



## November 2011 Issue: Life Lessons

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### In This Issue

#### A Word from the Editor

##### Beloved!

Many times God allows us to endure hard times, so He can grow and shape us into His image. Hardships compel us to keep our eyes on the Father and our hearts open to His will. However, God also provides an easier way to learn and develop in our faith: He wants us to absorb the *life lessons* of others who have walked through the fires of tribulation and have come out stronger and wiser.

Whether these lessons are written down or communicated orally, we as the audience can gain wisdom and understanding which can be applied to our current situations; but we must be willing to listen. The stories of redemption, clarity, comfort and victory encourage and motivate us when are walking down difficult and confusing paths. Instead of forgetting the wondrous things God has done in our lives, we need to shout them from the mountaintops (i.e. homes, blogs, churches, neighborhoods, work place, etc.). We can share the movement of God in our lives and praise Him for His wonderful deeds, and those around us will see God's mighty handiwork! The writers in this issue are standing side-by-side with one voice, uniting together to tell their life lessons. The stories are filled with laughter, tears, insight and a fresh understanding of God's grace. We hope that you find empowerment from the lessons we have learned, so you will be motivated on your walks of faith. May the words you read here refresh your soul and strengthen your resolve. "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were

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written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come" (1 Corinthians 10.11 ESV).

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Model Life



During graduate school, I worked as a leasing agent for an elegant residential apartment community. I was required to wear a three piece suit in order to match the upscale vibe of the complex. Each unit had luxurious accents and features, and the exquisitely designed landscape and leasing office made working there very enjoyable.

One of my duties as the leasing agent was to prepare the model units. I'd show these units to prospective renters as examples of how the homes could look when they were occupied. Perfectly chosen furniture pieces and décor adorned each unit. There was no pile of bills, dishes, laundry or homework to be seen. No computer or television occupied any space. Only a small radio that played continuous soft

contemporary music rested on a corner table.

Every morning, I looked forward to entering my perfect model homes. I'd turn on all the lights, switch the ceiling fans to medium for a perfect breeze, open all the curtains and spray floral potpourri in the air. My eyes would lovingly glide over the ensemble of furnishings, and my imagination would begin to create a perfect life. No research essays to write. No bills to pay. No dishes to clean. No bed to make. No looming responsibility to be done. I could just grab one of the classic books from the coffee table, sit back and indulge in endless free-time.

After months and months of coveting one particular tropically decorated home, I finally indulged. I adored the master bedroom with its large, stylish bed that was always made. I would look at the thick, expensive comforter and wonder what it would feel like just to slip under the covers and close my eyes. I could dream away all the bills to be paid, all chores to be done, all the homework to be finished and all the parts of life that I didn't like. I could finally merge myself into the perfect world of my model home.

At last, I turned down the bed, jumped under the covers, tucked myself in and closed my eyes. My smile only lasted a few seconds until I caught wind of the stale layer of dust all around me. The bed itself did not have a mattress, and my bones jabbed into the hard box spring under me. I felt out of place, like I was stealing another person's nap. As hard as I tried, I couldn't get over the fact that I didn't belong. I quickly jumped out of the bed, looked around to make sure no one had seen my impulsive action, and put the comforter back in its place.

Now I saw the model home with new eyes. Everything was fake. There were no clothes in the drawers, no food in the refrigerator, no soap in the bathroom and no pulse of life in the air. Though the model home looked perfect on the outside, it was lifeless, empty and joyless inside. The model home was a lie. No occupied unit that I had ever entered looked so clean and put together. All the beauty and romance I had developed for that home was washed away with one truth: Life is messy.

The movement of life is chaotic, imperfect and many times hectic, but it's also filled with emotion, truth and energy. I think many times we covet an ideal, seamless existence, but that doesn't exist. Jesus led a perfect life, but that doesn't mean His life wasn't messy. He offended, confused and disappointed people. Jesus talked to sinners, which offended people. He spoke in parables, which confused people. And He came as a lowly carpenter, which disappointed people. Jesus lived perfectly before God, but His life was

many times crazy, hectic and difficult.

