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May 2011 Issue: Summer

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A Word from the Editor

Beloved!

The summer before my first year in high school, my family moved from Alaska to Texas. We journeyed slowly in our minivan, and I remember enjoying the "in between" stage. I was leaving one chapter of my life, but I haven't arrived at the next chapter. It was a wonderfully blissful intermission, and I took time to rest, think and enjoy every moment. My childlike faith trusted that everything was going to be okay.

It wasn't until much later that I realized how stressful that time must have been for my parents. They had no connections, no home and no job where we were moving, and they had a family to provide for. I find it interesting that two people can be in the same situation, yet one person will find joy and the other anxiety. Now that I have a family, I find myself in the position of worry, instead having the childlike faith that everything will be okay.

I'm learning, though, that God gives us "in between" stages. He gives us "summers" to relax and enjoy life; however, many times we don't take advantage of His peaceful offering. We sometimes sabotage our *Holy Holidays* by worrying about tomorrow, but we want to change our doubt to faith. We are determined to seek rest in God's presence and enjoy those lazy days that He has for us. God takes immense pleasure in us, and He wants us to take pleasure in Him.

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Summer in the Desert

The contributing writers in this issue desire to lay hold of God's peace and enjoy the blissful intermissions that He has prepared. The voices here discuss those things that define summer: playing at beaches, gardening, fishing and relaxing in the sun. They also write about family vacations, marriages and the changing of seasons. The warm memories that fill the long summer days scatter these articles like a starry sky in the late summer night. We hope you find a moment to relax and enjoy our gifts of restoration.

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matthew 6.33-34 NIV).

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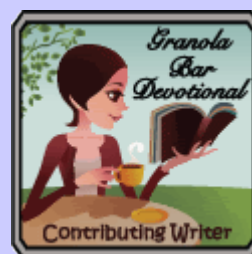
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Eternal Summer



I've been thinking a lot about aging lately. Gray hairs are starting to find their way into my auburn hair, and fine lines and creases are beginning to frame the features of my face. The youthful aspects of my body that I've always taken for granted seem to be losing their momentum.

I'm trying to gain an eternal perspective about the physical changes that I'm about to experience as God allows me to live more years on

this earth.

To acquire understanding, I looked at the average lifespan of a person. I know that people many times use the concept of "seasons" when describing life, so I divided the average life into four: spring, summer, autumn and winter. If a person lives 80 years, then each season will have a set of 20 years. I realize this is a little cut-and-dry, but I really needed to have something tangible to explore the aging process and to prepare myself for what's to come.

Since I am thirty-four years old, I am nearing the end of summer. The youth I've always known is waning, and I will begin the beautiful season of fall. I'm not angry or scared about this new season. I've just always been horrible with change, and my mind and spirit desperately need awareness before my scenery changes. I want to stay on the curving path of God's design, so I will have victory in my autumn years and continue to live with confidence in Christ.

Jesus never lived into His last two seasons; He was crucified in the glory of His summer. He conquered death for us and returned to show His resurrected body to the world. He walked the earth in the ripeness of His summer, and the splendor of His eternal body revealed the scars of His earthly sacrifice. His physical brokenness became His everlasting beauty.

Brokenness is not a very nice word in a culture obsessed with perfection and beauty. If someone were to invent a body eraser to airbrush over blemishes and imperfections, that person would become a gazillionaire. We would use that eraser to shave off inches from our hips and stomachs, erase freckles and wrinkles and rub out stretch marks, cellulite and scars. We might even become skilled enough to shade in some muscle tone and firmness! We would definitely not highlight our brokenness, but that's exactly what Jesus did.

Our brokenness is what releases God's fullness in our lives. It is not until we finally admit that we are not perfect and our efforts at control don't work, that we finally cling onto to God's power instead of our own. When we die to ourselves, God lives abundantly in us. And God will break us to get us to understand that. Aging is definitely a form of brokenness. As we get older, we realize that time is no longer on our side. Our physical bodies are dying and we have very few years left to reach our predestined purposes. Aging helps us to look beyond

ourselves and into the heart of God, where the spiritual and eternal things dwell.

I pray that in my new season, God will show me how fleeting my looks are and how short my life is compared to eternity. I want heaven-eyes, so I can keep my life aligned with God's everlasting plan. I desire to lay hold of the aspects of my life that have eternal value, so my life can have purpose and meaning. I know that the physical elements of this life are important, but I want to use them to develop and fulfill eternal assignments.

With all that said, I will still hold onto the promise that I will die in this crippled, mortal shell and be transformed into my Eternal Summer self. In heaven I will have long auburn hair, a wrinkle free face and youthful muscles. I will be able to fly, run and dance into God's glory that fills the gates of heaven. But I know that any brokenness I endured in this life for the Kingdom of God will be worn like a badge of honor. I will recite my stories of how I lived by faith for Christ, and I will highlight the brokenness that caused me to cling onto God because I believed in His promises.

And we who are living will also be transformed. For our dying bodies must be transformed into bodies that will never die; our mortal bodies must be transformed into immortal bodies. Then, when our dying bodies have been transformed into bodies that will never die, this Scripture will be fulfilled:

"Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where is your victory?

O death, where is your sting?"

- 1 Corinthians 15:53-55 (NLT)

~ Alisa Hope Wagner

Alisa has a God-given passion to write, and she loves to write about what the Holy Spirit is currently teaching her. She is the founder of [Granola Bar Devotional Writing Ministry](#), which helps publish and share women's faith-story. She writes Christian meditations on her personal website, [Faith Imagined](#). She is also a contributor for [Internet Cafe](#). She and her husband love their church and enjoy raising their two boys and a girl.



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Planting Seeds



"What's that you have, little girl?" asked the stranger with the kind eyes.

"It's a tiny seed," she replied.

"What are you going to do with it?" he asked.

"Well, at first I just put it on a shelf, but then it got all shriveled and dried out. Then I decided to hold it really tight in my hand, all the time, but

then it got all soggy and limp. So, I've decided I'm going to plant it."

"That sounds like a wonderful idea!" said the kind stranger. "Where are you going to plant it?"

The little girl looked puzzled. "I'm not sure."

"Well, I know a great place to plant it!" he said with a smile.

"Really?!" she squealed.

"Really."

So the kind stranger led the little girl to a tiny patch of dirt, in an obscure little field, and pointed to a place next to a large tree. "Here is the perfect place for this seed to be planted."

The little girl looked doubtful. It didn't seem like the area was very conducive to growth. It looked rather inhospitable and dry. The ground was hard, and the little patch of dirt was in the shade. But, too embarrassed to disagree with the kind stranger, she started to dig up the dirt. And then, when the little hole was dug, she glanced back up at the stranger. "Should I put the seed in the dirt now?"

"Yes, absolutely. It's exactly the right time for it to be planted."

So she did.

For days, the little girl would come and check where she had buried the seed. She saw nothing happening...nothing at all. The dirt looked even drier, the ground looked even harder. There were weeds growing everywhere. The shadow of the tree was blocking out the sunlight. One day, very discouraged,

she just sat down and started crying. Almost instantly, she became aware that she wasn't alone. She looked up and saw the silhouette of the stranger.

"What's wrong?" he asked kindly.

"My seed isn't growing," she sniffed. "I didn't think this was a very good place for it to grow."

"It's the perfect place for it to grow," he reassured her. "It just needs a gardener."

"Well, I don't know anything about how to grow seeds, and I don't know any gardeners," she sighed.

"Ah, but that's where you're in luck," he said. "I am a master gardener. Will you let me help grow your seed?"

With no other alternative in mind, the little girl said, "Yes."

