do.

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WHEN YOUR DIGITAL, PHYSICAL, OR SPIRITUAL LIFE HURTS



Technology can be the cause of some of your problems. Technology can be the help to a few of your problems. Technology can be a link to solutions to various problems.

DIGITAL

One little keystroke and your technical world goes haywire. You get the spinning rainbow of death or one of those haiku-gibberish error message screens akin to:

**Windows NT crashed.
 I am the Blue Screen of Death
 No one hears your screams.**

– Peter Rothman

If only the real error message was so kind and not so data threatening.

But we do have times in our lives when our digital life hurts.

I'll never forget one time after finishing a chapter and doing a prideful stretch of joy, I accidentally toed the power backup and turned the complete system off – during the save operation. Thousands of carefully crafted words disappeared into a binary slough of despond.

But it was just a chapter and I'm sure my complete rewrite was better than my previous version. Or I keep telling myself that.

Nowadays we can have all sorts of backups – from “up in the digital stratosphere” to disciplining ourselves to cut CDs, copy thumb drives, and use portable hard drives. Some of it is as easy as just clicking an auto-save feature to one-minute intervals and to generate auto-backups. I use about

four versions of saving, especially when I'm writing.



Even with all the precautions at our disposal, freak (albeit almost expected) incidents occur like corrupted trash bins that don't delete what you are cutting, but stores it and gobbles up all your available memory or like an “infinite do loop” that your cat initiates by walking across your keyboard or like when you open an email from a friend and the newest virus comes to visit, that virus that



your firewall will have a defense against tomorrow.

Good news: you are rarely alone. Someone else, somewhere has had a similar complaint. With some simple searching on the web and reading about others' blights, you can get a handle on a fix, solution, or alternative.

For the above mentioned delete error, the solution was simple, just extremely time consuming. If I had to pay a geek team to fix it at an hourly rate, I would have already exceeded the price of a new computer with the epochs I've "yentered" (typing "y," then enter) thousands upon thousands of lines of code. But this fix has saved my computer, cost me nothing but time, and a little monotony.

Just be careful about the source before you start going into the belly of your computer beast.

When all else fails and that friend

of your brother-in-law's dentist's cousin's solution doesn't work, employ a professional. Several of the chain stores have competent "Nerd Herds" or some independent services can be worth the time – especially if the data is critical.

My father was convinced there were auto-destruct features built in to his gizmos and appliances. The dishwasher that died two weeks after the warranty expired, for example. The air conditioner that had to have the compressor replaced three days after the service contract stopped. He was just shy of calling it a commie plot to discourage us all.

So, we are cattle-chuted into the queue to just buy a new system. The good news is that often we get better equipment for less than the repair would be — or as Steve Jobs advertised for the iPhone 3G: "Twice as Fast, Half the Price."

Until we are marching lock step toward the singularity, but then I digress and that whole AI debate is for another day.

PHYSICAL

But for today, there are times that the Internet is a blessing – when the hurts are physical.

Obviously, there are "ask-the-doctor" websites, to give you some ideas of where you might be headed with certain symptoms. If you're prone to worrying, don't cruise those sites or you'll have invented conditions that waylaid you.

But those medical advice sites can be helpful especially if you are scheduled for a procedure and want some more information about what will be happening.

Some people would rather not know and just let the professionals jab and poke. But there are those of us who are calmer if we know more about how we are going to be jabbed and poked.

Some doctors have set up safe message boards for their patients dealing with the same malady to share stories, helps, and progress – all within a private forum.

There are thousands of egroups for those who are coping with various conditions and situations. For example, our editor, Jill has been sponsoring a support group for parents of children with autism since the early 1990s.

You name the ailment; there is someone who is also seeking information, support, or encouragement about it.

Of course, you want to be vague about specifics with complete strangers and research the "privacy" requirements of the group.

There is valuable information from

original sources about side effects, binary implications, and timing for many treatments, medications, or procedures.

When I was put on a new medication, I valued a "Pill Taking" app that helped me keep track of when and how much I needed – until it became routine. These medication apps even allow for descriptions of the pills and other specifics (take 1 hour before eating, take with food, take with 8 ounces of water, etc.) It is especially useful when you are helping an elderly relative and want to monitor that they are taking their supplements properly.

There are wonderfully designed



apps that keep records of your blood pressure – even charting the changes. There are apps for specific conditions like diabetes, chronic pain, and even Multiple Sclerosis. Some just help you keep track of pertinent data to keep your doctor informed at your next check-in, to some that can be set to send you reminders to follow your prescribed regime.

I have an app that can actually take my pulse. I've checked it at the doctor's office. The professional took my pulse officially with her device and simultaneously I used my app. The numbers were within one digit of each other – so pretty accurate. For those of us who have to strive to not have a pulse over a certain figure, this app can be a lifesaver.

Even if you aren't app-happy,



entering medical data into a spreadsheet, can give you a graphic, literally, with the charts-feature, a pictorial idea of how you are health-wise. My doctor's system does this automatically for me via "MyChart" and it keeps track of all my lab results and tests and can print me a progress chart.

There are great first aid apps and triage ones that could help you save a life in an emergency.

There are hundreds (maybe thousands) of apps to help parents with special needs children. We'll look at dedicating a whole column to those in the future.

SPIRITUAL

But I think my favorite asset of the digital world when life hurts are the prayer support measures available.

There are several apps that feature prayer support. With some of the apps you can post your prayer request and then hear from people all over the world who are praying for you. And you can send a quick message to someone as simple as, "I just prayed for you." (For example: Prayer Wall.)

One that is soon to be launched would actually log the time prayed



about a request is PrayerButton.org. It will be great for those who organize prayer teams or prayer sessions.

Social media offers pages for individual churches or groups to share prayer needs and praise reports. Plus there's the efficiency of emails and group lists for prayer support.



One brilliant woman I know uses <http://TakeThemAMeal.com> to organize the meals ministry at a local church. As one who remembers what it was like to make dozens of phone calls to coordinate meals for a family in need, this system, gives the whole team an efficient, user-friendly interface to manage all the entrées, side dishes, and too-often-overlooked, desserts and salads for hurting families. She can even add notes about food allergies and delivery times.

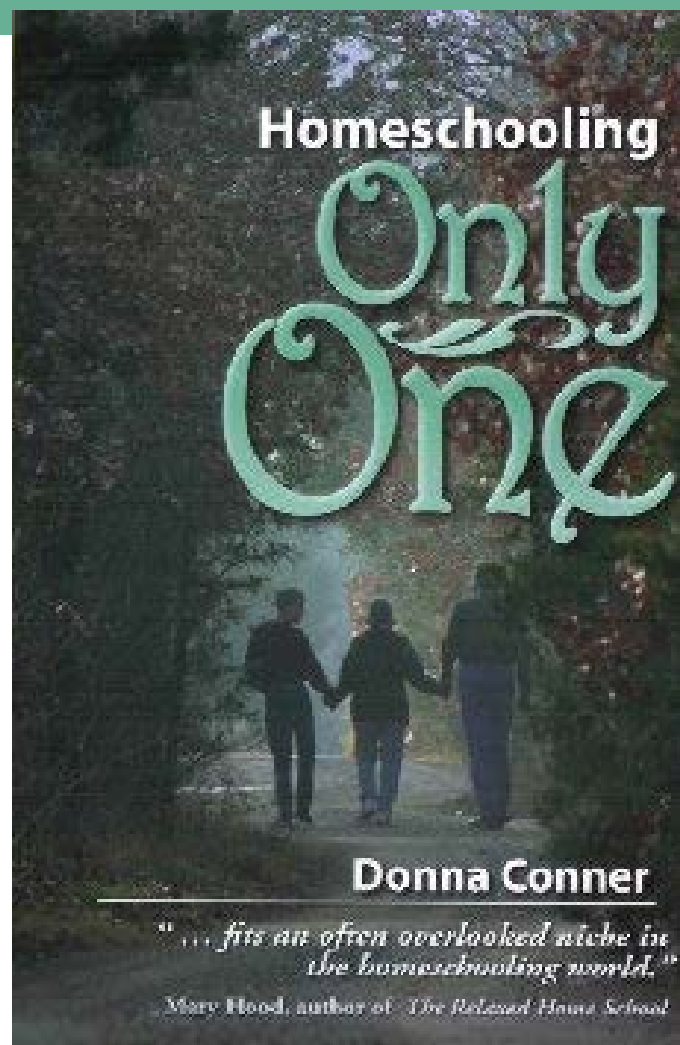
WRAP-UP

Overall, when life hurts, sometimes technology can offer some benefits. Sometimes technology is the ailment, but with proper discernment, it can help us link to others that God can use as ministering saints to help us on our journey.

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BLWE

NEVER ALONE, NO MATTER THE STORM



On the stage or screen, you will hear something akin to “The Ride of the Valkyries” by Wagner, giving you a prelude to what is to come, a warning perhaps.

In our everyday lives, tragedies and problems are not heralded in such a manner.

They hit us sideways, out of left field.

They hit us flat-out in our faces as we turn a corner, totally unexpected.

There are unseen pebbles and vines strewn in our pathway, which trip us. This is life. There is pain. There will be



pain.

We are not given any word in Scripture that promises once we are followers of Christ, there will be smooth sailing with no pain. It’s how we handle and deal with the pain, and Who we seek in the midst of the darkness, that determines how we journey to the other side of the pain and who we are after the crisis.

I’ve had plenty and I know you have also, and we’ll find more down the road. Let me share part of my journey with you.

After the death of our second-born son, Richard (a whole other story for another time), and after the majority of the grief passed, we were advised to not try for another child for a full year. (Grief never goes away, but the wound no longer oozes or gives massive pain.) When you are in grief, it’s sometimes easier just to do what others tell you. It did seem like a good idea — to give my husband, our firstborn son, Mike, and me time for a good start in the healing process — so we accepted this.

After the first year (1993), we practiced “not actively preventing,” as my husband called it. After another year, I was definitely starting to feel angst for another baby. Baby fever set in. Every waking thought screamed “BABY” and every month that went by was filled with sorrow and questions.



Then things changed. The Lord quietly spoke to me, in 1999. His voice wasn’t audible but there was a “vision” aspect to it. My whole assignment took about 9 to 10 months in all to complete.

The Lord gave me a cup to drink. It was a pretty little china teacup on a saucer. It was handed to me. I knew what was in the cup — Acceptance of Our Family Size: Past, Present, and Future.

I knew I did not want to drink it with any strings attached, such as, “Okay, Lord, I’ll be happy to drink this cup, and then you can give me a baby.” I knew He was giving it to me with no strings and I did not want to put any of my own on it.

That’s not how it should work.

It took me at least a couple of months before I could even bring it to my lips... I could look into the cup. “Yup, sure has stuff in it.” “It’s still there.” Those sorts of things came to mind.

Over a little bit of time, I started to sip it, ever such small sips, but sips in good conscience. “Yes, Lord, I want to do and have Thy will.” Yes, I was drinking it, but so carefully and slowly. I didn’t want to attach any conditions unconsciously.