Life is messy, but it is the mess that signifies life. I think once we fix our perspectives and realize that the model life we're groping for is only a fantasy, we'll be more content with the life (chaos, imperfections and mess) that we've been given. When we find satisfaction in our fabulously imperfect lives, we will begin to see all the beauty and blessings that surround us. Every dish that we clean means that we broke bread with someone. Every load of clothes that we wash means we have a reason to dress up. Every assignment or project we complete means we are learning and growing. Every bed that we make means we got to live another day. We should be thankful for every mess because they signify that we have been given life!

~ 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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## Life Lessons about Joy



When my daughter laughs she tilts her head toward the sky, her eyes brighten, and she lets out the most amazing, freeing sound. It's a sound of pure happiness, a sound that I would love to emulate.

Her laughter fills me with hope. It reminds me what joy is really like. My little girl's world is complete with me as her mommy, a papa that loves her, and her baby doll close at hand. She is safe, protected, and full of seemingly unending energy. She is joyful.

Recently my pastor talked about joy in his Sunday message. He encouraged us, as Christians, to display the joy of Christ in our everyday lives. He pointed out that we often get caught up in the worries and cares of this life and forget to allow joy to enter in. His sermon really challenged me to live every moment joyfully.

You see, I'm a military wife. It's a life that I never thought would be mine, but it's mine just the same. I currently live 1000 miles away from my closest relatives. I miss the closeness that I used to share with these loved ones. Shared meals and birthdays and evenings around a campfire. I struggle with this life God has given us. At times it's hard to be thankful when I think about my daughter growing up without her grandparents close by.

And then, there's the idea of deployments. That, too, is a painful thing. I miss my husband's companionship when he's overseas. I miss talking to him about every facet of my day and cuddling up next to him for a movie in the evenings. And I worry as well. I worry about his safety. I worry about his relationship with our little girl.

I easily get bogged down by all of the worry and loneliness in this life. It's easy for me to be completely caught up in everything I don't have. And when this happens, I miss out on the joy in life.

I miss out on everything God has given me.

He's given me a beautiful home. He's given me friends that are really more like family. He's given me a support group that helps me through the lonely times: people that care about me and check up on me regularly.

He's given me life through the eyes of a little girl. A little girl who reminds me daily what true joy is like. She and I spend hours at the playground going up and down the slide. We laugh together as I hold her close and teach her how to dance. We splash around in the bathtub at night. And I soak up every moment of it. Because this is life. This is joy.

At times this joy isn't a laughter type of joy. No, I'm finding that true joy doesn't always necessarily include smiles, and laughter and silliness.

The day I moved away from home and the day I saw my husband walk onto a plane to fly over seas were not necessarily happy days. But God's joy was still present.

Instead, I'm learning to experience a joy that's within. It's a sense of inner peace. It's believing that my God is in control of everything in this life. It's knowing 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). Sometimes it's hard to see what this good would be. It's hard for me to look at certain life lessons and see what God may have for me as the outcome. I'm caught up in the circumstances. I can't see the end of the tunnel as of yet. But He's there.

He's holding my hand. And He's giving me His abiding along the way.

"But let all who take refuge in you be glad; let them ever sing for joy. Spread your protection over them, that those who love your name may rejoice in you" (Psalm 5:11, NIV).

~ Megan K. Chaney

Megan lives in Colorado with her Air Force husband and their little girl. She loves spending time outside in God's creation, sipping lattes, and blogging. In 2008, she received her Master's in English from the University of Dayton. Since then she's happily taken up the role of housewife, mommy, and freelance writer. Her work has been published in



Student to Student, Proverbs 31 Magazine, Granola Bar Devotionals, and The Secret Place. Visit her blog at [www.deployedheart.com](http://www.deployedheart.com).

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## Lessons from the Potter



"So I went down to the potter's house, and there he was working at his wheel. And the vessel he was making of clay was spoiled in the potter's hand, and he reworked it into another vessel, as it seemed good to the potter to do." (Jeremiah 18:3-4, ESV)

Several years ago, I had the privilege of working with a potter. I am not an artist, but I assisted with the vessels after they had been in the kiln. I find the process required to transform a shapeless lump of clay into a beautiful piece of pottery fascinating.

The potter first takes the clay and throws, literally slams, it onto the wheel. If the clay does not adhere firmly to the foundation, the piece will collapse. While working with the clay, the potter adds water to keep it pliable while his skilled hands molds and shapes the vessel. There are times when the vessel is not to the potter's satisfaction and he will completely rework the clay until it is shaped to his liking. Any flaws in the pot may cause it to crack or break while in the kiln. Unnecessary pieces of clay are trimmed away using a sharp tool and thrown put aside into a container.