And the stranger got to work. He cultivated the surrounding dirt, he yanked out the weeds, he spread fertilizer, and he watered the area around where the seed had been planted. "There, that should take care of it until tomorrow."

"Tomorrow?" the little girl asked in surprise. "You mean you have to do this every day?"

"Yes," replied the stranger. "Seeds need tending every day if they are to grow."

Day after day, the little girl watched the stranger work. Every day he tended the seed. And before she knew it, under his watchful care, a sprout broke through the surface and began to grow. She was delighted. One day, the stranger approached her. He still had the kindest eyes. "So, what do you think? I told you that seed would grow!"

"Yes, you did. But it only grew under your care," she replied.

"But that's how it's supposed to happen. Only a master gardener knows how and when and where to grow a seed."

"Will it grow very big?" she asked him seriously.

He paused for a moment..."Time will tell. But see that large tree right next to your growing seed?"

She looked to where he was pointing. "Yes, I see it."

"Well, I planted that one, too." And with that, he winked at the little girl, as she stared at the tree in amazement!

Are you giving your seed to the Master Gardener? Letting Him do His work of cultivating and weeding - fertilizing and watering? Can you trust that in His timing, your seed will become a mighty tree?

Plant your seeds, my friends - and have faith...

"You don't have enough faith," Jesus told them. "I tell you the truth, if you had faith even as small as a mustard seed, you could say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it would move. Nothing would be impossible." (Matthew 17:20)

~ Sharon Kirby

Sharon is a married, 50-something, mother of two grown sons - and also the grandmother of a delightful beagle! She loves to share what God is doing during this time of great transition in her life. She writes a daily devotional blog, [Sharon Sharing God](#), enjoys being a speaker for MOPS (Mothers Of Pre-Schoolers), and participates in a weekly ministry to the elderly. It is her deep desire to help others hear the voice of God, and to encourage them to passionately pursue His calling on their lives.



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Seashells



Siesta Key Beach filled the horizon, and bright white sand meshed perfectly with sparkling sapphire water. Umbrellas dotted the landscape like trees, while dozens of sun-seekers walked along the water's edge, admiring one of the most beautiful beaches in Florida. A surprisingly graceful pelican swooped at the water in search of lunch. My toes curled into the flour-like sand as our boys ran excitedly toward the waves.

Six-year old Cole was on a mission to start a seashell collection while his brother herded seagulls on the shoreline. Chase's screeching laughter was drowned out by the seagulls annoyed cries and the gently crashing waves. Cole spent much of his time hunkered down, diligently searching through the seashell blanket connecting water to sand. After a few minutes the tattered Wal-Mart bag in his hand was bursting with sharp seashell points and damp sand. I offered to trade Cole my nearly-empty bag and he eagerly accepted.

As he headed up the shoreline to fill the second bag, I looked down into his collection of shells. Expecting beauty, I found brokenness. Instead of whole seashells, I counted dozens of shell pieces. The only common element was their obvious imperfection. Cracked, damaged seashells stretched the sides of the bag. Nestled among seashells were a few unusual, sea-mangled rocks masquerading as shells. How different from my small seashell collection!

The few seashells I picked up that sunny afternoon were perfect and pleasing to the eye; I specifically overlooked the broken shells on the water's edge *because* they weren't whole. I saw no beauty in what was obviously damaged, yet Cole was fascinated with his motley collection of sea-tossed beach treasures. I praise God that He does the same with us.

I'm a cracked, imperfect seashell. We all are. Some might even feel like a misshapen rock hiding among seashells, or that we're broken into irreparable pieces. But our gracious Heavenly Father gently picks us up -- in our broken, useless state -- and places us securely in His treasured collection. "But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace you have been saved)" (Ephesians 2:4-5, NKJV).

Battered by the pounding waves of life and floating along the tide of sinfulness, we're a world away from beauty and perfection. More accurately, we're a Garden away. Yet God loved us so much that He sent His perfect Son in order to redeem His creation. What amazing grace! At salvation, our brokenness is

perfected by the righteousness of Jesus. Not of ourselves, but solely through His completed work on the cross. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10, NKJV).

As Cole ran excitedly down the beach carrying his second bag full of broken treasures, I gave thanks that our loving Creator did the same for each of us.

~Kerry Johnson

Kerry grew up exploring the woods in Connecticut and reading any book she could get her hands on, sometimes at the same time. Now transplanted to sunny Florida, she still loves to read and write, which come third only to her love for her Savior and to her loud and very ticklish family. Her patient hubby Trevor keeps her feet on earth and their two bouncing big boys, Cole and Chase, give the best hugs ever. She finally worked up her courage to join the blogosphere, [A Lamp, a Light, and a Writer](#), where she enjoys writing about God's work and His Word in and throughout her life.

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The Fruitful Soil



"I am the true vine, and my Father is the husbandman."

(John 15:1 KJV)

It's that time of year when many brave souls are out in their gardens. Me? I'm probably still thinking about it!

Always delivering great nuggets of truth in a parable, Jesus plants His seeds of truth in the Parable of the Sower:

"Now here is the explanation of the story I told about the farmer planting grain: The hard path where some of the seeds fell represents the heart of a person who hears the Good News about the Kingdom and doesn't understand it; then Satan comes and snatches away the seeds from his heart.

"The shallow, rocky soil represents the heart of a man who hears the message and receives it with real joy, but he doesn't have much depth in his life, and the seeds don't root very deeply, and after a while when trouble comes, or persecution begins because of his beliefs, his enthusiasm fades, and he drops out.

"The ground covered with thistles represents a man who hears the message, but the cares of this life and his longing for money choke out God's Word, and he does less and less for God. The good ground represents the heart of a man who listens to the message and understands it and goes out and brings thirty, sixty, or even a hundred others into the Kingdom." (Matt. 13:18-23 TLB)

The Lord once said to me...

"If the ground is not turned, I cannot plant My seeds. A life as a lovely green meadow with its abundance of wild flowers is a fair picture of beauty. But there's more to be had from the rich soil lying beneath the surface blanket of a lovely green pasture. Cultivating this meadow can produce a harvest of fruit, of nourishment, of good things for others.

The Hand of the One tilling the soil is the One Who loves it the most and sees the greatest potential in it for harvest. The roots beneath the surface must be ripped out that the ground might be tilled and furrowed, giving room to accept the seeds of growth.

Open your eyes and see as I see. I see beautiful golden fields of wheat, waving their ripened grain in the breeze, ready for harvest.

A life in the Hands of the One guiding the plow will be a fruitful meadow yielding a harvest of grain as bread-corn for others. A life uprooted and turned over, welcoming the plantings of the Master Husbandman, will gladden the hearts of others with its lovely field of produce."

The deep furrows made upon your soul serve only to open it to receive the words, comfort, love, healing, and power of the Lord that they may take root and flourish with a crop of tasty fruit.

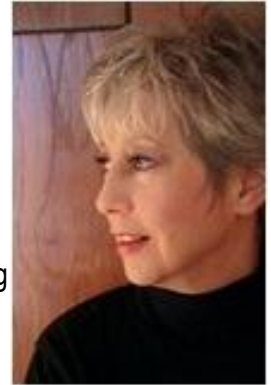
God is the Master Husbandman Who sometimes must dig deep into one's life, knowing where the best soil lies, and dropping in His seeds of encouragement, peace, and blessings that they may grow for the use of others.

"The husbandman that laboreth must be first partaker of the fruits." (2 Tim 2:6 KJV)

The Husbandman knows His soil and purposes to have a harvest. Allow Him to do His tilling in your life and to plant the seeds of Word into your heart that you may give back to Him that bumper crop.