About five or six months into my journey, I noticed that I had drunk about half the cup. Now I didn’t think about my cup and all it entailed every day, not even every week. At times I was able to take large swallows, at other times, only a bit of a sip.

I believe it was October 1999, that I suddenly realized that I had drunk the whole cup down... I wasn’t so consumed by “Baby Fever” as I was before. Yes, I still was very open to having another baby, but it wasn’t an overwhelming “fever” as it had been.

I discovered that there are a lot of pluses in not having nighttime feedings, or in not having to lug a stroller, the diaper bag, and extra clothes everywhere I went. We continued to “actively not prevent;” but yet, we never did have another pregnancy. And in 2006 (I was 48), I had a fallopian tube (and subsequent ovary) that needed to be removed. After much prayer and discussion, God, my husband, and I decided to take the uterus also, leaving my right ovary. Even with this permanent act, I still had my newfound contentment — His contentment with our family size.

This episode ran concurrently with the first part of our family’s homeschooling odyssey. The year after Richard died, we started homeschooling our firstborn, at the end of the summer of 1995. There were challenges and blessings along the way. I learned a lot myself. By our eighth year (2003), I was confident with God’s help; my family and I were well on our way in the homeschooling lifestyle.

That spring, my friend with an only daughter, contacted the head of the local homeschool book fair, asking for her to

The storms grow us,
mold us, and direct us
to Him.



provide a forum for those who homeschooled only one child, like what was done for twins, triplets, and minority families. The reply to my friend was, "Great idea! Can you lead it?" She had only homeschooled a year or two, but had researched homeschooling for the past 13 years (while waiting for the Lord to bless them with a child). So she had a vast information pool to draw on, but had very little actual experience.

She called me. I had eight years of experience and she, the years of research. It turned out I had an introvert son and she had a social-butterfly daughter. Hers was very young; my son was older and approaching high school. We made a perfect team to answer questions.

The first day of the fair, we had standing room only. The second day almost every seat was taken — and with a whole new set of families. I was energized and excited. I had no idea there were that many families home educating a single child.

I said, "I could write a book! I should write a book! I will write a book!" The Lord took over, and the book came out of me flying.

I had a friend doing graphic design who made the book look very professional. I had another old friend doing professional photography and he took pictures of my family

of three which became the front and back cover, as well as my author photo for the book. I had a friend whose company used a certain printer, so she passed our info to him. Come to find out, he was a homeschooler of several children, saw the usefulness of a book dedicated to those homeschooling only one child, and gave us a wonderful deal that was very helpful for us.

One year later, I was at the same book fair, with my friend, speaking to those homeschooling only one student, and selling my new book, "Homeschooling Only One." God is so good and He definitely directed my whole path, inspiring me, bringing the words out of me, and providing those who could help me create the book.

If and if, and if, and... If our son had been a "normal" child and had lived more than 2 years, or if we had been blessed with another child in the eight years before my partial hysterectomy, I wouldn't have been one of the vessels God chose to use to help those homeschooling one child. This group is larger than most might think, yet still rather a small subset of the whole homeschooling community (although the majority of families will go through this step at some point).

Even through the pain of losing a child, infertility, and the small hurdle of having to learn to talk in front of groups

(a major rock in the road for me, which I stumbled over several times through the years prior), God was there... with me... guiding, directing, comforting, loving, and supporting. He is good, truly all the time.

I'm not sure how those who do not have a personal relationship with Christ are able to survive when they come to a heartache, a disaster, or a problem that seems insurmountable. It is through Him, and with Him, that we walk through the storm. We may not see the thread of His work as we only see the tapestry of our lives from the back, but He uses every circumstance, every wrong turn, each choice we make (no matter how seemingly inconsequential), and He works it out for His purposes: to bring us closer to Him, to rely on Him, to call out to Him, and/or to arrange the pattern of our lives for future events, waiting to unfold.

This path He walks with us becomes the beautiful tapestry of our lives, we just don't see it or realize it until much later in our lives, if at all in this life.

I have sat in the hospital waiting room with other parents as they waited on a child's surgery. I've sat in that waiting room before myself, and I can be a quiet support or an encourager sharing the Hope we all can trust and rely on.

I have shared my story of the loss of my son with mothers who have lost a child, whether by miscarriage or infant

death, or loss at other ages. Because of circumstances, I've been available through my book to touch lives, encouraging them to know that homeschooling is perfectly doable with an only child, last child, grandchild, or whatever situation that have one child educated at home.

The storms grow us, mold us, and direct us to Him. They prepare us for life experiences beyond the storms themselves. They allow us to be there for others. Knowing that God loves us and wants our best, and that He is trustworthy, knowing a much grander scope of things than we can even imagine — knowing all this, we learn to trust Him.

He has been with me in so many events, good, bad, really bad, and even indifferent. He has always been there and never forsakes. Whatever I've had to walk through, He has been there, all the way. You can trust Him. He will be ever faithful for you, also.

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Donna Conner lives in Fort Worth, Texas, with her husband Glenn, of 32+ years, their firstborn, Mike, and her mother, Charlotte.

Artwork provided by Donna Conner.



ROMANS 5 FOLKS

1 Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,

2 through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we boast in the hope of the glory of God.

3 Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance;

4 perseverance, character; and character, hope.

5 And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us.

Romans 5:1-5 NIV

In a few hours our summer vacation would begin, but for one last time every class in our school had gathered together to celebrate one another's achievements over the past year during our end of the year award ceremony.

Although all the accolades were well deserved, the most special award presented in each class is for the Most Christ-like.

Interestingly enough, when one of the students came up to receive the certificate, you could feel the whole school smile with satisfaction at the wisdom of the teacher's choice.

Like Christ, this student truly did reflect God's love, hope, and joy.

Amazingly, that young one had experienced many hardships in her short life, but the joy of the Lord always radiated from her presence no matter the situation.

She was what I call a **Romans 5** person.

Romans 5 begins with these words:

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,...

My **Romans 5** friends know the Lord in a very personal way.

Their trust in the One who is trustworthy gives them a peace in any calamity, because they know that,

... All things God works for the good of those who love Him...

Romans 8:28 NIV

They also know that Jesus will never leave them nor forsake them

Anne Marie and her **Romans 5** friends, Judy...



...and Barbara.



(**Hebrews 13:5**).

They also have peace, because God gives them His perspective and therefore they know what is truly good and they are solidly moored in His Truth and are not rocked by the chaos of a society swept away by its own ever-changing whims and fancies. (See **Ephesians 4:14**.)

Romans 5 people rejoice in the hope of the glory of God (**verse 2**). One of the most joyful ladies I have ever met is a co-worker of mine who has lost both parents as well as a sister and a brother, yet whenever Barbara opens her mouth she exudes joy so much so that I lovingly refer to her as "Sonshine Personified."

When sharing Christ with my mother-in-law she said that her joy comes from knowing a good God and that we will one day see Him. Her joy in the Lord overflows so much that she can not help but share Jesus with



everyone she meets.

Romans 5:3 and **4** talks about rejoicing "in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope."

When Christians suffer, they do so in the very presence of the Lord. Suffering while in union with Him transforms our character and helps us to mature. Because we have seen God at work in our lives, we have assurance of His power and protection over us and that assurance gives us hope in all circumstances.

Judy, another **Romans 5** friend of mine attests to this.

During the past two years she has undergone trial after trial, yet she honestly claims that she would rather continue on in adversity sheltered by the love of the Lord and continue to grow in Him than return to her previously blissful life marked by immaturity in Christ. She wisely acknowledges that in order to grow in

her faith, it comes at a great cost, and she willingly would sacrifice everything in order to continue growing closer to Jesus. Incredibly, through our struggles God lovingly cultivates our growth in perseverance and character in order to give us hope!

According to **Romans 5:5**, the hope produced by this painful process of endurance and character "does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." I have seen this verse beautifully fleshed out in my own life.

When my beloved husband unexpectedly passed away, I was filled with gratitude for the hope that is in Christ Jesus.

During this toughest of times, God has carried me closer to Him by revealing an ever deeper love relationship through His Spirit within me.

God's faithfulness in the past gives me hope for the future, because He has shown Himself faithful to me and

has even confirmed it by His own Spirit.

As overwhelming as the past months have been, God's love is even more overwhelming. Because of what I have been through I can confidently agree with the saying:

"I know not what my future holds, but I know Who holds my future."

Simply put, **Romans 5:5** confirms NOTHING can disappoint the hope I have in Christ.

© 2014 Anne Marie Transe, All Rights Reserved. Artwork provided by Anne Marie's 2nd grade class.

Anne Marie Transe's goal is to radiate the love of Christ into the lives of others. By God's grace she has experienced hardships that have transformed her life's message into a beautiful expression of **Romans 5**.

SAME PROBLEM, DIFFERENT PAIN



None of us like pain. Most of us would do anything to avoid or rid ourselves of pain—physical or emotional. This oftentimes comes with unwanted side effects (i.e. more pain—same problem, different pain.)

What's even worse, is seeing our kids in pain. We start out when they're babies pretty much fixing everything for them, and that's okay. They need our nurturing and protection when they're young.

The trouble is we continue that when they get older. We don't know when to stop fixing things for them. There comes a time when they make choices that we should not, and indeed cannot, fix.

Psychologists call this "enabling," but it actually "disables."

The principles I am about to discuss apply to all ages and situations, whether you're dealing with a child, a

relative or a friend. Too many well-meaning people struggle with enabling loved ones. I have coached more people on this issue than I wish was needful.

In this issue about life's hurts, I'd like to share a little about my son's drug addiction.

Even if you're not currently dealing with this, eventually you may. No one is immune to the epidemic of addiction. Some of the nicest kids from Christian homes have died because of drugs. (I've known a few.) It's often the sweet, kind, compliant ones, the ones you would never imagine, that find it hard to say no to their peers.

Most of us, if we haven't been addicted ourselves or worked with those who have an addiction, have no idea how to help them. We don't understand how an addiction controls its victim. They self-medicate to avoid life's pains, then live for the next fix to keep from the pain of

When you hit rock bottom, you find the Rock at the bottom.



withdrawal. Before long, they will lie, cheat and steal to get it, and their identity becomes lost to the name of whatever substance binds them.

We try with the best of intentions to help them, but we really only mask the problem which inevitably becomes worse. (Same problem, different pain.)

Our son was addicted to drugs for about 13 long, hard years. He tried many times to get clean on his own, and he would succeed for a while, but would end up being sucked back down that same black hole of the control of drugs. Many times we tried to "help" him build his life again, as so many well-intentioned parents do. But it wasn't until we stopped "helping" that things changed.

A time came when we gave our son an ultima-

tum. He had stolen from us for the second time. We told him he could go to a year-long, faith-based rehabilitation program (short ones rarely work) or we would prosecute. (Talk about tough love.)

Well, he just ran. He moved several hours away from us with a friend. So we had to follow through (no false threats—from babyhood to adulthood.).