When the potter finishes forming the vessel, he sets it aside to air-dry. Several days may pass before it is ready for glazing. After this, another period of air-drying is required before the pot is ready for firing in a kiln.

The firing method this potter most often used was Raku firing. The potter removes the pieces from the kiln while they are glowing hot and then places them in a container with combustible materials. The heat from the pottery ignites the material and the container is immediately covered to smother the fire. This combustion reaction brings about the about the rich colors of the glaze and finally a beautiful piece of pottery is complete. If the potter skips one of the steps in this process, the pot is flawed. However, because he cares about the finished piece, he will use all necessary methods to make it into a work of art.

It wasn't until several years later that I realized how much the process of making pottery compares to our Christian life. At salvation, we are firmly adhered to Jesus Christ and filled with the Living Water.

However, during our sanctification process, the Master Potter often has to reshape us in order to remove our flaws. He lovingly trims away the things in our lives that hinder our walk with Him. There may be times when we may experience periods of dryness, feeling as if we are alone. We may go through the fire of a severed relationship, the diagnosis of a major illness, or other life changing events. Still other times we may feel as if we are in a dark pit, alone and abandoned. However, God is never far away. Isaiah 43:2 reads, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you; when you walk through fire you shall not be burned, and the flame shall not consume you." (ESV)

Like a potter forming vessels of clay, Christ is molding us, shaping us, and transforming us into His image. Each step is necessary in order that someday, we will become His finished work of art. "But now, O LORD, you are our Father; we are the clay, and you are our potter; we are all the work of your hand." (Isaiah 64:8, ESV)

~ Joan Hall

After becoming a Christian at the age of ten, Joan spent several years as a prodigal daughter. God used a difficult and trying time to bring both Joan and her husband back into the fold. She has a passion for women's ministry and helping women to realize they can have an abundant life in knowing Christ. She teaches women's Bible studies and co-leads a writer's group at her home church. She loves writing from her country home in East Texas and enjoys taking photographs. You can find her at her personal blog, [Reflections](#).

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## Whirling Lessons



As shooting stars of light crisscrossed the dewy grass, the little bloom stretched out. A Cardinal's jubilant cry echoed across the yard.

"This is the day the Lord has made; let's rejoice and be glad in it," he chirped.

Morning was the perfect time to reach upward, and the small

bloom did so with a flowery flourish.

"Get ready. Here comes the light!"

"Move over. I want it too!"

All around the Whirling Butterfly plant, shafts of golden warmth ignited the eager stems with the promise of a new day. The little flower joined with the other blooms in lofting off the morning breeze. They whirled toward the sunlight.

"Wait!" The excited murmur cut off. "Not yet. Patience, young blooms."

The entirety of the thick swath of green stems and white and pink-tipped flowers turned toward the soft voice of the elderly flower. She wore her age and wisdom with the deep pink staining her petals.

"In order to be lifted up, first you must be filled."

The legend was that the elder flower burst into bloom the evening of the bright, exploding colorful lights at mid-summer's peak. The young blooms were the last crop of summer, and they were eager to blossom fully and enjoy the waning warmth before fall's official arrival.

Now, with the children gone again during the day and night temperatures dipping lower, the youngest blooms hoped to glean from her wisdom.

"You must wait for the dew to soak in," the wise old flower said, her mauve petals held together. "You are too dry. The sun will scorch your stem and petals just yet. We whirl best when we are water-filled."

The young flower listened intently. Wait for the dew to soak in, then whirl.

"But the sun gives us the strength to whirl and grow." A tiny bud spoke up.

"The sun will give you strength, true, but you must soak in the moisture from last night's rain and this morning's dew first. Sunlight and water together allow us to whirl for our Maker."

Cherry petals danced in the light breeze as she opened them, looking at the many blooms around her.

"Do you want to show the glory of our Maker?"

An exultant, "YES!" rose up, drowning out the Cardinal's chirp.

"Wonderful! We will direct people to His glory until the ground is frozen and the gray of winter takes over. But the only way you will bloom and whirl now is with His water in you. Before you reach for the sun, drink."