~ Lynn Mosher

Born and raised in a Christian home in Kentucky, Lynn has been a believer since the age of 11. Lynn lives with her husband of 44 years in their empty nest in Kentucky. On occasion, the three offspring, who have flown the coop, come to visit, accompanied by a lovable son-in-law, daughter-in-law, and three precious granddaughters. During this time, the Lord placed the desire in her heart to write for Him. She now writes in obedience and, in addition to devotionals and inspirational writings, which can be found on her blog [Heading Home](#), she is putting the final touches on her first book.



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Fitting Two Feet into One Shoe



I am an independent thinker who usually believes she has the right answer for most situations. I am also an only child who went to college, has a stubborn streak, was not afraid to take the lead in areas where I felt confident, lost my father to cancer at age 16, and became a survivor--albeit a sensitive one. All of those traits can be healthy when you are making decisions on your own.

However, when you find the man of your dreams in your mid-twenties and you are ready to waltz down that white-lined aisle of a church bedecked in carnations and daisies,

those traits need tempering. As my mother used to say, "Marriage is like fitting two feet into one shoe." A rough Italian translation that means, "It's going to be uncomfortable making two different personalities blend into one."

As a knowledgeable, educated young woman, I assumed I knew better than my mother's old world sayings. In my marriage, we were going to make all the right decisions. "Holly Hobbie" and the eternal optimist lived in my heart. It was just that my emotions did not always agree with all that logical, Biblical, head knowledge I had gained over the years. The emotions would scatter all education, determination, and beliefs into the cars of a roller coaster racing down the "Scream" at Six Flags. Something was bound to fly out before hitting the level tracks.

From these rough, jostling rides, I've garnered two lessons:

1. "Do not let the sun go down on your anger." Ephesians 4:6 That is an Amen!
2. And submit that stubborn streak to the one whom the Lord appointed to be the head and protector of your household.

When the topic of submission comes up these days, everyone skirts the issue. For good reason. Submission has been misused by some as a way to abuse another verbally, physically, emotionally, and psychologically--all in the name of Christianity. It has also provided a way for one spouse to manipulate the other in such a way that he always has the final word.

Upon close examination, that is not what the Holy Spirit is speaking through Paul in Ephesians. The other half of the passage admonishes a husband to love his wife as Christ loves the Church. If the husband is acting in a sacrificial way, his love will dominate the household, not his self will. I would advise you to read the whole passage in Ephesians 5:22-33 and seek the Lord's heart.

With that clarification, I would like to retell an event in my life where the Lord made it clear to me how He was calling me to be more submissive.

There are few times when my husband has imposed his will upon mine, but they stand out in our marriage as times where the mighty hand of God was moving.

One such instance occurred on a cozy winter evening while I was cuddled up with my plans for the week ahead. Our monthly Women's Fellowship was just a few days away with the promise of refreshment and encouragement. As I contemplated that evening, I pictured the day that would follow it and our drive into God's glorious snow-covered mountains.

As I savored these delightful plans, my husband broke into my reverie and announced we would have to leave for the mountains a day earlier. "This would not work," I thought. "Women's Fellowship is that evening." I was sure once I explained this to him, he would agree to resume our original plan.

However, my husband refused to budge. He insisted we travel up with one of the other families. In my mind, nothing could be more important than Women's Fellowship! We argued the benefits of each one's viewpoint, but in the end I reluctantly buried my plans and allowed my husband's decision to override mine. The words of Ephesians 5:22-30 echoing off the wall of my mind. The Submission passage. Wives submitting to husbands as to the Lord.

Submission is one of those spiritual attitudes that sticks in the mind and gets clogged on its way to the heart. My heart wrestled hard against the idea of leaving one day early. With legs of lead, I headed to the bedroom, mentally packing for the snow.

A few days later as we journeyed with the other family up the winding, dark mountain road, my husband discovered we had a few car issues. Not enough gas--and chains that did not fit. Rounding a bend in the road, we spotted a beacon of light--an open gas station nestled in the mountain.

We all pulled in, the other husband shaking his head, amazed and amused. They were always prepared and here was our family--ill-equipped, yet bailed out. The gas station closed as we maneuvered our now well-equipped cars onto the road. It wasn't long, however, before our friend's car encountered serious mechanical problems.

As his engine sputtered, we searched for a safe pullout snug against the mountains. While the husbands poked their heads under the car's hood, I flipped on the overhead light, and turned to play with our cherub-faced toddler in the back car seat.

I could see our friend shaking his head again--this time in disbelief. Our befuddled friend asked my husband the question lurking in his mind, "How does an ill-prepared family such as ours get bailed out while his family, who was well prepared, struggle up the mountain?"

He knew we had a different relationship with the Lord than he and his family. The questions were coming fast, and my husband had the opportunity to share with him about the Lord's great provision when we humans are weak.

The rest of the weekend was flooded with questions about the Lord, our Bible Study, our community of believers, the foundation for how we believed. For our friends, this was their beginning of a journey with Jesus. When I looked back on that weekend, I wondered what would have happened if we had stayed behind the extra day so that I could be filled with Jesus at the women's gathering? I would have been filled, but what about our friends?

For me, that weekend was a lesson on how "submission meets love" when I choose to obey the Lord. I can't say that I always follow the lesson learned, but that I have to relearn it often as I have a strong-willed, independent, only-child streak that runs through my thinking.

"Wives submit to your husbands as to the Lord." Ephesians 5:22 NIV

"Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her..." Ephesians 5:25 NIV

~ Janis Van Keuren

Writer, wife, mother, and a special education assistant, I'm full of joy at how I have experienced Jesus in the everyday, ordinary life. I'm a seasoned woman, married to my ever-patient, loving husband of 35 years, and we have two adopted sons who are grown young men with careers and adventures of their own. I've tasted the Lord in His creation, in the treasure of long-time friendships, in giddy girl times, in answered prayer, in His Word, and, yes, in journeys with Him through the valleys of life. Through my experiences and insight, I hope to inspire others to find Christ walking right by their side.



Links for me include my blog: <http://openmyearslord.blogspot.com>

twitter: <http://twitter.com/#!/openmyearslord>

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Patio



I sit on my back patio and close my eyes. The cool and crisp morning breeze delivers a fresh smelling fragrance that is comforting to my spirit. The quiet is broken only by the occasional sounds of nature. The sweet song of birds communicating with one another ushers in peace.

I love this time with God. I enjoy gazing all around at His creation and then digging into the Holy Word while surrounded by the awesome evidence of a Holy Creator. He is so amazing.

My heart is still so full of the powerful messages delivered during our revival services -- messages straight from God's heart to the lips of His servant and then right into the hungry souls of man, delivered deep down into the very depths of my spirit.

So much truth. So much power. Just so much....

My heart was sorely convicted. My spirit was joyously renewed. My fervor for the Word re-energized. So many people to reach. So many lives to touch. So little time to do it.

Too much worry about the temporal and not near enough concern about the eternal. Help me, Lord. Too much focus on fleshly enjoyment and not near enough on spiritual growth and satisfaction.

Therein lies the deep hole in our gospel and in our faith. We get burdened for the lost. We get convicted of our sin. But we fail to do anything about it. We have got to be moved by it. We have got to be stirred into action. We have got to be doers of the Word and not just hearers only. (James 1:22)

It's about obedience to God. It's about a glorious faith that leads to works. It's about service. It's about surrender. Christ beckons to us, His followers, to be His hands and feet in a lost and dying world. Will we answer the call?