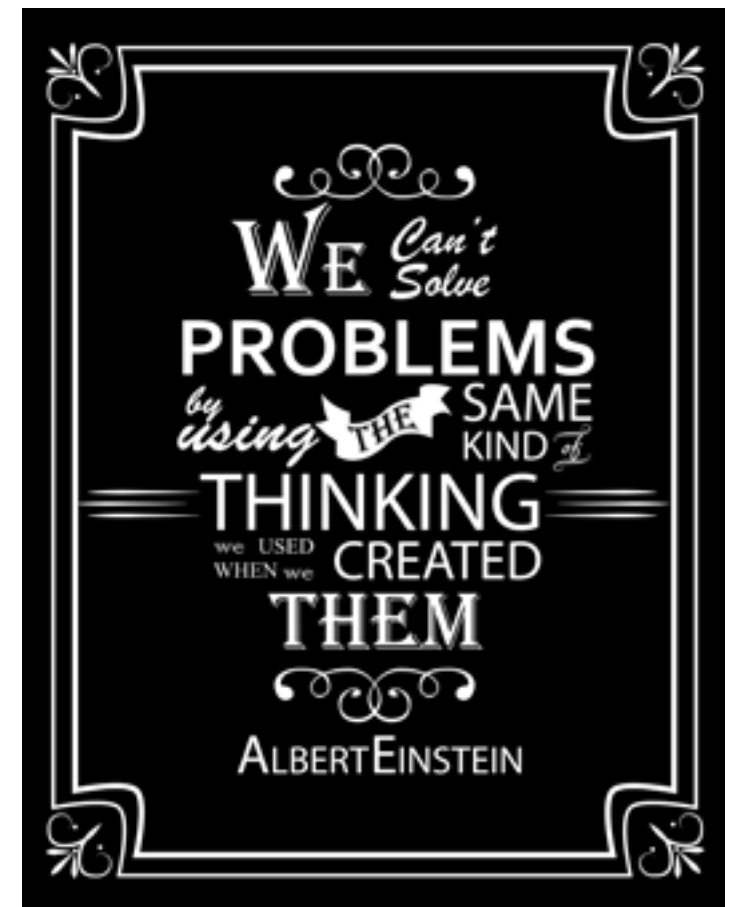
About two years later, the warrant was discovered that we had initiated. He then spent time in jail followed by a year-long, faith-based rehabilitation program (this time, at his desire and choosing). He was finally ready to change because he was allowed to hit rock bottom where there was nowhere else to go but up.

The way this all came about was nothing short of a miracle, and a story that

is too long for now. We had continued in prayer for years, not even having the words to pray anymore, other than praying scripture. (You can read more about that on page

19.)

God was so faithful, but how we wished we had taken that kind of action the first time he stole from us, we may have shortened the amount of his life that



was wasted on drugs.

He had been arrested several years prior as well, and we rescued him (bailed him out). This only gave him the opportunity to continue in that lifestyle and allow more painful circumstances. (Same problem, different pain.)

Deuteronomy 30:19 ESV says,

“...I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life...”

Likewise, we set before our children right and wrong, and we can encourage them to choose right, but ultimately we have to let them choose, and we must accept whatever

they do choose and allow them to learn from the consequences of their choices.

Just as God, in His wisdom and sovereignty, allows us to choose.

I think of old as mature in Proverbs 22:6 ESV.

Train up a child in the way he should go; when he is old he will not depart from it.

“Train” indicates teaching, not enabling or controlling, especially beyond the age of 18. This keeps them in an adolescent mindset.

In his book, *Just Do Something*, Kevin DeYoung states that young adulthood keeps getting longer and

longer. He calls “adulthood” the new normal.

What do you suppose is the reason for this?

In the process of preventing them from stumbling, we can actually become the stumbling block.

We must let them live their own consequences. We must come to the realization that we are just dragging out the pain and keeping them from learning and growing, even from confidence and success.

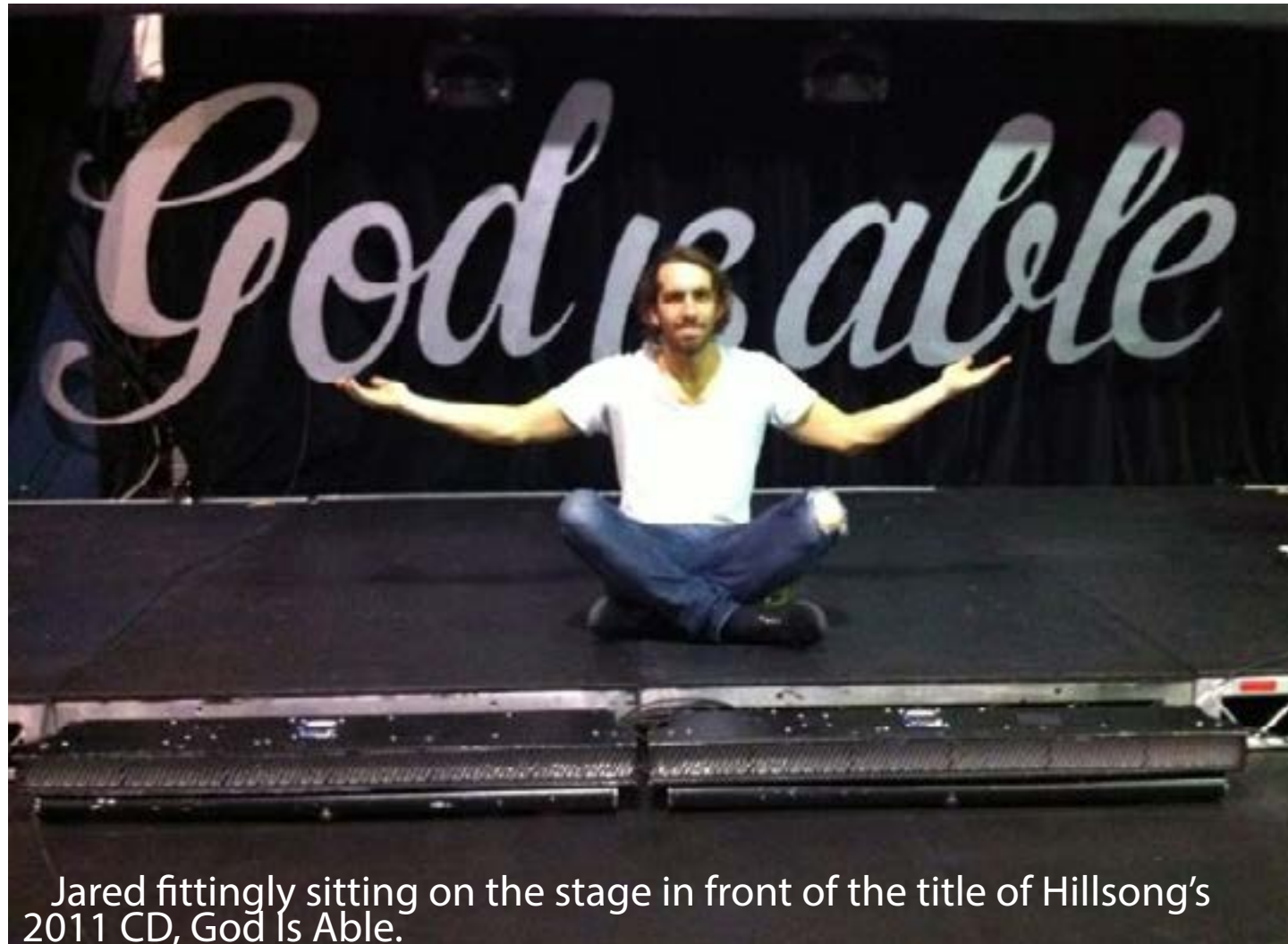
In reality, we rescue them from growth, maturity, healing, and ultimately from redemption.

Remember that God could have rescued Jesus from the cross, but He didn’t for the sake of our redemption.

I can’t tell you how my heart broke

When we rescue our kids, we rescue them from the cross.

– Nancy Leigh DeMoss



Jared fittingly sitting on the stage in front of the title of Hillsong’s 2011 CD, *God Is Able*.

knowing my son was in that jail cell, even though I knew it was for the best. And as if that wasn’t bad enough, he ended up in solitary confinement. My heart ached knowing he was in that cell alone. But that is where he finally took the Bible off the book cart and realized God was right there with him, helping him, freeing him.

This is hard to say, but please hear me. Oftentimes, parents try to cover up the situation so no one will know, especially in the early stages when things need to be nipped in the bud. But addiction doesn’t just go away, and soon it will show its ugly head again no matter how hard they try to hide it. (Same problem, different pain.)

When we keep fixing things and “rescuing” them from their consequences, what need or desire do they have to change? In trying to make them [look] functional, we create dis-function. We must allow them to experience the pain (and humiliation)

of their consequences so that they will want to change. And until they want to change, they won’t.

The hungrier you are, the harder you work.

Proverbs 16:26 CEV

This principle works for any age. When children are young, they manipulate by crying and even tantrums. Giving in (many times just to quiet them, especially in public) teaches them that manipulation works and gets them anything they want, whether it’s good for them or not.

When they are older, and especially if they become addicted, their manipulative behavior plays out in ways like “I hate you,” or the proverbial, “If you love me, you will...,” or at least they make us think that’s what they’re feeling, even if they don’t use those words.

This tactic is as old as the serpent himself when he manipulated Eve

with words implying, “If God really loved you, He would provide that delicious fruit from that beautiful tree for you.”

And we certainly don’t want to see our loved one in jail (because that would be painful for both of us, not to mention embarrassing) so we bail them out; or on the street so we pay their rent (after they’ve misspent their money); or lose their car (because then they’ll lose their job and then they won’t be able to pay their rent and then they might end up on the street). And on and on it goes. So we pay that car payment—again.

Each time we do something like this, we actually (indirectly) give them the money for their addiction or whatever frivolous living they mis-spent their money on.

Love them enough to not allow this behavior to continue.

In trying to get them out of bondage, we actually keep them in bondage because we make it easy and possible for them to stay in

bondage.

Maybe it's not only about them changing, but us. Maybe sometimes it's about us trusting God to do what only He can do and allowing Him to do it. Until then, it's going to be "same problem, different pain."

Our loved ones must figure things out on their own if they're going to learn their way doesn't work. Why would they want to change when they can have things done and paid for them? There's no motivation in that at all; it just breeds entitlement. No wonder adolescence extends well into adulthood.

It's all about trusting God.

We pray for miracles and avoid the context for which they can take place.

– Christine Caine

God is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think. (Ephesians 3:20 ESV) He can intervene any time He chooses. But we still need to get out of the way.

When we try to control the situation we play God, and they become dependent on us instead of God, who is the only one sufficient and wise enough to help.

God will be there the moment they cry out to him, but we keep them from crying out because we keep them from seeing their need and wanting to change. We keep them comfortable. Because we cannot bear to see them in pain, we keep them from the painful consequences that may be the very thing that will make them cry out.

Do you cry out to God for help when you're comfortable?