The young flower carefully closed its petals as it drew up moisture from the roots. It was a tedious process, and he was learning to be careful to gulp slowly so all the other stems had enough water.

The wise old flower turned and spoke directly to him.

"You are kind to think of others."

The young flower preened its petals at the praise.

"Many young blossoms reach up too early. They don't realize the sunlight is too bright for them by themselves. They must have living water in their stem and petals to whirl. It is as our Maker intended."

The young bloom nodded in acknowledgement, but then a question cross his mind.

"And when it doesn't rain?"

"There are times you will be dry. You must learn to reach down deep for moisture, and learn to drink of the dew of night. But rain, it always comes. Sometimes, we must be patient and trust."

"But what if the clouds do not provide rain for many, many days?"

"Then we wait and trust. You will be dry and uncomfortable, but you will not die. Moisture always comes, whether from the clouds or the green hose or from the dew. You will learn this. Our Maker always provides."

The narrow rays of sunshine grew wider and wider until scalding sunlight overcame shadows lingering from night.

The young flower finished drinking and began stretching slowly, whirling upward. Its dark green stem was flowing with life-giving water.

In the fullness of the late summer morning, the young flower reached toward the golden sun and burst open in vibrant bloom, stem and petals whirling for the glory of its Maker.

~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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*A Life Lesson from the Dog*



Sydney is a Blue Heeler, maybe even a mix of sorts. Rather hard to tell. She has brown eyes and mostly black hair, some spots are mottled with white.

Sydney is a good dog, actually very obedient. She does drive me nuts sometimes by trying to outsmart me just to see if she can get a treat. She will beg to go out just to come back in for a treat. You see, we give her a treat if she doesn't bark. She doesn't always get one!

But she has one bad habit...

...she loves to get in the garbage and tear up used tissues!! don't think she eats them, just tears them up.

If we point to the tissues and ask her, "What's this, Sydney?" or "Who did this?" we get a hilarious response...

...she turns her head to ignore her wrongdoing. She'll turn completely around and look in the opposite direction, as if to say, "Who me? I didn't do anything!"

Oh, my! Don't we behave the same way with God? Obedient, yet sometimes, when the Lord points out some bad habit or wrongdoing, we turn the other way as if to say, "Who me? I didn't do anything!"

### **Recognition**

Because David desired to be rid of those sins prowling around in his heart that might escape his attention, he said to God, "But how can I ever know what sins are lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults." (Ps. 19:12 TLB)

Do we recognize our wrongdoing?

### **Remorse**

After committing a sin, are we in anguish only that we got caught and now have to face the consequences or that we have wounded the heart of the Father?

Do we even blush? God said of the Israelites to Jeremiah, "Are they ashamed when they do these disgusting things? No, not at all-they don't even blush!" (Jer. 6:15 NLT)

Do we say to the Father, "I am deeply sorry for what I have done" (Ps. 38:18 NLT)?

### **Repentance**

So, how long does it take you to confess a sin? Thirty seconds? Thirty minutes? Thirty days? Or thirty

years? The moment you know you have done something against God's Word, do you confess it only to rush out the door to do it again? Where is repentance?

The proof of the pudding, so to speak, of repentance is, as Jesus said to the Pharisees, to "Bring forth fruit that is consistent with repentance[let your lives prove your change of heart]." (Matt. 3:8 Amp)

### **Removal of Sin**

It is by Jesus' sacrifice on the cross that "we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." (Eph. 1:7a NKJV)

When God forgives our sins, He removes them "as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us," (Ps.103:12 NKJV) tossing them "into the depths of the ocean," (Micah 7:19b TLB) never to emerge.

He forgives and forgets our sins. The only memory of them is in our own minds, not God's! God dumps our sins into the great abyss but we're the ones with the fishing poles!

### **Repercussions**

After we succumb to one of the enemy's pretty packages of temptation, what is the aftermath? What do we forfeit? Our peace, our joy, our relationships with others, answers to our prayers, and even our fellowship with the Lord.

Consequences are attached to sin. God does not wave a magic wand over our sins to make the repercussions disappear. However, as Jesus took the punishment of sin for us, Paul said, "Where sin abounded, grace abounded much more." (Rom 5:20 NKJV)

### **Restoration Afterwards**

God gives us a sure-fire-get-back-into-fellowship guarantee, "And since we have been made right in God's sight by the blood of Christ, He will certainly save us from God's condemnation." (Rom. 5:9 NLT)

Pursuing our own ways takes us on a detour away from Home. However, the Father always anxiously watches for our return and welcomes us back with open arms.