"God never asks us to give what we do not have, but He cannot use what we will not give." - (Richard Stearns)

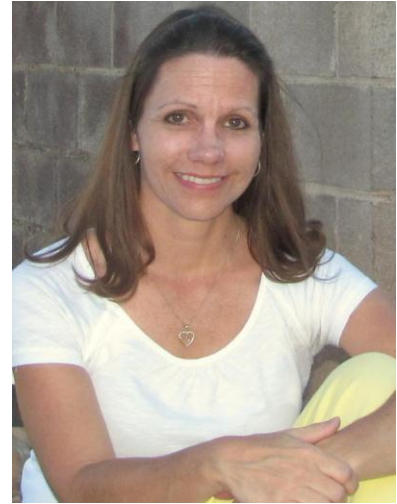
You see, it's not about us. It's not about this world and the things of this world. It's not about bigger houses, better cars or more stuff. It's all about Jesus. It's about bringing a living Savior

to a lost people.

Lord, continue to convict my heart of my selfishness and help me to be selfless for You. Continue to stir my heart into seeking what You are teaching me and help me to be willing to go where you are leading me. I want to be about Your business. I want to put You first. I want to be surrendered to You in all things and for all time. I love you, Lord, and I worship you with all that is in me...

~ Beth Herring

Beth has been married to an amazing man for 25 years. She is a pastor's wife, mother to 3 grown daughters and blessed Nana to 6 amazing grandchildren. This season of life finds her seeking and finding the "much more" of her precious Lord and Savior. She blogs for Him at [An Instrument for His Glory](#).



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Pop! Pop! Seal!



Hand-me down some summer-time, whispered some words within, words I had stored away, like canned tomatoes, bread and butter pickles, blackberry jam. Stored for a time when nothing fresh was available, for when winter snow storms buried us inside, to complete a dish that needed something extra.

Summer time is like that. It is a time for tending things planted, watching planted things grow, harvesting the meaty fruit and vegetables, storing to re-seed after the winter.

Springtime, new, sweet, eager, joyous - like when my time with Jesus was new. A basking in the cool warmth of a Spring sun. A scratching of the surface, tilling

deeper, turning the soil of our souls. A re-birth, new seeds brought out for planting, a faith-is-the substance-of-things hoped for - these seeds.

Summer comes, a maturing time. A root growing time. A reaching deeper-to-the-center-of-our-soul time. A working time, an intense tending time, stretching our muscles, handling the heat, a constant loosening of the surface of our soul to grow more deeply, produce healthier fruit, learning to protect from the burn, drinking thirstily of living water, a sharing and pouring time, a gathering time.

Summer ends as a storing-away time. Taking the meaty fruit of the word, storing it in our hearts, like canned salsa, snap beans and strawberry jam. Sealing it in a Holy Spirit Water Bath. Sealed and Saved to either share with others or for ourselves in winter-time moment of our lives.

The last two years, there have been winter-time seasons, when I had to reach into the pantry of my soul and pull out what I had gathered. Too weak at times to gather anew, wearied by gusting, tormenting, buffeting moments, I had to reach within and let what I had gathered sustain me.

Speaking *faith* to the wind. Speaking *Hope*. Speaking *Love*. Speaking *Protection*. Speaking *The Word* to my tormentor. Meaty, Fruit-filled, God-filled words. Spoken in the night. Spoken in the morning. Spoken behind a steering-wheel. Gathered in the summer time moments of my life, His Words sustained me, reminded me, nourished me.

~ Maryleigh Bucher

Maryleigh is a child of divorce become whole as daughter of The King. Married for 27 years, mother of 5 boys to men, she has been a college composition instructor, teaching college-bound composition to homeschool students, journalist and freelance writer/editor. Maryleigh is the author of [Blue Cotton Memory](#), a blog about the faith, love and politics of raising boys to men and creator of *Standing at the Cross Roads*, a program designed for teens and college students to break/prevent cycles of dysfunction by understanding the gifts and plans God has each of us.



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Memories of Manitou



I'm sitting in the grassy tranquility of Manitou Park, and as the river gently winds and flows past me, childhood memories come to the surface. This beloved park has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember.

As a child, my dad and older brothers would let me tag along to spend a lazy Sunday afternoon fishing on the banks of the river in Manitou Park. The rhythm of the lines cast upon the water would capture my imagination, mesmerizing this carefree little

girl for hours on end.

As I grew older, Manitou became a cool hang-out for all the pre-teen girls on my block. In the spirit of Robin Hood, we would each pillage our homes, forging for anything edible that we could use for a picnic. We longed to be all grown-up, so if we were lucky enough to score some hotdogs or hamburger meat that we could cook ourselves, it made our day. And don't forget the cheese! No respectable Wisconsite plans a picnic without it.

We would shout with glee over all the 'treasures' we pirated, and then pedal our bikes to Manitou with our backpacks heavy-laden with booty. After we ate until we couldn't anymore, we would lie by the river and let our minds wander off to the usual things young girls dream of, as we watched the billowing clouds roll by.

I remember one particular Saturday afternoon; we picked the wild white flowers in the fields, tied hundreds of them together in a chain, and carried them up to the train trestle in a funeral-like procession. We hung them from the trestle, and then quickly scurried back down to the bottom, hoping a train would come and carry our hopes and dreams off into the future. We waited for hours, but the train never came.

As I entered my teenage years, I still found myself sitting at Manitou Park in quiet contemplation. One night in particular stands out in my memory. It was the night before my first day of school at Lincoln High. I had spent the last carefree day of summer with Mark, my future husband, and his best friend Ron. We headed home late that night, feeling anxious about the unknown of being tossed into a group of other angst-filled teenagers to make our way into a very uncertain future.

We weren't quite ready to call it a day, so Mark pulled his rusty old pickup truck into Manitou, and the three of us sat quietly, side by side, contemplating life as the big, bright moon stoically streamed its light onto the rippling river, reminding us that this night was but a flicker in the grand scheme of life.

The mystery of Manitou still draws me close today. I have passed the torch of Manitowoc's

old romantic park on to my children and grandchildren. They must make memories of their own here. I can only share the legacy of this little piece of paradise that was handed down from the Indians who, in their reverence for this park, named it after this historic city, given the name of 'Manitowoc' which means "Home of the Great Spirit."

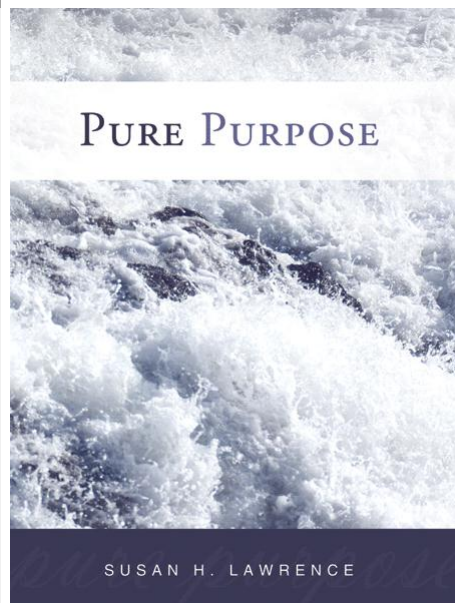
~ Deborah Erdmann

Deborah is first and foremost a friend of God. She is also a wife, mother and grandmother. God has called Deborah to write humorous devotionals, and a book is currently in the making. She is also a featured writer for her local newspaper, contributing articles on coffee and God, with that same brand of humor. Deborah has 3 blog sites, each with a specific purpose to glorify God: [Heavenly Humor](#) is her main blog, where she shares her heart and humor. [Markings in the Wood](#) is a place to go for solitude and rest in God's Presence. And [Poetry & Paradise](#) where she dabbles in poetry.