Do we pray for God to help them

and then take matters into our own hands? Maybe their lack is what they need to help them to see their need for God. Maybe that arrest is just the intervention God ordains to get them to a place where they can be helped.

Your choice is to recover or repeat.

– Jim Burns

Pray, and then get out of the way.

My son now says he envisions, "God sitting on His throne with angels all around Him. As He looked down and watched me take one drug after the next, angels plead with God, 'Now! God, we have to save Him now!' But God says, 'Wait...'. This goes on for some time, but the moment I dropped to my knees and said 'God I need help,' God immediately says, 'Its go time,' and in an instant my life was



Jared and Emma Cooke, May 6, 2013
Danelle Bohane Photography,
Auckland, New Zealand

"It's not what you do for your children, but what you have taught them to do for themselves that will make them successful human beings."

– Ann Landers

When Divine Grace Masquerades as Discipline

In the fifth week of Lisa Harper's Malachi Bible study, she states that grace can masquerade as difficulty and discipline. She tells a story of her friend Eva who was confined to a wheel chair at age 17 due to a car accident.

One day Eva's mother lovingly insisted it was time she learned to put her own pants on and then left the room. Eva was so angry and bitter at her mother for abandoning her in her time of need, she threw herself down on the bed and sobbed. But her mother did not return to "rescue" her.

After a while, Eva finally "sat up and reached down and grabbed the waistband of the jeans and slowly began working her floppy feet into the pant legs. She said it took her 15 minutes just to get both feet into the right and left holes. After which, she fell back on the bed and cried again. Later—when her mama didn't return to rescue her—she sat up and began tugging those stiff Levi's toward her hips. Fifteen or so minutes later, she fell back onto the bed sweaty and exhausted. She said she was so spent she didn't even have the energy to cry anymore. Then—after her mama still didn't return to rescue her—Eva sat up one last

time and inch by inch painstakingly worked her jeans up over her bulky back brace and finally buttoned them with a sigh.

Then when she collapsed on her bed the last time with a victorious 'Yes,' she heard her mama crying. She had been in the next room the whole time. It nearly broke her heart to listen to Eva struggle, but she loved her child way too much to rescue her. *She wisely understood that Eva's path to physical independence would include pain. That to do everything for her would be to cripple her.* (emphasis mine)

This mother went against her motherly tendencies and allowed her child the pain of the battle, knowing that like a butterfly working its way out of chrysalis, the fight was necessary and worth it.

Eva now says, "I used to hate this chair. But I don't anymore. This chair has taken me to places I never would've been otherwise. I feel overwhelmed at the amazing things God has done for me through this chair. I stay overwhelmed over the fact that He thought I was worthy of this chair."

changed..."

Let's stop putting another link in the chain that binds them.

What need or lack are you allowing that makes your loved one want to change?

I encourage you to begin with one thing you can change. What one thing can you stop doing that is enabling someone's undesirable behavior?

Once you've got your bearings, what is the next thing you will work on changing? I encourage you to seek help and accountability for your situation, no matter what the age or

circumstances are.

For further reflection:

What undesirable behavior is your loved one exhibiting?

When did it start? What might have triggered the behavior?

How might you have encouraged this behavior, enabling it to continue? How might you change your thinking and therefore your actions pertaining to this situation?

What steps can you begin to take, one at a time, to change this behavior?

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Penny's son now says he realizes he didn't have a drug problem, he had a lack-of-God problem. He has since graduated from Hillsong Bible College, Sydney, Australia, and is Venue Oversight Pastor for Hillsong City Church. He was married last year to a wonderful Christian woman.

God IS Able!

BLWE

WHEN LIFE HURTS...I REMEMBER WHO I AM AND WHOSE I AM

I am an alien in this world, (ref. **Phil 3:20**)
 chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father,
 by the sanctifying work of the Spirit of God
 to obey Jesus Christ and be sprinkled with His blood...
the blood of Christ!
 Grace and peace are mine in the fullest measure.

(ref. **1 Peter 1:2** and **1 Peter 1:18-19**)

Who I am is determined by Who I belong to:
 My relationship with the Triune God determines my identity as His.

I am a child of The Promise.
 (ref. **Galatians 4:28**)

My name is Christian, L.B.G., C.O.G., S.B.G.G. (Loved by God, Child of God, Saved by God's Grace)*

Thank You LORD!

I am born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead
 to an inheritance imperishable and undefiled, reserved in heaven for me.
 I am protected by the power of God, the Shepherd and Guardian of my soul,

through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time...
 (ref. **1 Peter 1:3-7** and **1 Peter 2:25**)

In this I rejoice even though I have been distressed by various trials,
 so that the proof of my faith, more precious than gold even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ
 (ref. **1 Peter 1:6-7**)

I love Him, I believe in Him, I belong to Him
 and I greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory obtaining as the outcome of my faith the salvation of my soul.
 (ref. **Psalm 116:1**, **1 John 4:4**, and **1 Peter 1:8-9**)

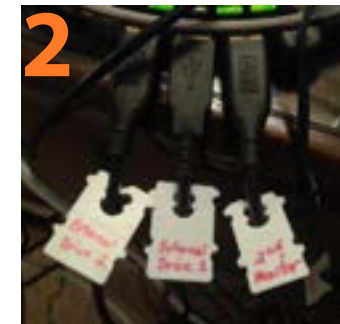
Father, I ask You for strength to live in a manner indicative of who I already am in Christ. It is in His Name I pray.

*Thanks, B. Abbey Gayle. (See her Plan of Salvation article in this issue.)
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OUT OF THE BOX BREAD TAG IDEAS



1 CUSTOM FRESHNESS TAGS: Write down the date of purchase to know how old the bag's contents are.



2 CORD MARKERS: Identify electric cords and cables.



3 EARBUDS WRAPS: Keep your earbud cords straight and untangled by using a bread tag. This also works for other short cords, like charging cables.



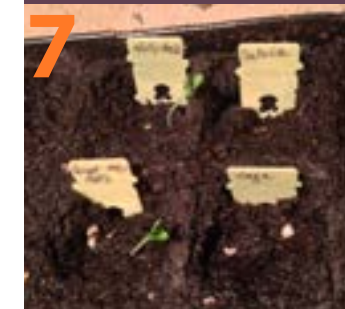
4 STEMWARE NAME TAGS: Clip a tag to each guests' glass to avoid beverage mix-ups.



5 KEY LABELS: Keep track of keys – especially those you don't use very often or look remarkably alike.



6 NEEDLEWORK: as yarn bobbins (excellent for Intarsia knitting), stitch markers, row markers, or thread holders (e.g., cross stitch).



7 GARDEN MARKERS: Especially useful for seed starting.



8 SOCK CLIPS: Instead of stretching the socks out by inverting, use bread tags to keep pairs together.



9 TAPE CATCHER: Don't you hate having to pick at the end of a tape roll to get it started? Just place a bread tag on the end each time and make it easy for yourself.



10 CLOTHES TRACKER: Place a bread tag on each hanger in your closet on a particular date. Whenever you wear the item that year, remove the tag. At the end of the year give away any item that still has a tag – you didn't wear in a whole 12 months. (Or set any time frame you feel comfortable with.)



11 SCRAPERS: Save wear and tear to your nails and use a bread tag to scrape off labels and food residue from your dishes.



12 HOUSEHOLD HELPS: For example: this screen door catch was rough and cutting fingers, so by attaching a bread tag, the problem was solved.

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SOAK YOUR CARES AWAY



We had narrowed our search for our new home down to five top contenders.

Though one was in a fantastic neighborhood, had a unique, but charming layout and style, ample storage, and even a guest apartment, I chalked it off the list for the simple reason that there was no bathtub in any of the four bathrooms. They were updated, newly remodeled, and delightful, but stocked with elaborate showers only. So, we were down to four options.

That house would have been a better investment and was closer to my husband's work than the one we chose, but I wanted a soaking tub. I guess I'm from the "Calgon take me away" generation.

Of course, my number one go-to when life hurts is to bow my will to the LORD, and follow where He leads.

Sometimes He uses nurturing water in a tub to soothe me like a balm in Gilead, even if it is just a temporary calming of strained muscles, tensions, and cares.

There are two basic soaking powders that I use for the base, depending on whether my issue is an ache or an itch.

POWDERED EPSOM SALTS

Technically you can use Epsom Salts straight from the container in your bath, but I've found that if I run it through a few pulses in my coffee grinder, there is a better dispersion in the bath water.

Epsom Salts are not salts named after some guy named Epsom. It is actually a marvelous mineral compound that God supplies: magnesium and sulfate. It is named for a bitter saline spring in England. Surrey, England to be specific.

Relatively inexpensive, Epsom Salts give you a great deal of healing bang for your bucks. I keep a jar of powdered Epsom Salts in the bathroom to use in variety of applications – including a bath soak.

Use Pour a few cups of Epsom Salts into your running bath water. Soak.

(And/or use it in conjunction with other medicinals.)

The Science: It's not just an "I think this is great" concept. Yes, we all love to

float away for a few minutes of "me time." But there is real science going on. In other words, God doesn't just do a placebo effect on us when we soak in a tub interlaced with some of His creations. He really did design some amazing properties into the mix.



It helps refuel the magnesium in our bodies that stress depletes. That magnesium aids the production of serotonin, the joy-bunnies (mood-elevating chemicals) within the brain that gives us a feeling of calm. Magnesium is major – it helps regulate more than 325 enzymes in the body.

Magnesium is integral in the production of ATP (adenosine triphosphate), which does increase energy levels in the cells themselves.

Magnesium ions have been found to reduce the effects of adrenaline – thus improving sleep and concentration.

It is a phenomenal aid in reducing pain and muscle cramps. And even works to calm bronchial asthma (I use it as a regular tool in my arsenal against lifelong asthma).

It eliminates toxins from the body. By using reverse osmosis, it can actually pull harmful toxins from your body. I even found several articles when I was double-checking some of my facts that said it was a great tummy-flattener. I wouldn't know

but the science seems to be sound, as it does reduce inflammation and would then take away some tummy bloating.

And to add to the ever-increasing list – it is eco-friendly.

COLLOIDAL OATMEAL

After years of making oat flour with my grain mill from raw oat groats, and adding them to a host of cooking applications, I had a eureka moment. The flour seemed identical to the doctor-recommended compound that I was putting in our baths when any of us had insect bites, or a rash (e.g., eczema, hives, dermatitis, diaper rash, sunburn, acne, psoriasis, poison plants).

I had been purchasing packages of oatmeal powders with the brand name that starts with "Av." I read the ingredients to the expensive packets and read only one ingredient: "colloidal oatmeal." That was it. I had been paying \$1.00 for about a nickel's worth of oat flour because it was convenient and recommended by a physician.

I did some research, because it seemed too easy.

The good news is that it is that easy.

You can either mill oat groats (make an oat flour) or a cheaper and quicker method is to pulse some oatmeal flakes in a coffee grinder or blender until it is like a powder or flour.