### **Rejoicing in Restoration**

Isaiah said in the Old Testament, "I am overwhelmed with joy in the LORD my God! For He has dressed me with the clothing of salvation and draped me in a robe of righteousness." (Is.61:10 NLT)

Because of Jesus' sacrifice for the forgiveness and cleansing of our sins, we rejoice and are able to say, "Thanks be to God, Who gives us the victory [making us conquerors] through our Lord Jesus Christ." (1Cor. 15:57 Amp) Amen!

Are you ignoring your sin or are you happy dancing in the victory of your forgiveness and restoration?  
~ 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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## Never Give Up



"Never Give Up."

Years ago I gave up. I stopped believing. Not in God, but in myself and my dream all I because I allowed someone to bulldoze my confidence. Subsequently, I lost faith in myself...my talent...my gift...my calling.

To write.

Now that dream is alive and well, despite setbacks, roadblocks, detours and a few flat tires along the way. My career careened off course because I believed a voice that told me, "I couldn't...I

wouldn't...I shouldn't..."

I wish I could erase the lies I believed from someone who didn't believe in me. Someone who had an agenda, ulterior motive, vengeful spirit. Someone who used feathers from my clipped wings to help them fly. Someone who would rather watch others trip over their own two feet instead of hailing them victor when the race is won.

Through this experience, I learned to regret. I regret giving someone else permission to distort my dream, weigh my worthiness, pummel my passion. It wasn't the first time someone looked at me through a distorted lens and blurred my vision. Why did I let them drown my confidence like a rose petal in battery acid? Because I believed they knew better? Because my well of doubt already ran deep? Because they were older and wiser?

Older maybe, but not wiser.

Wisdom doesn't automatically grow with age, only wrinkles and gray hairs do.

Why didn't the encouraging voices drown out the ones that were drowning me? Why didn't their sweet melody outweigh that discouraging dissonance? Why did I accept the lies all tied up with their ugly bow and discard the truth like a soiled diaper? I don't know. Maybe it was just easier to believe and wrap my

mind and heart around lies because they were all too familiar. When you live without the light of day for so long, your vision learns to adjust to the dark.

Sometimes I'm tempted to regret, but I have confidence that God works all things for good to those who love Him and are called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

So I can't. I won't. I shan't.

REGRET THE PAST.

The plant of bitterness is watered with regret. With "should haves, would haves, could haves." Instead, I will choose today to start anew and to believe the truth. I'll leave lies behind like paper dolls I've outgrown and don't play with anymore.

Never, never, never, never again will I give up...

My dream is God's ultimate will and plan for my life.

This 'dream' might not come in the wrapping paper I choose, but it is always the perfect gift in the end. I will never exchange it for another. I will never demand a refund.

God's word says, "Delight yourself in the Lord and He will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalms 37:4)

This doesn't mean we come to Him with our shopping list of requests like He's Ol' Kris Kringle. But when we align our heart with His and surrender totally to His will, our dreams take a shape only His hands can mold. His perfect plan mysteriously unfolds in us as we allow the Master Potter to do His work in our lives. But first we must let go of everything that is holding us back.

No holds barred.

I believe today that for every naysayer who says you can't, there will always be someone in your corner who says you can. And HE has so many blessings, and He's just waiting to pour out to those who seek Him with their whole heart.

"For the eyes of the LORD move to and fro throughout the earth that He may strongly support those whose heart is completely His." 2 Chronicles 16:9

He wants nothing more than to see you cross that finish line victorious! It's your choice whose voice you will listen to, believe and trust. "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." Ephesians 2:10

He has a plan for our lives. Along this road called life. We all experience setbacks, detours, roadblocks and flat tires. Fortunately, God allows U-Turns and it's never too late to get back on the right path and let Him steer us in the right direction.

With God, there is no expiration date on our dreams.

So today I choose to believe!

I CAN, I WILL, I SHALL overcome the past.