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Author Interview: Susan Lawrence & Bible Study Giveaway



Discover Pure Purpose - in the midst of your experiences, questions, and relationships - and discover who God is and what he intends for your life. Finding the answers won't be easy. You'll need to commit to digging into God's Word and looking in the mirror at the reflection of the woman God intends you to become. You'll be challenged to apply what you're learning in everyday life.

You can start Pure Purpose on your own or with a small group. You'll begin each week with a Starter Session, followed by five Make It Personal sessions. Three of the sessions will be personal study, and two will include reflection and action, during which you'll apply several verses to your life as well as take action. God's Word is essential - so essential that we need to both know it and live it out in our everyday lives.

Q: Your first Bible study, *Pure Purpose*, released last year. Did you always inspire to be a writer?

A: Yes...and no. When I was a little girl, I dreamed of being a writer, but I also dreamed of becoming a zoologist, gymnast, mom, and physical therapist. I started writing *Pure Purpose* out of necessity with no plan to publish it. A small group of women at church were searching for a Bible study that would challenge them as women of God in all areas of their lives. They wanted to experience significant growth in a relevant, relational way, and they asked me to write it. I repeatedly said "no." They persisted until I agreed to pray about it (yes, of course, it would have been a better idea to *start* with prayer!). Guess

what? God apparently had plans that differed from mine, and it's been quite a journey since I place my steps in each footprint he's making just ahead of me!

It's funny how we sometimes learn the very lessons we're teaching, because that's really what *Pure Purpose* is all about. We struggle with decisions. We wrestle with the past, get paralyzed in the present, and stress about the future. God uses us just where we are when we're willing. We can spend our time trying to figure it all out, or we can spend our time getting to know God's character. When we peek at ourselves in God's mirror instead of our own, we see ourselves as God sees us. As we learn what God says about obedience, service, love, discipline, humility and more, we draw closer to him, and we rely on truth more and struggle with our own junk less.

Q: You begin *Pure Purpose* with a chapter on Baggage, which might be uncomfortable for women. Share why you chose it to begin the study.

A: I think most women are uncomfortable when dealing with baggage, because we've been taught all baggage is bad and should be left behind. I disagree. When I pack for the beach, I need certain things, such as sunscreen, sunglasses, and a towel. When I hike in the mountains, I need water, hiking shoes, a snack, and a map. We need supplies along the way, and we use baggage from our past for the present and future. The problem isn't the baggage itself; it's discerning what needs to be left behind and what's useful for today or for tomorrow. We need to go through a process of letting God decide for us what to throw away, what to set aside, and what to pick up and carry.

Pure Purpose is a journey, and until we deal with some baggage, we're going to be ill-equipped. We'll be unprepared or overburdened. God doesn't want either for us. Because *Pure Purpose* is a journey that goes beyond a 10-week study and impacts everyday living, I was certain we all needed to start dealing with some baggage.

Q: Your second Bible study, *Pure Emotion*, releases the first week of June. Can you tell us a little about it?

A: As I consult with women in ministry around the world, I hear the emotions pouring through their words. I see emotions dancing and weeping in their eyes as I speak at conferences. So many of the emotions we experience entangle us. We feel like puppets responding to and making decisions based on our emotions. We excuse erratic behavior because of our emotions. We also enjoy life because of emotions. We passionately serve out of emotions.

I was compelled to search God's Word for the truth about emotions, and the truth is - emotions saturate Scripture. God is an emotional God - not in the same way we talk about an emotional woman or emotional person. But God is certainly aware of the runaway emotions we're referring to when we put a negative spin on emotions. We can't escape God's presence. That means he sees and hears alongside us, including our (often messy) emotions. And if we let him, God will replace those untruthful messages we've learned about emotions along the journey of life with the truthful messages reflecting his character, will, and commands.

Pure Emotion is a process of learning the difference between godly and ungodly emotions, including fear, jealousy, anger, anxiety, peace, frustration, guilt, shame, and joy.

About the Author:

Susan Lawrence is a women's ministry consultant who is passionate about equipping and encouraging women. In addition to authoring two women's Bible studies, she regularly contributes to Internet Café Devotions, Just Between Us magazine, Espresso and more. She's a national speaker and loves to lead Bible studies near home in central Illinois. Susan loves dark chocolate and long walks, especially when her toes are in sand!



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Cool of Day



"Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day..."
(Genesis 3:8, NIV).

Summer is great for many reasons: ice cream, swimming, and flip-flops. But, my favorite part of the day is in the evening when the warmth and heat -- even the heat of activity and busyness -- comes to a slow cool. Peace washes over my thoughts and the calming evening quiets my mind as I walk around the shady backyard. While this is a simple act, walking amongst the cool, it is easy to dismiss this activity in our busy lives. But, why *is* this?

Jesus walked with God in the cool of the day. Through their talk and walk, God refreshed and renewed Christ; infusing new life into his flesh. Jesus went into the gardens, mountains or fields to pray and he did this to restore himself and renew his strength. God also walked with Adam and

Even in the cool of the day in Eden. Can you imagine that? A real, *daily* conversation with God.

While I tend to recover my energy at the day's end by plopping down on the sofa to watch a show or the news, it is not an ideal action. Though it's not bad, I have to wonder: *Where does God place in my life?* Is it only in a quick prayer before sleep? Or is it a petition-filled monologue first thing in the morning? If God walked with Adam and Eve and with Christ in the cool of the day, how much more does he want to walk and talk with us? We are sinners, now saved by his son's own death. Does that not give us a huge right to be with him too?

In order to know God, to *really* know him -- and to witness miracles and answered prayer -- spending time with Him is a must. Today, when the sun goes down, I plan on stepping onto the patio to talk with him. If this isn't an option for you, take a jaunt down your street. Immerse yourself in nature, even if it's a lone tree, or a small flower patch. This is a place for God to walk and talk with you; a place for you to speak and listen to him in the cool of the day-- morning or night. When we search for him, we will find him and see that was already there, waiting for us.

~ Heather Spiva

Heather is an assistant editor, freelance writer, poet, and most importantly a mom and wife. She loves spending time with her two young boys and husband. When she's not doing this, she is either reading or writing, or searching for vintage treasures for her online shop. And when she's not doing any of those things, well, she's not certain what she would be doing ... because it has never come to that. She can be found writing at her blog www.heatherspiva.blogspot.com



and her vintage treasure blog www.theperennialpast.blogspot.com.

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Longing for Summer



"He enjoys true leisure who has time to improve his soul's estate."

Henry David Thoreau

After experiencing this year's harsh, snowy Indiana winter, I'm pining for long, hot days more than a pregnant woman in her 8th month longing to be delivered. I'm not willing to hedge all my bets on that simile, but you get the picture. Laura Ingalls Wilder and I could've co-written *The Long Winter* since snow flurried as late as two days before celebrating April Fool's Day.

Daffodils, flowering trees and songbirds are a welcome sight for eyes that have viewed brown and white for far too long. Unfortunately, with seven school days to make-up, my children will be spending part of their summer still listening to teachers. I imagine attention spans will be as fleeting as the squirrel that flies across the grass to escape my dog's jaws. Those extra days in June corralled in the school building may not add significantly to the intelligence of students whose minds and hearts yearn for pools, play dates and popsicles.

Summer is a time for relaxation, rejuvenation and rest. Days without alarm clocks, schedules and homework bring sighs of relief for weary moms and children. When I graduated from college, I was ecstatic to be finished forever with homework never realizing that once I birthed children, I would be entering round two. It's a pity I've forgotten the majority of the vital information I learned back in the good old days. Summer is a break from the nagging, "Hurry, brush your teeth; get your shoes and coat on; the bus is coming!" If school is a fast-paced, flurry of activities, summer is a slow sauntering, casual affair.