You can make up just enough in a few seconds for a current bath, or make a mega-batch and freeze the "flour" for later uses. [If I'm using oat groats, I freeze it to keep it from going rancid. The oat groats (the oat version of wheat berries) keep for decades until you break the husk by milling or

grinding.]

If you have any sensitivity to gluten, be sure your source (oats groats or oatmeal) is gluten free. And of course, you should opt for organic, non-GMO versions (if that is as important to you, as it is for us.)

Not only as a marvelous soak for skin issues, the powder can be used in a variety of homemade products – just get ideas from all the products that the "Av" company makes using oatmeal as the base ingredient. (More in future issues.)

Use As warm water is flowing into your tub, sprinkle 1-2 (or more) cups of colloidal oatmeal into the turbulent water. Soak for at least 15 minutes. Be careful as it can make the tub and your skin quite slippery. Blot skin dry. Don't rub – that would disrupt the sore areas.

FOR BABIES: Be sure to use lukewarm water for babies – check it yourself. It's a great relief for diaper rash. Because it will make your baby almost like an oiled watermelon – have towels ready and don't blink.

FOR PETS: This even works for pets – sometimes their exploring renders them with skin irritations – so let them soak in a bath for five to ten minutes using lukewarm water infused with colloidal oatmeal.

THE SCIENCE: Oats are chockful of β -glucans (Beta-glucans). Those polysaccharides are just another of God's amazing designs nestled into His creation for healing us:

β -glucans work to fortify the large white blood cells called macrophages. Those white cells, according to the theory, become more powerful in



battling foreign invaders, dead and dying cells, and mutated cells. (Epsom Salts also have been found to boost the immune system and help fight infection.) They reduce skin inflammation, and Stimulate collagen deposition, which influences the mechanical strength of the healing skin. One added benefit is the reduction of "itch." That alone makes the process very worth using – if it will keep the kid from scratching and reopening a wound or bite area and transferring the yuck to other parts of their bodies, go for it. But add to that it will soothe, seal, and emulsify the skin, and you have another amazing God-created solution

to a nuisance.

CONCOCTIONS

Depending on what is going on, and what therapy is needed, I'll make up a special bath soak blend or will just rely on my basic mix.

- Basic Mix: (I make a x10 basic mix)**
- 1 (10) cup(s) powdered Epsom Salts** (Milled or ground to a powder consistency)
 - 1 (10) cup(s) Colloidal Oatmeal** (Ground flakes, or milled groats)
 - ½ (5) cup(s) dried herbals – finely ground in coffee grinder**
 - 4-10 (40-100) Tea bags** (open tea bag and use raw leaves in mix)
 - 6-20 drops of essential oils** (I'd recommend you wait to sprinkle

the essential oils as the water is running, but if you are making up gifts or need to prepare ahead, then sprinkle the oils into the mix – realize it might take 2-3 times as much to have the same vivacity as freshly opened oil – depending on your manufacturer.)

Coloring, Optional – you can make it any color you want using powdered dyes found in the cake decorating section of your craft store, or use natural homemade dyes like dried beet powder. These make much-appreciated gifts or take-homes from a party, shower, or Bible study.

Mix the ingredients thoroughly in a container. Label it if you make a

mega-batch and have more than you'll use in one bath. Pour ¼ cup to 3 cups worth (depending on how much relief you want) into the running water. Enjoy your bath and let the hydrotherapy, scents, and emollients do their blessed work.

I'll vary the tea, the herbals, and the essential oils depending if I need to relax enough to go to sleep, to energize for a full day, to remove tension, or to clear lung congestion. If I'm dealing with a skin issue, I will double or triple the oatmeal. If my problem is strained muscles from a fall or over exertion, then I'll load up with more Epsom Salts.

We are so blessed nowadays with such a variety of herbal teas and essential oils.

Since this isn't a book, but a

magazine article, I don't want to bog it down with a tedious list of dozens of ailments and their applicable oils, so I recommend you use the Internet to research how different essential oils can be beneficial for various conditions.

Often, teas will even carry the "name" of what they were blended for – from "extra energy" to "calmness."

For example, for female issues I'll use powdered, dried red clover, or raspberry teas.

Invariably, lavender as a tea or essential oil works amazing well to get a person calmed down and ready for sleep. Even spritzing it on pillows can be an alternative to taking an over-the-counter sleep aid.

With just a little research, you'll find what works best for you and your family.

As to the dried herbs/flowers, I save some of my herbs and flowers from my garden, dry them and then use them for a variety of applications.

You could add purchased herbs/spices from the store, or leave them out – and rely more on essential oils for fragrance and medicine appeal of herbs/flowers.

For example, the

next time your husband (or boss or friend) gives you a bunch of roses, save the rose petals – lay them out on absorbent towels for a few days until they are dry, place them in a jar for powdering for use in your bath mix or a host of other concoctions.

WRAP-UP

Don't feel guilty because you want to soak your troubles away, because by taking a therapy bath two-three times a week, you will actually be strengthening your body, and keep it running more in harmony with how God wants it to operate. You'll be reducing stress, both psychologically and physiologically.

Without spending much at all you can do some positive hydrotherapy with real results.

So when life hurts, take a soothing soak.

(In upcoming issues, we'll look at more of the healing properties, uses, and applications of these two amazing gifts from killing weeds, to fertilizing roses, to bathroom tile scrubs, and acne treatments.)

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Relishing in God's amazing creation, Jill Bond continues to use her family to test homemade concoctions. By reducing toxins and manufactured products, she's able to help the planet, make the budget stretch, simplify their lives, and provide a healthier lifestyle for those adorable guinea pigs (a.k.a hubby and kids).

BLWE



BEAUTIFUL FLOWERS THAT MAKE US HAPPY



Bougainvillea, *Bougainvillea spectabilis*, is a very common Florida plant that grows wonderfully on arbors, fences, and posts. Just be wary of their spiky thorns.

Have you ever stopped to wonder what exactly it is about flowers that can brighten even the gloomiest day?

There is something uplifting about a flower arrangement, bouquet, vase, or even planted flowers.

Imagine yourself strolling through

the park and you see a beautiful vibrant flower, it automatically captures your attention and makes you stop.

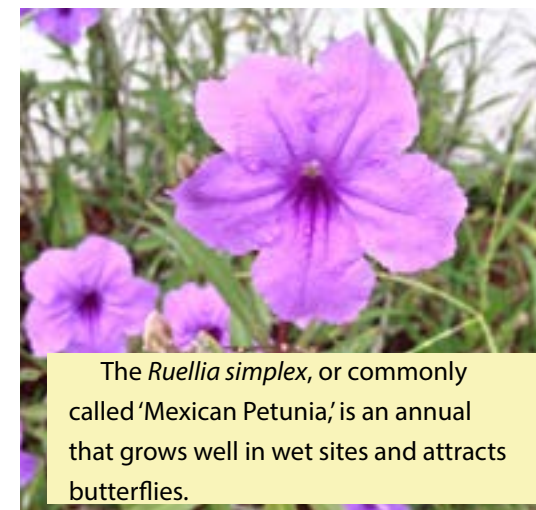
Or you're at a wedding and see the bride as she holds a gorgeous bouquet full of intense color against the back drop of her white gown.

Or when someone, in love, comes

home with the deep red of roses to show their affection.

Or when you are sick in the hospital and the world seems like a dark and gloomy place, someone brings you flowers and all of a sudden you forget the pain.

Flowers have been proven to relieve stress, depression, and bring



The *Ruellia simplex*, or commonly called 'Mexican Petunia,' is an annual that grows well in wet sites and attracts butterflies.



Mirage Lavender Petunia, *Petunia X hybrida*, blooms in late spring to mid fall and prefers partial sun to full sun.



Having a bright flower arrangement near your front door adds a bit of cheer as you leave the house and can help to unwind you when you return.

real smiles.

Also, they are even placed in the workplace to achieve clarity and help with memory and concentration. All around, flowers bring a positive outlook to even the worse places. I could go on and on with how flowers bring a sense of happiness with them.

There are so many ways people have broken down all the different flowers from their meanings to even the colors.

I went on to write about specific flowers that symbolize happiness

and the more that I searched, I found that they all do.

Sure, I could go through a list such as a pink rose means friendship and mix in some yellow carnations which represent cheerfulness and BAM! There you have it, in the world of florist you have a cheerful friendship bouquet.

Back in history you could see that flowers and their arrangements were so very important for they represented a certain emotion, message or feeling.

As I grow my own flowers I see all

the beauty in every shape, color and uniqueness, kind of like people. We are all different, and we may even look mean or angry, but when you grow with them and get to know them, you find out they are all beautiful.

God gave us flowers to brighten our days and to show us beauty even when we come from the dirt.

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BLWE

APPLE RECIPES

What images spring to mind when you think of apples? A teacher's desk adorned with dozens of apples as gifts in a Rockwellian drawing.

A doctor's prescription of an apple a day?

Your grandmother's steaming apple pie dripping with freshly turned ice cream.

For far too many young people, an apple is something that comes in slices now in a "happy-day meal" or it is something that "flavors" their carton of juice-substitute.

Yet, apples are so marvelous – especially when you can get organic, non-genetically modified ones.

Even if you can't, and it's hard to beat an apple as a snack. Just as it is.

Yet, of course, we have to go in and tinker with it, not that God didn't do a great job as it grows from the tree, but just to add in some other nutrients and give it some pizzazz!

Here are several of my favorite apple recipes.

MAPLE APPLE RINGS

Okay, these are not healthy. But if the alternative is a 900-calorie donut, these apple rings are definitely a step-up on the good-for-you meter. And for a once or twice a year treat, these are delicious. My husband loves these and would eat them once a week if I made them that often.

x1 (x2, x4)

4 (8, 16) Servings

¾ (1½, 3) cups Flour, AP (Soft wheat berries for freshly-milled)

1 (2, 4) Eggs

¼ (½, 1) cup Maple Syrup (The real stuff, not the sugar-water stuff)

¼ (½, 1) cup Buttermilk

3 (6, 12) Apples (Your choice – I tend to prefer yellow delicious, but go with what you have or your favorite variety)

¼ (½, 1) cup Confectioners' Sugar – mol – use for dusting rings

1. Set up deep fryer. Bring oil to 375°F while you prepare apples and batter.

2. Beat egg(s). Set aside.

3. Peel, core, and slice apples into ¼" rings. (A spiral slicer makes this quick work.)



4. Combine flour, egg(s), syrup and buttermilk and pour into a shallow dish.

5. Dip apples into the batter – both sides.

6. Fry in hot oil for about 2 minutes.

7. Drain on racks placed on paper towels.

8. Dust with Confectioners' (or 10X) Sugar

9. Serve warm with some dipping sauces or the

Simple Glaze recipe.

MAPLE SYRUP – Cut with 50% water.

APPLE SYRUP – Make with 2 Tablespoons cornstarch and 1 cup apple juice. Heat until thick. You can add sugar if you have a sweet tooth. This syrup is great over pancakes with added tiny apple chunks. Depending on application, you might want to sprinkle in some cinnamon and/or nutmeg.