For God's TRUTH tells me: "If God is for me who can be against me?" (Romans 8:31)

"But He was pierced of my rebellion, crushed for my sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was shipped so we could be healed." (Isaiah 53:5)

"For God hath not given me the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (2 Timothy 1:7)

"In all my ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct my paths." (Proverbs 3:6)

"Delight myself in the Lord and He will give me the desires of my heart." (Psalm 37:4)

Now I am learning to accept His truth like a precious gift and discard lies like yesterday's garbage. I KNOW I will cross that sweet finish line of victory, because I will never doubt again: Someone believes in me.

And I promise to help those limping along the sidelines to cross their finish lines by being encouraging, supportive and a believer of dreams.

For dreams can only come true if one truly believes...in the One who never gives up believing in us. I believe.

Do YOU?

Never Give Up

"Therefore encourage one another and build each other up." 1 Thessalonians 5:11

"What do you mean, 'If I can'?" Jesus asked."Anything is possible if a person believes." Mark 9:23

"Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us." Hebrews 12:1

~ 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 Home](#)



## Broken Pottery



Having been raised by the hot-glue-gun-queen who saw something salvageable in every collectible she owned, I had taken a different route than my mother. If stuff was damaged, I tossed it. "Life's too short to deal with broken junk" became my motto. So when I was challenged at a women's retreat to break a piece of pottery...and then glue it back together...on purpose, I began to question just what kind of nutcases were running the show!

I was told it would be therapeutic. The process of breaking a piece of clay

would bring insight and introspective wisdom to my soul. (Can you hear my sarcasm?) The plan was to aid with "healing deep hurts and buried grief". Personally, I thought it was crazy! Breaking a perfectly good piece of pottery didn't jive with my too-practical personality -- but I went along with it.

As the idea grew on me, I finally chose a pitcher that held value to me -- both monetarily and sentimentally. Placing the pitcher in a Walmart sack, I raised it up in the air, cringed, and slammed it against the ground. The clanking sound of broken pottery left a heaviness in my heart that surprised me, and as I later sat in the corner of that convention center patching it back together, I realized that maybe those "nutcases" were onto something!

Piece by piece I saw parallels of life in that broken pottery. We start out with pristine perfection -- a life of value and beauty. Time goes by and if life's' experiences don't slowly chip away at us; it's the crushing blows against the pavement that finally does us in. My heart ached for the girl I once was -- the perfect, carefree life without its flaws and imperfections. To me, the past was where my value was. Situations and circumstances had changed who I was, and I couldn't say that I particularly loved the scars my heart now held. "There was nothing attractive about Him, nothing to cause us to take a second look, a Man who suffered , who knew pain firsthand."

I turned the broken shards carefully in my hands, careful not to cut myself. Some pieces made no sense to me, and to be honest, I didn't know where to begin with putting the pitcher back together. But slowly and methodically, I became familiar with each piece and with great care began to restore the pot back to its original shape.

As I worked, a question began to form in my mind. "Is this how God feels about me? Does He see value in my brokenness?" Tears formed in my eyes as I realized that God Himself knows each intimate part of my life -- enough to be able to rebuild it again! "But the fact is, it was our pains He carried -- our disfigurements, all the things wrong with us."

By the time I had finished recreating the broken pitcher, I had come to love it more than ever. The slices on my fingers stood to prove that my own rough edges had certainly hurt my Jesus, still He hadn't given up on me. "But it was our sins that...ripped, tore and crushed Him -- our sins! ...Through his bruises, we get healed!"

One area bothered me though. Towards the bottom of the pitcher was a hole. The pieces that belonged there had been crushed beyond repair. I worried over it for some time before God spoke to me about it, "It is here My light can shine through the brightest." Suddenly the jagged, ugly hole didn't look so horrid anymore, nor did the imperfections on my own heart! I had known all along, but somehow now it became clearer that true beauty shines brighter through brokenness! "The plan was...that He'd see life come from it -- life, life and more life!"

The pitcher now holds a place of honor on my dining room table. Each time I look at it, it reminds me of the value I hold in Jesus' eyes, and it challenges me to let His light shine through my life.

~ Lynette Carpenter

Lynette is first and foremost, a worshiper of Jesus and her life revolves around Him as well as the other steady rock in her life, her husband Tim. Together, they are enjoying the adventure of raising four delightful children. Tyler, Amy, Corey and Kobe give their mommy no lack of entertainment as well as an abundance of writing material. Lynette is happy to be able to stay home to care for her family and is also the author of the blog ['Walking On Water'](#) where you will find stories of how real life people found redemption following abortions and addictions.