Yet, a few days into summer's informality and laissez-faire, my children utter the three dreaded words every mom despises as much as changing smelly diapers, "I am bored."

"What?!" I cry. "How can you be bored? Summer just started." Obviously, these rug rats can't handle their newfound freedom from the prison of regimented time. They haven't a clue what to do with the hours of unlimited possibilities that lay before them. I offer suggestions. "You could ride your bike."

"I don't feel like it."

"How about a craft?"

"Nope."

"Make brownies?"

"Too much work."

The bantering continues until I offer a few cleaning options when suddenly a brainstorm hits and they disappear. In just a few short weeks, summer will swamp us, and what will we do when our kids pull the "b" word on us? I've got a few ideas up my sleeve besides boarding school. Perhaps if we all work together we can conquer this boredom uprising.

While I love sleeping late and throwing routine out the window, I've learned that I still need to run our household with some semblance of schedule in the summer. I trade my 6 o'clock wake-up call for a 7 or 7:30 time instead. This allows me to still have some quiet time in the Bible and journaling before the craziness begins. Once kids are awake and have gobbled down Cocoa Puffs, we begin what I call the "activity in a cup" game. My youngest looks forward to this game like I await my blonde hair color application.

Placed in the cup are fun activities, such as *play a game, make a craft, go to the park, go to the pool, eat at the mall*. I only include activities that I am prepared to follow through with that day. I also write down activities that would be considered homework, such as *practice piano, complete two pages in homework book* and *read for 20 minutes*. As a former teacher, I force my children to review over the summer with grade level appropriate books. This game gives my kids a balance between fun and work and keeps the "I'm bored" phrase almost nonexistent.

While I remember saying the "b" word myself when I was a kid, I can probably count on a section of a finger how many times I've spouted it as an adult. Who has time to be bored as a wife, mom, nurse, taxi-driver, Bible study leader, homework helper, cook, baker, house-cleaner....? Still, with a plethora of jobs to occupy my time year round, summer needs to be a season for my own rejuvenation as well. I'm tempted to become lazy during the summer, not only in the physical realm but also the spiritual. Yet, this is the time when I should be refreshing myself in God's word, in good Christian fiction reading and other books that replenish my soul.

I tackle those things in the house which I've put off because of busyness with kids' activities. I might purge a closet or clean a clutter ridden area of my house. I enjoy the pool or eat lunch with friends. I re-energize in God's creation while working in my garden or taking a walk with my children. Barbecuing and eating a leisurely dinner on the deck with my family renews our relationship. Summer is an opportunity that I can't afford to miss.

As I assist my kids in navigating a balance between pleasure and production, rest and responsibility, I need to set an example for them to emulate. Taking time to be in the moment, be with my family, and be

with God, prepares me for the tasks yet ahead of me. Doing allows me to free my mind from one more toilsome task that can be laid aside. "God, this summer help me to become more like you, to rest in you, so that I can fulfill the tasks you have ordained for me, both now and in the days to come."

~ Annette Stronger

Annette lives in Indiana with her amazing husband, two awesome teens and one spunky tween. Her passions include savoring dark chocolate and sipping Starbucks mochas, especially alongside good friends. Through her writing, Annette hopes to encourage other women in their faith journey using her life experiences. She contributes to [Main Stream](#) and [Devo Kids](#). Her personal blog is [Renewed Heart](#).



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Holy Mackerel



You wouldn't know it if he stood in front of a tropical aquarium. He can identify and name Hawaii's state version:

Humuhumunukunukuapua`a! Also, you can witness him reading my favorite childhood book: "One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish."

But if you sat around my parents' dinner table while we visited them in Hawaii, you would realize that my son hates fish-- not entirely, just

the finless, skinless, boneless type waiting to swim down his trachea into his stomach's seabed.

I have to give him credit, at least he tried it. Nine times out of ten he usually won't, but that's debatable.

Just consult my brother, nephew and his wife, my parents, my husband or me and our opinions will all differ. My folks contend that piece of Mahi Mahi didn't even tap his tongue before he vehemently spewed that Jonah from his five-year-old mouth and burst into tears. I argue he tasted it. They shake their heads.

But I have to admit, it's not beyond a reasonable doubt my stubborn child could have convinced himself, beforehand, that he would detest fish. Not unlike Dr. Seuss' *Sam I Am* character who claimed to hate "Green Eggs and Ham" before even trying them. And we all know how that story ends: once *Sam I Am* tasted them, he loved green eggs and ham and couldn't get enough of them! However, my son is not *Sam I Am*. I believe it will be a long time coming before he tastes fish again.

That four-letter "F" word became the running joke for awhile at grandma and grandpa's. We dare not speak it, fearing he'd be further traumatized. We'd cross arms over head, duck and scream imitating him: "Fish, FISH! NOOOOO, not FISH!!" We all volunteer to donate toward his inevitable therapy bills.

Seriously, though, what parent doesn't struggle introducing their child to new foods? My son tries new foods one-tenth of the time and more often than not he likes what I'm offering. We both do a happy dance atop kitchen tiles when he does! But why is he so hesitant to taste? Does he not trust me? Does the food not look appetizing or appealing in texture? Does it smell offensive? Does the unfamiliar and foreign frighten him away? I've even offered him succulent, syrupy, saccharin-laden treats guaranteed to be a *party in the mouth*, to no avail. He'd just offer a turned up nose instead.

I wonder how many times I've turned my nose up at God's sweet offerings.

Psalm 34:8 says: "Taste and see that the Lord is good." I was raised in "the faith," but like a *holy mackerel* caught in a net, my faith became stagnant. It wasn't long before something smelled fishy. You see, I was one of those Christians who loved touting the verse: "Christianity isn't about *religion*; it's about *relationship*," yet I hadn't a clue what that really meant.

After all, I didn't spend time hanging out with Jesus, carrying on a Chatty Cathy conversation with Him, like I did my best friends. I didn't read His love letter to me---the Bible--like pouring over romantic cards from my fiancé before we married. I didn't share my tears, transgressions and temptations, like I might a therapist. In fact, I felt tremendous guilt, condemnation and shame because I didn't do these things regularly like everyone else was; so I pretended otherwise, like most everyone else was. I struggled with reading my Bible, praying and obeying rules trying to be the perfect Christian. But it's not about rule

keeping or keeping score.

It's not about religion; it's about relationship. I---me, myself and I---made it about RELIGION. When in truth, it's all about GRACE. *"For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God- not by works, so that no one can boast" (Ephesians 2:8-9).* Now I get it! It's about grace and trusting God's goodness.

But if you've had a history of bad relationships and heartache, it will take time for wounds to heal, so you can start trusting again. In other words, you can't expect an abused and abandoned Dog to jump on his new owner, wagging his tongue and tail, eager to play catch. It would take time for that relationship to build. My mind and heart escaped battlefields and the shrapnel needed removal before healing could begin. Then I could decide to taste, *really* taste. For me that meant twirling the morsel around my tongue, sucking out all the marrow, chewing it like cud, marinating on its flavor. I had to have faith the Master Chef wasn't trying to poison me, since I'd had a history of food poisoning. I had to surrender all my preconceived notions beforehand about how it might taste, feel and smell. Nobody could make me swallow that first bite; I could clamp my mouth shut and be none the wiser.

Like a fish to bait, I needed to take that first nibble on my own before I could be hooked on all of God's goodness. That's what faith in action is all about. True faith.

My son hates fish and may be finicky, but what upsets my stomach more is being a finicky Christian. So I'm doing my own happy dance before God, because *I now know, believe and trust* that He's the only one who truly can satisfy my soul's deepest Spiritual hunger and thirst. I still lose my footing now and then, but as long as I keep dancing and stay in step with Him, I know I'll be fine.