APPLESAUCE-RASPBERRY GELATIN SALAD

This can work as a nice salad over a bed of lettuce with some fresh apple slices for garnish OR it will work as a dessert with some whipped cream and fresh fruit.

X1 (x2)

1½ (3) Cups Applesauce (homemade or commercial)

1/8 (¼) Cup Orange Juice

1-3 oz (1-6oz or 2-3oz) pkg

Raspberry Gelatin

¾ (1½) Cups Lemon-lime

Soda

3 (6) Cup mold OR

4 (8) Individual dishes

1. Bring applesauce and OJ to a boil in a pan.

2. Remove pan from heat. Sprinkle in gelatin and stir until completely dissolved.

3. Slowly pour in soda.

4. Spray molds or cups for easy release – depending on flexibility of mold.

5. Pour gelatin mixture into molds or cups.

6. Chill until firm.

7. Un-mold, garnish, and serve.



SIMPLE GLAZE

This simple glaze recipe can be used on nearly any recipe listed below. Substitute the liquid portion with any fruit juice to create a unique and fitting sugary topping.

2 cups Confectioners' Sugar

2 Tablespoons Apple juice (or milk)

1. Mix ingredients together in moderation until you have the quantity and consistency that you need.

Create your own piping decoration bag by pouring your glaze into a seal-able plastic bag and then cutting a tiny notch out of a bottom corner of the bag. Squeeze

the bag to dispense the glaze upon your desserts. OR simply mix the ingredients in the bag and save washing an extra dish.

FANCY GLAZE

x1 (x2, x4)

1 ½ (3, 6) Cups Confectioner's Sugar

1-2 (2-4, 4-6) Tablespoons Milk

1 (2, 4) teaspoons Butter, melted

1/4 (½, 1) teaspoons Vanilla Extract

1/8 (¼, ½) teaspoons Salt

Follow the same directions as for the Simple Glaze.



APPLE SWIRLS

Yield: 1 dozen
1 loaf's worth of your favorite Bread recipe

- 1-2 Tablespoons Better Butter Spread or Butter, softened**
- ½ Cup Apple Powder (or 4 packets of cider powder)**
- 1 cup of diced, peeled Apple pieces – 1/8" or smaller**
- 1 Tablespoon Cinnamon**
- 1 teaspoon freshly-grated Nutmeg**

Optional:

- 1 cup chopped Pecans or Walnuts**
- 1 cup Raisins**
- ½ cup Sugar, Sugar Substitute, or Honey**

Prepare your favorite bread recipe [be it pop-bread, frozen bread dough, or my Daily Bread recipe (Mega Cooking, page 240) from freshly milled wheat berries] you can make apple swirls that add variety from the typical cinnamon roll. If you do make your own bread dough, substitute apple juice for the water in the recipe to add one more

layer of flavor to the Swirls.

- 1. Roll** or press the dough into a thin rectangle (8" x 12").
- 2. Spread** with 1-2 Tablespoons of Better Butter Spread or Butter softened.
- 3. Sprinkle** with ½ cup of Apple powder (or 4 packets of cider powder).
- 4. Scatter** the Apple pieces over the dough.
- 5. Sprinkle** with cinnamon and nutmeg. If you want nuts or raisins, scatter them across the rectangle now.
- 6. Roll** the dough into a 12" long cylinder. Cut 1" slices.

7. Place side by side in a prepared pan. Depending on your dough, you would allow to it to rise until double in size, or if using a popbread you can bake immediately.

8. Bake according to your normal baking temperature, but shorten the time for a loaf to 2/3 the time, and check a few minutes early. For instance, when I use the same bread recipe to bake a standard loaf it takes 30 minutes. These swirls are fully baked and golden between 18-20 minutes.

9. Use the Fancy Glaze on page 53.

APPLE CARROT SOUP OR APPLE CARROT CREAMED SOUP

I like soup. I like it as my meal sometimes, but often use it as first course or second course. It adds nutrients to the body quickly, so it rates high on my "It's good for them" scale. It also works wonders to stretch the food budget. Often when we eat in restaurants, I'm full before the entrée comes because of the soup course. This recipe is quite different than most soup recipes I use – it has fruit in it. I like it hot, but it is actually quite good as a chilled soup. By making a mega-batch, I have containers ready for other meals in the freezer. Using a food processor making the "x4" batch is barely anymore work than the x1. Please note that you can make two different versions: A traditional soup with visible and chewy produce OR a puree or "creamed" version.

- X1 (x2, x4)**
- 1 (2, 4) Tablespoons Butter**
- 8 (16, 32ish) Carrots, peeled or scrubbed clean, and thinly sliced**
- 2 (4, 8) Apples, (I use 4 different kinds, but if you're using only one, use a tart apple), peeled, chopped**
- 1 (2, 4) Onions (mol [more or less] – de-**



pending on potency and preference)

- 2 (4, 8) Celery ribs, thinly sliced**
- 5 (10, 20) cups of Chicken (or turkey) broth**
- ½ (1, 2) teaspoons of powdered sage (or minced fresh)**
- ¼ (1/2, 1) teaspoon Pepper**
- 1 (2, 4) teaspoons Salt (WAIT – depending on your broth, salted or unsalted, you might be able to omit the salt. Wait and taste the soup before adding any salt. Salt to taste.)**

- 1 (2,3) Bay leaves**

1. In a large saucepan (x1) or a large Dutch oven (x2, x4) cook and stir carrots, apples, onion and celery in the butter until ONION is tender. (The carrots won't be.) It will take about 5-8 minutes depending on pan and

density of the produce.
2. Add the broth, sage, pepper, and leaves.

3. Bring to a boil.
4. Reduce heat. Cover and simmer for 20-30 minutes – until the carrots are tender.

5. REMOVE Bay leave(s) before blending.

Option A – Traditional vegetable soup version:

6a. Pour or ladle out about 1/3 of the soup liquid and produce (2,3,7 cups appx.). Allow to cool. Pour it into your blender and set it in the refrigerator to cool enough to blend. You don't want to ever blend HOT food because of safety issues. Once cool enough (5-10 minutes), blend until smooth.

Option B – For "creamed" of vegetable soup version – a puree of the soup:

6b. Allow all of the soup to cool. Puree all the cooled soup until smooth

using your blender.

Depending on the size of your blender pitcher, it will take 2 or 3 blender uses for the x1 batch size.

Continue with same directions for either option:

7. Pour blended vegetables slurry into pot.

8. Cover and cook until heated through for hot version. Or allow to cool for the cold version.

9. Serve one batch hot, and allow the others to cool before bagging and freezing for other meals.

Serving suggestion: If serving to individual bowls, pour a little bit of cream on top of soup and swiggle it with a fork. It will look elegant. Or dust the top with some fresh grated nutmeg.

This soup works great to just set the frozen mass in a small crock pot and let it thaw and simmer throughout the day, while you do something else that is wonderful.

APPLE STREUSEL MUFFINS

These muffins take a few extra steps, but are well worth it. They freeze wonderfully, so I make the x4 recipe and freeze them individually, ready for a quick grab-and-go breakfast. I use a combination of freshly-milled soft wheat flour and off the shelf AP flour. It works with all freshly-milled flour, just be sure to use soft summer wheat berries. You can substitute ¼-½ of the flour amount with whole grain hard winter wheat, but there will be a grainier consistency. I've tried several sugar substitutes that work well – especially stevia.

X1 (x2, x4)

For Muffins:

1 (2,4) Yield in dozens

2 (4, 8) Cups Flour, AP

1 (2, 4) Cups Sugar (or substitute)

1 (2, 4) teaspoons Baking Powder

½ (1, 2) teaspoons Baking Soda

½ (1, 2) teaspoons Salt

2 (4, 8) Eggs

½ (1, 2) Cups Butter, Melted

1¼ (2½, 5) teaspoons Vanilla Extract

1½ (3, 6) Cups Apples, peeled, chopped (I use a combo of several varieties)

For Streusel:

⅓ (2/3, 1⅓) Cups Brown Sugar (or substitute)

⅛ (¼, ½) Cups Flour, AP [⅛ cup = 2 Tbls]

⅛ (¼, ½) teaspoons Cinnamon, grd

1 (2, 4) Tablespoons Butter, cold

1. Preheat oven to 375°F. Pare Apples and chop – sprinkle with lemon juice to keep apples from browning if there will be some time before you mix them into the batter for baking.

2. Whisk together flour, sugar, baking powder, baking soda, and salt in a large bowl (fluff with a large whisk).

3. In another bowl, beat together eggs, butter, and vanilla.

4. Gently stir wet ingredients into the dry ingredients until just moistened – don't over mix.

5. Fold chopped apples into the stiff batter.

6. Fill greased, sprayed, or lined muffin cups – approximately ¾ full.

7. In a fresh bowl, combine first 3 Streusel ingredients – cut butter into the mixture with two forks or a pastry knife.

8. Sprinkle Streusel mixture over muffin batter.

9. Bake at 375°F for 15-20 minutes – use clean knife test

10. Prepare the Fancy Glaze recipe while muffins are baking by combining the glaze ingredients in a seal-able plastic bag.

11. Cool muffins for at least 5 minutes before removing from pan.

12. Cut a small slit in the plastic bag and use as you would an icing bag to drizzle glaze over muffins.

13. Serve some and freeze the rest in airtight containers.

TRIPLE APPLE PIE

This is one recipe I get asked for every time I serve my Triple Apple Pie. It is really simple and I can "talk" most ladies through it by first teaching them to make some apple powder. You'll be putting apples in the bottom crust, the filling, and the top crust or crumble.

Recipe for those who already have an apple pie recipe or use packaged ingredients:

Whenever you peel apples, save the peel, dehydrate it (either on cookie sheets in a 100° F oven or using a commercial dehydrator). Use a coffee grinder or blender to turn the apple peel into a powder. I keep a jar of apple powder to use in this recipe and dozens of other recipes like muffins, breads, cakes, pancakes, and cookies. If you don't want to make the powder yourself, just use commercial "Hot Apple Cider" powder – the type you just add boiling water to.

Make your normal pie pastry, but substitute 1-2 Tablespoons of flour with 1-2 Tablespoons of apple powder (per pastry layer). If you use prepared pastry sheets, just sprinkle on the apple powder and press it into the dough.

Use your "normal" apple pie filling recipe (be it a quick couple of cans or the traditional fresh apple slices).

You can make a lattice top with another layer of apple pastry Or our favorite: Dutch Apple topping using even more apple powder. (¾ cup flour, 2 Tablespoons Apple powder, ½ teaspoon cinnamon, ½ cup brown sugar, ¾ cup oatmeal flakes, ½ teaspoon lemon zest (optional) and ½ cup butter. Mix dry ingredients together than cut in the butter. Sprinkle topping over pie and bake



normally.)

TRIPLE DUTCH APPLE PIE

Crusts:

2 cups Flour, AP

1 cup brown Sugar

½ cup Oatmeal (flaked oat groats) – Or use 2 oatmeal packets

¼ cup Apple Powder (or 2-4 apple cider packets)

¾ cup Butter, melted

Pie Filling:

2/3 cup Sugar

3 Tablespoons Cornstarch (Arrowroot can be replace, at a 1:1 ratio)

1 teaspoon Cinnamon

¼ teaspoon Nutmeg (freshly grated)

1¼ cups cold Water

3-4 Cups Apples, peeled, cored, diced (Use a variety for a richer flavor.)

1 Teaspoon Vanilla Extract

1. Peel, core, and dice apples.

2. Mix this in glass pie pan (saves dish washing), toss together the dry ingredients and then mix in

melted butter. Scoop out 1-cup for topping and set aside. Press crust mix across bottom and sides of pie pan.

3. Shake shake water and cornstarch in a glass jar for an even dissolution.

4. Pour cornstarch slurry over sugar in a large saucepan. Stir. Bring to a boil. Stir for 2 minutes until thickened. (Any time you use cornstarch, realize that it has to boil for at least one minute so that the granules will swell to their full capacity.) Remove from heat.

5. Stir in vanilla. Gently stir apples into sugar sauce to coat.

6. Distribute apples over crust in pie pan. Use your hand or a spatula to smooth the top. Sprinkle retained crust across top of apples.

7. Bake at 350° F for 40-45 minutes or until crust is golden brown.

8. Cool for at least an hour to allow the pie to set. (Don't skip the cooling step as it is vital for most pies to "conceal" or set.)

9. Serve with ice cream and drizzle with caramel syrup.





DUTCH BABY PANCAKE PUFF

(Mega Cooking, page 228)

This makes a great breakfast. We have tried a variety of toppings including half-a-dozen fruit pie fillings, maple syrup, even just confectioner's sugar, lemon juice, and/or vanilla cream. In my cookbook, I include the steps to make a (x8) batch to have extra for freezing – basically, I have to mix it in a large Dutch oven

and use a stick blender to mix that much batter. Reheat in microwave for 2 minutes or in an oven for 5 to 10 minutes.

**X1 (x2)
2 (4) servings**
½ (1) Cups Water
¼ (1/2) Cups Butter
(Margarine doesn't work, but Better Butter Spread does.)
½ (1) Cups Pancake Mix (Your favorite

or homemade)
2 (4) Eggs
2 (4) Cups Apple Pie Filling (Optional)
1 (2) standard pie pans OR 10" (18") cast iron skillet.

1. Preheat oven to 400° F. Spray pie pans or cast iron skillet.
2. In a large pan bring the water and butter to a steady boil.
3. Quickly stir in the pancake mix. The

mixture will form a ball and leave the sides of the pan.

4. Remove the pan from the heat.

5. Add the eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Beat the egg in quickly – you don't want it to cook in lumps when it hits the hot batter.

6. Spread the batter evenly into the pans.

7. Bake at 400° for 15 minutes.

8. Reduce the oven temperature to 300° F and bake an additional 10 minutes or until golden brown.

9. Serve with pie fillings or fresh fruit as topping or simply sprinkle with confectioners' sugar.

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Jill Bond found it hard to limit her apple recipes to just 7, but decided on these as a wide variety. As a thank you to our Blessed Living readers, Jill is offering a \$5 discount on her Mega Cooking book. See our website at blwemag.com for details.



CREATIVITY

DESIGN A UNIQUE NATIVITY SCENE



When I was a wee lass, my family had this plastic nativity scene that we'd place out in the yard at Christmas time. You might remember those pieces as they were quite common back in the 90s. Joseph covered in a bright pink bed sheet is what stands out in my memory. Well, we sold or donated or trashed them at some point and for nearly a decade we left our outside holiday displays to icicle lights hanging off our gutter.

Recently re-inspired to show the Bond Family holiday spirit, my mother asked me to design a custom nativity scene as the store brand scenes didn't quite fit our style. I toyed around with doing an unusual themed scene. Zombie Holy Family? Western Space Opera in Bethlehem? Steam-punk-Cyborg Baby Jesus? Oh, the endless possibilities.

In the end, I designed and built a simple arrangement for our yard. It took me a solid month to finish all seventeen pieces. To give you enough time for your next holiday

season, we're including these directions in this issue.

RESEARCH

Plan out what location you're going to use to display your scene, which characters you want to show, and how much you want to spend.

What Location?

Think about how much space you have for your scene and how far away from your audience you're going to place the figures. This will help in the decision of scale for your pieces. Example: if you have a spot in mind that is right against the road, is only 10' x 4', and is going to host about six characters, you'll need to have fairly small cutouts to fit everything. In our case, our area is quite large, far from the street, and we wanted 18 characters. This meant we needed fairly large scale characters for anybody driving by to see them.

Which Characters?

In any nativity, you're pretty much required to have at least three characters – Mary, Joseph, and the manger. Other characters commonly shown are the three wise men, some shepherds, and animals to give the idea of a stable.

In our case, we wanted to recreate what we felt was an accurate night of Christ's birth. We wanted to stress the stable-ness, so we made more animal characters than humans and chose creatures that would be commonly found in an Israeli stable at that time.

We also wanted to include the shepherds since it is indicated they arrived that very night after the angel came to them. In [Luke 2:11](#), the angel speaking to the shepherds says "... Born this day..." and in [Luke 2:15-16](#) the shepherds state they must "...now go..." and that "...they came with haste, and found Mary... and the babe..."

Now, as for the wise men, we left them out. Partly because we weren't sure if they were there that night. They are not mentioned in Luke's account of Christ's birth and [Matthew 2:9](#) describes Christ as "... the young child..." when they met him. And because we didn't quite want to broach the nationalities of the wise men themselves. We aren't worried about political-correctness backlash, but more because we don't know where the men were from or what they looked like or even how many there were. Instead of wildly guessing, we chose to omit them. Besides, a custom scene like this can always be added to year after year.

One last thing. While we don't know for sure if the wise men were there at Christ's first night on earth, we do know that there were angels. Quite a few, actually. A "multitude of the heavenly host," to be exact. ([Luke 2:13](#))

When I think of angels (and I'm not talking cherubim or seraphim here, just regular angels) I imagine them to be more like beings of celestial light than the dove-winged humans of traditional Christian iconography. Reading that [Luke 2:13](#) line describe a heavenly host, just makes me picture the night sky over Bethlehem filled with 10x the amount of stars than space naturally has. Either way, I decided to not draw up angels as I could not stand by any design I could think for them. Ultimately, we strung several yards of outdoor, single lights in a cascading manner towards the manger that could be interpreted as either stars or a heavenly host.

YOU can pick whichever characters YOU want to display.



How Much?

With the bigger number and scale of characters you're of course going to need more supplies. If budget is first on your mind, I recommend planning for the amount of wood you are going to buy. If you're going to buy only one 8'x4' sheet of plywood, then you'll have to judge the size and amount of characters that will fit on that one sheet. Again, for us, we wanted a multitude so we got the amount of wood needed. Same for paint, bigger characters equal greater surface area to detail. Also, think about versatility for character arrangements. If Mary is always going to be on the left of the manger and Joseph always on the right, you only need to paint one side of the cutout. If you want to be able to switch things up, like we wanted to, you should consider painting both sides of the characters.

PLANNING

This is where we get to drawing. If you are one of those talented folk who can just draw large-scale figures at command, I commend you. You can probably skip over this step and go on to working with the actual materials. I, however, needed to practice drawing my characters first. Since I have access to such tools as Photoshop and art tablets, I drew everything in the computer. This allowed easy scaling and placement for each character as I drew them. You don't need fancy techie items though. Regular pencil

DESIGN TIPS:

Think about the structural integrity of your pieces. Avoid large holes near the base that create thin legs as they could snap under the weight of the plywood. Also, watch out for one sided heaviness. The donkey in my first designs had only two, thin legs to support its heavy body. After drawing him on the plywood, I added two more legs to fill in the empty section under his belly and moved them toward his hind leg to battle the forward weight of his head.

Think about the shape of each character that you are defining. I chose to make every character a profile to utilize strong silhouettes. What do I mean by "strong silhouettes?"



Imagine each character you draw is solid black (no interior detail). Look at these solid shapes. Can you tell the difference between the donkey and the camel? The dog from the sheep? Mary from Joseph? Does the cow look like a cow? Are there parts that don't translate well? Do you have tails that look like tumors? If you merely cut out the shapes of wood and put them on your lawn without any paint, do you think people will be able to tell what each piece is?

Think about your color pallet. Can you reuse colors so you don't have to buy a whole bunch of different paints? Can you get by with only ten colors? Less? Do your colors work together? Are they in the same family? Will they stand out against the backdrop of your whole scene?

and paper work fine too.

Start off with a grid. If you're working on paper, I suggest using graph paper. Assume that we will buy a 4'x8' piece of plywood. For my grid, I made a 4"x8" canvas and drew grid lines at the 1", 1/2", and 1/4" marks (making my grid a scaled 3"x3"). On graph paper, treat each square as a 3" block and mark out 16 squares by 32 squares. Then outline each 4x4 square. Now you have a scaled grid of your plywood with each square foot marked out.

Next sketch out your characters. You can go about this two ways. 1) You can draw right onto the grid working out the scale and arrangement as you go. Or 2) draw the characters on a separate piece of paper, cut them out, and then arrange them on the graph paper cookie cutter style. The second choice is much like how I did it in Photoshop. You might want to glue down the characters once you have them arranged just the way you want them.

Save. You are going to want to have your new concept art around when you are working. You might want to make copies just to be safe.

Once you have the characters needed drawn out and arranged you're ready to move on. Now, technically you don't need your concept sketches until step four, but, no matter what, you've got to give it thought.

CONSTRUCTION

Now is the time that we get our hands dirty.

1. Procure your plywood and some primer. For the plywood, we got a high-grade 3/4", interior sheet for about

\$40. We wanted a thickness that would hold together as we cut it but wouldn't be over kill. You probably want to get as high grade as possible to save you the trouble of having to use filler to get a flat surface. Now for the primer, I used a standard indoor/outdoor, latex based type. Most primers come off the shelf as a white or give you the option to tint it. If you chose to tint it, like we did, avoid any dark colors that will be difficult for your lighter paints to cover.

2. Prime the plywood. I put down three layers per side and didn't bother with edges. (Once you cut out each piece, then prime the edges.) I highly recommend painting with the

1. Procure plywood.



2. Prime the plywood.



3. Lay down your grid.



4. Draw out your characters.



5. Cut out the characters.
6. Prime the edges.

wood flat against the ground or held up on saw horses. If it is at any angle, you run the very probable risk of having paint runs across your project. And that just won't look nice.

3. Lay down your grid. I measured out 3" marks down all four sides of the plywood. Because not all plywood sheets are created square, I laid out my lines 1/2" inside the board. With my tick marks down, I used one of those chalk-snapping-line reel thingies to connect each edge. I then used a long, straight ruler to draw a pencil line over the chalk line to make sure my grid wouldn't disappear with stray hand swipes. I also drew thicker lines at my 1' lines just to help differentiate the grid for my characters.