For I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good, but it was a long time coming. Thank God He's patient with finicky ones like me. In turn, I'll try to show more patience and grace toward my own finicky child.

~ Karen Naber

Karen has a passion for writing, music and art and wants to use all these gifts for God's ultimate glory. She is a songwriter who is working on her first album: "Deeper" and is also writing/illustrating her



first book to offer hope and encouragement to brokenhearted women. She has a B/A in journalism, was a newspaper reporter in the 90s and has been published in numerous newspaper and magazines (both nationally and internationally). She was raised in California and Hawaii, but now lives in--(brrrrr!)--Indiana with her husband and 5-year-old son. In addition to contributing as a freelance writer to several publications, she writes weekly for these blogs: [My Heart's Home](#) & [Main Stream](#).

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Running Barefoot



My husband and I recently watched [The Thing about My Folks](#) with Paul Reiser and Peter Falk (it is a good movie but there is bad language in it). The story is about a husband who finds a note from his wife of 47 years that she has left him. Paul Reiser and Peter Falk spend the week together as father and son discussing the marriage while they wait to find out where the mother went. I don't want to give the storyline away if you haven't seen it so that is all I will say. One thing that intrigued me about the movie was how a parents' marriage and its health has effects even on adult children.

The movie reminded me of Malachi 2:15: "Has not the LORD made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth." I am becoming more aware of the importance of marriage because of its relation to our children. This verse points out that God made us one flesh with our spouse because He desires godly offspring. Our marriages provide a foundation for our kids, and it doesn't matter how young or old they are, your marriage still provides a stability for their identity.

I have recently noticed those awful prickly weeds starting to grow in our backyard. Our backyard has been notorious for having those weeds and if you step on them, those pricklies get embedded in your feet. Last year, we hired a professional company to get rid of those nasties, but they are already coming back! My desire for my backyard is that my kids would be able to run through the backyard barefoot. They should be able to enjoy the summer without a care in the world. And kids, especially my daughter, love to be barefoot, but those weeds make it difficult.

In our marriages it is very easy for weeds to grow in our "yards." Our "yards" is where our kids romp, play and learn about life. We need to weed our "yards" on a regular basis so that our kids can run through life, enjoy and not worry about getting hurt in their own yards.

*Hebrews 12:14-16 reads, "Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that **no bitter root** grows up to cause trouble and defile many."*

One thing that can begin to sneak into marriages is a root of bitterness. Bitterness starts out small and seems like not a big deal, just like those weeds. If the bitterness is not dealt with, it will get deeply rooted and begin to spread. It might not seem to affect your kids because it is so small but as days and weeks go by, it will continue to grow and spread and there will be a day your kids will stumble upon it and it will hurt them. When my daughter was two, she was running in our backyard and her whole foot got filled with those pricklies. It was not a pretty moment.

I don't know where you are in your marriage and whether you have younger or older kids, but no matter what I would like to encourage you to do some spring weeding in your marriage "yards." If you need motivation, do it for the sake of your kids. None of us would purposely send our kids out in a yard full of weeds to run around barefoot and get hurt. However, we often allow the weeds in our marriage to get out of control and we probably end up hurting our kids more than if they stepped on real weeds in the backyard.

Here are some verses that deal with uprooting weeds in the spirit realm:

James 3:13-16 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.

Ephesians 4:30-32 And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.

My prayer for you and your marriage is that you, your children and your spouse can run barefoot through your "yards" this summer.

~ Jaime Farkas

Jaime has been happily married for the last 8 years to her high school sweetheart. She has two beautiful children: a 7 year old boy and a 5 year old daughter. She is able to stay home with her children full-time and is currently homeschooling them. She leads women's Bible studies through her church. She had the blessing of growing up in a Christian home and is still a Christian! She loves the Lord and He is continually drawing her into deeper relationship with Him. Please visit her at her blog, [For His Glory Alone!](#)



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Love Can Build a Boardwalk



Love can build a boardwalk...straight through the Alligator Marsh.

That's where I was this weekend with my family---walking through the swampy marsh of South Louisiana LOOKING FOR alligators! Are you kidding me? What were we thinking? Yes, that is exactly what we were doing. Very near dark, too. As you can tell, we made it back safely to our humble abode just a few short miles from the nature trail in Fontainebleu State Park.

As we ambled along this fine structure of a boardwalk through the swamp, I of course had many thoughts.

"Son, don't fall in. Please!"

"Will the light of a cell phone be enough to see the path on both the boardwalk and along the muddy trail through the woods to get us back to our car? It is about to be dark, after all, and we didn't plan this jaunt, therefore we did not quite come prepared. Are my Sunday dress shoes evidence of that? Thank the Lord I wore flats."

"Is that really an alligator peaking his head out of the water right there? What is stopping him from swimming right over here and joining us for dinner on the boardwalk? How could he resist?"

"Oh, look at that beautiful, serene sunset over the marsh as the birds are flying off into it. Wait---sunset---so how are we going to see our way back the whole one and a half miles through all of this?"

Yes, these were merely a few of my calm, cool, and collected thoughts on that unplanned jaunt into the Louisiana swamps.

Don't get me wrong. I did enjoy the precious time with my family in such a beautiful setting our God created. It truly was serene and inspiring, even as I struggled against my mother-thoughts, some of which managed to slip out of my mouth making me sound like a worrisome mother, I'm sure.

Amidst all of these musings, one stood out the most.

If you've ever heard of The Judds (a country music mother-daughter duo), then you probably are hearing one of their songs in your head right now, as I am.

Love can build a bridge...

Well, I realized that day that not only did our Father's love for us build a bridge (Jesus) to span the chasm that is between us and Him because of our sin and His holiness....but often His love builds a boardwalk for us.

Typically, bridges allow us to go over something. Boardwalks, especially like the one in the marsh the other day, take you right into the heart of the place. Rather than going over or around some of the things we face in life, oftentimes the way of our Lord for us is straight into it and through it.

In those times, His love builds us a boardwalk.

If we recognize His path so carefully prepared for us, and chose to step our feet of faith upon it, then we can avoid sloshing through the waist-deep muck and mire surrounded by swamp grass that smothers us in height. Instead, we can walk boldly and sure-footedly right into and through the midst of some pretty dangerous surroundings. We can observe and learn from what we see occurring around us without fear of being pulled under, stuck, or harmed by the many creatures lurking beneath the murky surface.

Are you facing some ominous swamp of life right now? Are you ill-prepared without a flashlight in your Sunday best but staring at the Monday worst? Have you met The Bridge, Jesus? If so, have you found the boardwalk your Father has prepared for you to help you into, through, and out of this murky marsh? Does it seem as if there is not and never will be a boardwalk in your situation to help you through and out of it? Take heart! We have been promised it is there...and it is.

"No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it." - 1 Corinthians 10:13

The key is to recognize it and then to take the way He has provided. No matter how deep into the mess you already are, take His way out. Humble yourself. Admit your faults and your weakness. Declare your need for Him. Take His strength, hope, and guidance. Welcome the help He offers.

You are not alone. Your Father has gone before you and made a way. Look for the boardwalks. Ask Him to reveal them to you and to give you the strength, wisdom and humility to step onto them and follow them along His path for you. Trust Him.

~ Haelie Heard

Haelie is a follower of Christ, wife, mother of a five-year-old son, and a full-time Nurse Informaticist by profession. Her personal blog is [To Not Decide...Is To Decide](#) and you can also find her on [Twitter](#). She also writes for and co-administers two other blogs: [Faithful Feet](#) and [What If....](#). Her life mission is to be a voice, both written and audible, that unapologetically points to Christ and His sovereignly redemptive love and forgiveness.