4. Draw out your characters. Using the grid on your concept drawing, recreate your characters in this larger scale. Keep your eyes open for any issues that you might not have noticed on paper. Do any parts look dangerously thin and pose risk of snapping off? Is a character too small? Can you eliminate gaps by tweaking a couple of lines? Can you add another character by moving and rotating another? Are characters too close together to easily cut them apart? You may notice some changes between my concept drawing and the final piece. (Like the camel's belly being flush to the ground, the donkey's legs are shorter and thicker, fur tufts on the animals are smoothed out, and the clothes on the parents fill in gaps by their feet and hands for better structure.) There are some talented people out there who can just lay out a large design without making a small concept design – the kind of people who get volunteered to make school banners and posters. If you are one of them, mega kudos. Really. I can't begin to approach something of this scale without a test run.

5. Cut out the characters. For some areas, you might find it easier to drill starting holes in your plywood that you use for jigsaw cuts.

6. Prime the edges. You want to make sure the outside elements can't get past your primer, so seal the edges. True, we're going to cover the final characters in paint to protect it as much as possible. We just want to be extra careful with these works of art that so much time has been poured into.

7. Separate and paint each section. Use painter's tape if you need it. I free-handed each section so that I could quickly fill in every color a character needed in a day. Some days, I managed to finish an entire character palette by timing out which colors I used in what order. Just watch painting a fresh color next to one that is still wet. Lastly, I used a black paint to create linework on the characters. This added definition and a cartoony look that I wanted. This also helped to tighten up the joints of two or more colors.

Note. If you use painter's tape, be careful when you pull up the tape. If the paint is too clingy, it could rip. Use a sharp blade, like a box cutter, to slice through any large paint blobs that are the usual culprits of clingy paint.

8. Make the bases. For the bases of your characters, you can use cheaper plywood. But you might want to get an outdoor graded or pressure treated wood. Cut each board into rectangles that are at least 3-6" wider and longer than your character. You want to make sure the surface area of your base is



7. Separate and paint each section with as much detail as you want.



8. Make bases.
9. Attach base to character.



enough to support the character. For taller characters make wider bases to give it better footing.

9. Attach base to character. Drill through the underside of the base and into the bottom of your character. Attach the base with screws that are long enough to bite through the base and the character, but are not so long that they pop through the other side. We bore out inset holes for the screws to make a flatter surface.

Optional. Seal the paint. With outdoor level sealant, cover the character with at least two coats. You want to make sure no weather can get to the characters painted surface. You want to use these pieces more than once, right? So take precautions and protect your work. We choose paints that were already outdoor grade and didn't use sealer (except for areas where primer was bare, as primer is not top coat protected.)

LOOSE ENDS

Now, you may have noticed that my concept art and progress photos are all missing a key character: The manger!

Well, I tried. But drawing out something so angular and reliant of perspective, I realized, wouldn't work in the same manner as the other characters. (For this same reason, I omitted any kind of stable structure.)

Ultimately, we found a dish rack that was wooden and loosely manger shaped. To handle the infant inside, we put a handheld work light within the manger and covered it with our own swaddling clothes. The end effect looked quite nice at night as the glow from our makeshift Savior shined out through the cloth and shone on the faces of Mary and Joseph.

Personalize your display by putting your own pets in the scene.

Hope this log of our decoration creation will inspire you to express your creativity this festive season. Send us photos of your display for our holiday issue at blessedlivingemag@yahoo.com.



Our scene at night with the bright light of our faux Baby Jesus

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BLWE

LOVED BY GOD

have the greatest Father in the whole universe and beyond. His name is God, and He loves me very much. He loves everyone very much – so much that everyone can put some of the most important letters after their name – even before they are born!!! Those letters are L.B.G. (Loved By God).

13 For You formed my inward parts;

You wove me in my mother's womb.

14 I will give thanks to You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made;

Wonderful are Your works, And my soul knows it very well.

15 My frame was not hidden from You,

When I was made in secret, And skillfully wrought in the depths of the earth;

16 Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;

And in Your book were all written

The days that were ordained for me,

When as yet there was not one of them.

Psalms 139:13-16

Even better though, is that because God so loves us all even knowing that we are all sinners, He willingly made the greatest sacrifice ever made. He gave His Son, Jesus, to die for **all our** sins – past, present, and future. (Jesus was the perfect sacrifice because He was sinless.)

“For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

John 3:16

But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

Romans 5:8

The purpose for this was that so we could be made righteous before God and spend Eternity with Him instead of spending all Eternity in torment separated from Him.

8 Dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus.

9 These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from

the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

2 Thessalonians 1:8-9

“These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”

Matthew 25:46

All we have to do is believe in and confess Jesus Christ as God's Son, our Saviour, Who died for our sins and Who was resurrected from the dead.

That if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved;

Romans 10:9

The Good News doesn't end there. Jesus didn't stay dead. He rose from the dead – just like He told His disciples He would.

“For just as JONAH WAS THREE DAYS AND THREE NIGHTS IN THE BELLY OF THE SEA MONSTER, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.”

Matthew 12:40

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again.

Mark 8:31

“And after they have scourged Him, they will kill Him; and the third day He will rise again.”

Luke 18:33

Jesus is alive today!

“...And I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.”

Revelation 1:18

When we truly believe this, we begin a wonderful relationship with our LORD, and then we become co-heirs with Jesus.

And if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with *Him* so that we may also be glorified with *Him*.

Romans 8:17

Now we can put a new set of letters

after our name – letters that have both eternal and present implications – more important than any earthly degrees or doctorates you can earn. Those letters are C.O.G. – Child Of God.

But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, *even* to those who believe in His name,

John 1:12

See how great a love the Father has bestowed on us, that we would be called children of God; and *such* we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him.

1 John 3:1

So don't be so consumed with the world and its desires that we miss the most important status we could ever receive – all because we have been Saved By God's Grace (S.B.G.G)

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

1 John 2:16

And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

Romans 12:2

4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us,

5 even when we were dead in our transgressions, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved),

Ephesians 2:4-5

Additional verses:

“See that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that their angels in heaven continually see the face of My Father who is in heaven.”

Matthew 18:10

Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift!

2 Corinthians 9:15

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BLWE

HIGHLIGHTED BIOS



BITSY LAPORTAL is a freelance writer and tech expert to the non-digital generation. Though she was programming computers as early as 1971, she realizes her contemporaries aren't usually as geeky. She tries to bridge that digital divide to aid other Boomers and Matures in relating to their Generation Z or Millennial grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

As a computer science major at the college rated third in the nation for that area of study, Bitsy learned coding, flowcharting, and systems management. Way back then, much of the coding was done with punch cards. Languages like Fortran, COBOL, PL2, Binary, and machine were the must haves. Later she added to her training with graduate work in Systems Management and Technology Education.

Her geek blood runs deep and has lead her to be the first person in her sphere with a cellular phone, creating mob curiosity in stores, ("Excuse me, Ma'am, but your purse is ringing. Hey, everyone! Look she's got one of those phones.") She was one of those patsies who waited in line for hours to get the first iPhone, to have the price halved a few months later.

She now researches developments in technology to keep an eye out for what is for the good and what is to be wary of (tech the beast of Revelation could use).

Thankful the Lord gave her a brain that thinks like a flowchart, she tries to channel positive uses for technology to advance His Kingdom.

Originally from New York, **ANNE MARIE TRENSE** is grateful that God moved her to Florida when she was nine. It was here that she found her wonderful husband of 25 years and has enjoyed the privilege of being the mother of her three favorite people on the planet.

She thought her brother's asthma was a call from God to become a pediatrician. However, He was using her love of learning and children to mold her into a caring teacher, so after earning a pre-med degree (Go Gators!) she continued her schooling to become certified teacher.

Along the way the Lord has blessed her with many milestones including being named the Martin County Teacher of the Year, running as a candidate for the School Board, serving as a teacher in public, Christian and homeschool classrooms, tutoring kindergarten through college students, teaching guitar and serving as a homeschool evaluator.

She enjoys teaching her precious second grade students at First Baptist Christian School (Stuart, FL) as well as biking, kayaking, hiking, reading, writing, photography, and playing an assortment of musical instruments, but her passion is to radiate the love of Christ into the lives of others and for God to say "Well done, good and faithful servant."

ONE MORE THING

When life hurts the last thing you need is more of the world, more of human wisdom, or more stress. When life hurts what you need is exactly what you need when life doesn't hurt: more of Jehovah in your life.

We were all excited about starting a new year of homeschooling and eager to sign-up for programs, classes, volunteer jobs, and field trips. The room was packed with parents with clipboards and lists. The walls were lined with tables covered with posters and enrollment forms, questionnaires, and applications.

As we waited in various lines, friends would chat and talk about how their summer had progressed. Several of us were talking about various books we had read and I turned to the mother on my right and asked her if she had read any good books lately. She got this deer-in-a-headlight look in her eyes, started to cry and said, "I can't handle one more thing" and ran to her husband. He cradled her and walked her to their car and they drove off.

I wondered what I had said. I felt horrible. Another mother came over who was a close friend of that "deer" lady, and told me that after a severe breakdown, this had been her first time out in a social setting. Having to make conversations, balance all the input, and maintain calm was more than she could bear.

I then looked at what to me was like a kid's trip to an amusement park (all the offerings, all the great people, I was thrilled and didn't want to miss a thing), and tried to see it from her eyes.

It was as loud and as hectic as a gambling floor in Las Vegas designed to discombobulate people enough for them to part with their hard-earned money and bet on dice, cards, or spinning wheels.

From her viewpoint, everyone was hocking their wares, be it science club, a miniature horse farm field trip, or a mom's support group. She saw it as just more, more, more, and when I added that one more thing of reading the latest book under discussion, she folded. Days later we talked and began a sweet friendship nurtured in calmness and peace.

The world puts all kinds of expectations on us. There are companies who will give you a "media-presence" and tweet and post every two hours to give the world the idea that you are important, busy, or worth following. As an author, I get solicited daily by those who offer to expand my social media footprint to propagate excitement about whatever I'm doing or not doing.

The world comes at us at such a pace, that we can get blindsided and wounded in the fray. Like innocent unintended civilian casualties the military euphemistically calls collateral damage, our friends, colleagues, neighbors can be bruised by our example – if we're as enamored by the world as the pagans are.

It is a trap to equate busy-ness with importance as we discussed in our last issue, but in this issue, we wanted to focus on some of the results of that lack of resting. We know the cause of many diseases, conditions, and failures: world-induced stress. But when life hurts, how do we turn it around?

We go back to where we belong. We crawl up into our Heavenly Father's mighty-to-save arms and drink in His version of importance, His definition of worth, His revelation of joy.

When life hurts, be it from internal, external, supernatural, or random causes, the answer is always resoundingly: Jesus.

JILL



We know that all things
work together for the good
of those who love God: those
who are called according to
His purpose.

Romans 8:28 HCSB