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Summer in the Desert



"They grumbled in their tents and did not obey the LORD." Psalm 106:25

From October to May, living in the Valley of the Sun (Phoenix , AZ) is a dream come true. Sunny days, gentle breezes and moderate temperatures - everything you need for picnics, hikes and fun days at the park, but then comes summer.

By the end of May we are usually above 100 degrees and we're there to stay for about 4-5

months, with triple digit temps most of July and August. It's those days that I thank God for air conditioning, swimming pools and popsicles.

I often wonder how the Israelites handled living in the desert for 40 years without those blessings. It's not hard for me to imagine the stifling air, burning sands and scorching sun, but I can't imagine living in a tent in the middle of it all.

Packing everything up to walk for miles and miles across the burning desert, never having one place to settle down, scorpions, snakes, no water, little food. The only thing that would keep me going is the hope of reaching the Promised Land and knowing that God was walking through the desert with me. In fact, isn't life like that? God has called us to follow Him; to step out into an unknown place and trust that He is leading us. Sometimes that means walking through the hard places in life, fighting the wind and the heat without knowing for sure when it's going to be over.

I don't know about you, but I don't want to be in the desert one more minute than necessary, so let's be

smart. Let's not grumble and complain among ourselves about the hard journey. Instead, let's *speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Let's sing and make music from our hearts to the Lord.* (Ephesians 5:19) Because we, like the Israelites, can be sure that we are His children and that He will lead us to the home He has promised to us - our home in Heaven.

~ Jan Christiansen

Jan lives in Arizona with her husband Lee (33 years of bliss), a Schnoodle named Oliver and a mentally challenged poodle named Max. She lives just 10 minutes away from her grandsons, Ethan and David and has become the best grandson spoiler of all time. Aside from that, Jan heads up the prayer ministry at her church, teaches a new believers class, leads a mentoring ministry, writes several blogs [Refreshed by the Word](#), [Tweet Inspiration](#), [She Fancied Herself a Writer](#) and is the founder of [Inspired Ink Writer's Group](#). You can also find her online at www.janiceeileen.com.



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Detours



Have you ever planned summer family vacation? I mean really planned as if you have been waiting for this moment since January. Then the day finally arrives and you are onboard the airplane, awaiting to fly off into the sky. You and your husband hold hands as you are about to take off into the sun and clouds. You see an amazing sight -- the art work that God has created in the sky with the clouds. Ahhh, you have arrived. You think to yourself, "Wow, this has been what I have been waiting for. God has blessed this adventure at the right time. Our kids are at the

age where we all get along, and they can enjoy themselves."

Two hours into your flight you notice something. The plane has made a sudden turn and you see the plane is going in a different direction. Then the unthinkable happens: the flight attendant makes an announcement that due to unforeseen circumstances we are to divert and make a slight detour before we can reach our final destination. What? Seriously? This was not in the plan. I have packed and made lists

of things to see and do with my family. This can't be happening. However, the Christian girl inside of you thinks, *Okay, we can do this. There must be a good reason.*

The past few weeks I have been studying the life of Paul in the books of Acts. In Acts 9:3-4 (NASB) we read, "As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul why are you persecuting me?'"

"Who are you sir?" Paul asked." All of a sudden, the course of Paul's journey was brought to a divine halt. Isn't that just like our God? No announcement. No warning. And the course of Saul's life is changed dramatically.

Girls, that still happens today. Without warning, life takes a sudden turn. You are packed and prepared and on a mission that you feel is from God and BAM, God has a different plan. He has re-packed your bag because now you are going on the trip he has for you.

The reason why this particular story of Saul/Paul's life resonates with me is because my life has taken a sudden turn. A detour that has caused some turbulence, a change of packed bags for the family and a new way of living. We have a new little boy that is part of our family. He is three years old and a little firecracker to boot. He is my husband's nephew and due to this little boy's parents not being able to care for him at this time, he is now living with us. Talk about a sudden change off course in the flight plan of our family.

A few months ago I was knee deep in the preparations of planning to have my own business. I felt that God had given me this idea and the go head to take on such a task. Then all of a sudden, we received a phone call from the little boy's dad and suddenly our lives were changed that following weekend. I can't lie and tell you that this has been fun and I have embraced this with open arms. But I also wouldn't have changed a thing.

This little boy has brought an extra bag of love, laughter, and so much more with him. If you ask my children about this sudden turn of events, they would tell you that yes, having him has brought some joy, but also some inconvenience, especially to our seven year old son. If anyone has had some turbulence and change it has been him. He has gone from having his own room to sharing a room with a three year old. Talk about a detour!

As much as I do not like to admit it, it is not about me and where I dream of going and what I want to do. It is about where God wants me to go and do even if that means raising another child to become that Godly man. I need to realize that God's goal is not to make me happy, no matter how hard it is for me to swallow that idea. Life is not about being comfortable and happy and successful and pain free. It is about becoming the woman God has called me to be. Even if that means that I'm listening to *Dora the Explorer* and *Blues Clues* again and readjusting my day around snacks and naps.

How can really say that and mean it? In 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 Paul says, "...Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weakness, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weakness, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I'm weak, then I am strong." See he got it, girls! He went with it for the rest of his days. One thing that I'm

learning on this new "trip that I'm on" is that I should be content. The very things I dread and run from in my life are precisely what brought contentment to Paul. He was content when he lost and when he was in distresses. He was content with difficulties and pressures that were so tight that he couldn't turn around. Why? Because when he was weak, HE was strong.

~ Tiffany Locke

Tiffany lives in New Smyrna Beach, Florida. She has 3 kids of her own and is currently raising a 3 year old. With being a pilot's wife of 19 years, Tiffany's personal statement is *turbulence in life requires you to flexible*. When things get rerouted, the best thing for you to do is to buckle up for take off 'cause you never know where God will take you next.

You can visit Tiffany's website and discover more about her life and her adventure of flying through life where there is beauty, encouragement, support and yes sometimes turbulence. www.takeoffandlandings.com



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Issue Poem: Garden of Promise



A Garden of Promise is what God shares with me today
Bountiful and beautiful in every way.
And the blossom of each fragrance in all that I see
Was because of Jesus, dying on the cross,
Made from the wood of a tree.

But the truth of His life continues to grow all year 'round.
The strength of His promises stands firmly planted in the ground.
Starting with His creation, new in every way
Creating every living thing with the message showing,
"He's still alive today."
And, no weeds come to that Gardener, who chooses us with care
He nurtures us with water of life, which he abundantly shares.
He feeds His creation, the Son that shines down from above
While lovingly pruning us with His never-ending love.
He clears out the rocks of sin that seem to gather together
By breaking down the ground with all kinds of weather.
He uses lightning bolts of new ideas, and small drops of pain
Because all stand for growth, always for our own gain.
He changes the shape of each creation in which He does grow
He lovingly prunes us where we need so much to know.
But, He softens the ground while smoothing out the land
By planting new seeds with the palm of His hands.
So the garden that he Promises, He gives us all today
Watching us grow in abundance each and every day.
And the beauty of His work in all that we see
Are loving expressions for both you and me.

~Karen Hopkins

Karen was born into military family in the late 1950s, and Europe became her family's playground. She traveled to many countries, both for the military and for fun and adventure. She moved back to Northern California, where she finished her teen years. She now lives in the mountains of eastern Oregon, where she has learned to appreciate God's beauty. During the snowy and cold of winter, she stays inside and quilts to her heart's content. She donates each little handmade quilt, as an offering of her own healing from her not so pretty past. These quilts are an effort to give a healing touch to other women who have adopted out their own children. You can visit her on her blog at [My Passionate Obsessions](#).

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