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## *Cry Ye Sarahs Unto the Lord*



I held one child in my arms, year after year -- he grew -- and month after month, I grieved. 48 months, 48 "No's." Desolation snowballed into a downward spiral that drained me physically, emotionally, spiritually.

Secondary infertility was my diagnosis: the inability to conceive after the first child. Sarah, Rebekkah, Elizabeth, Rachael, Hannah, the barren woman -- they became my soul sisters. I understood their cry -- and I rejoiced in their answered prayers.

I sat at their feet, looking for behavior solutions in their stories.

Sarah and Abraham encouraged accountability in their relationship -- story after story of each enabling the other's weakness drove that home. That the only time Isaac is shown taking his problems directly to God was when he asked God for Rebekkah to conceive shows the mighty power of a praying husband. Hannah unabashedly spilled her heart out in front of everyone, so passionate was she in emptying it for her God. Elizabeth, having grown reconciled to her barrenness, showed us how to rejoice in God's surprises. Rachael cried out for a child to make her look good. Leah wanted to win her husband's love by giving him sons -- and found God's mighty, fulfilling love. And, the barren woman's house was filled, probably because she opened herself up to love more others than she could ever possibly conceive.

I mined these stories for clues to solve my problem. Because God had not given me what I asked for, I assumed it was a conditional behavior issue. God was waiting for me to behave a certain way before He would grant my request. I was like the mouse trying to find the magic button that releases the cheese -- and none of the buttons I pushed released my cheese.

To compound that, I was an obsessive thinker, constantly searching for solutions. Obsessive thinking starts on the outside -- can I work harder, eat healthier, study more, be skinnier, find a new theory, a new treatment -- all the solutions are outside based. Outside solution failure turns the obsessive thinker inside -- maybe I am not good enough, do not pray enough, believe enough, or am not important enough to God.

But God does not work like that. God does not love conditionally. I am not the mouse to his cheese. God wants a heart connection. Those bible stories? Meaningless without a God relationship. I knew what I thought I wanted, but without relationship with my Father, I could not know what He wanted for me. I had to take my mind off the plot and seek to know the author.

"Commit your way to the Lord, and trust in him, and he will do it." (Psalm 25: 5, New Advent Bible)

A Christian friend, who was more intimate with God at that time, during a particular moment of emotional crisis advised me, "Ask Him to take the desire away if having another child is not His will." I had to

everything off the table, so to speak -- my dream, my desire.

"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done." (Luke 22:42)

And, I did -- I asked my Father to take the desire away -- if this dream was not His dream for my life. Like Abraham's willingness to give up Isaac, I needed to be more committed to His plan for my life, than my plan, my desire, my dream. Though at that time I did not realize how much He loved me, who I really was to Him, I gave Him my heart's desire.

And He gave it back -- abundantly.

There have been big dreams and little dreams in my life -- that I have asked God to help me fulfill.

Sometimes my plan is not His plan -- and I let go. Sometimes, His plan unfolds in His time, not my time -- so there is a lot of waiting. Sometimes, I just need more experience so that I have what it takes to handle what I have asked for.

"The angel of the LORD called to Abraham from heaven a second time 16 and said, "I swear by myself, declares the LORD, that because you have done this and have not withheld your son, your only son, 17 I will surely bless you."(Genesis 22:15-17)

When a big dream bursts into a heart's desire, instead of dashing off to grasp it -- I whisper to my Father, "If it's not what you want, please take away the desire to do it."

And, He does.

~ 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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*Teachers of Life*



Interrupting her father's counsel, Catherine scooted her chair out from the table with indignation, stood up with frustration and said, "Dad, I already know that!" Catherine's father replied with the rhetorical, "Are you sure you already know? Do you know what I was about to say?"

Ignoring his question as her voice became a shout, "Dad, why do you always treat me like a stupid child?" Shaking his head, he slowly looked up at her. As if to control the raging volcano within, seated at the head of the table with his chair pulled out sideways, his left hand grasped the edge of the table, leaning forward, with his eyes piercing hers, causing her to sit back down. He said in a calm and steady voice, "My intentions are never to cause you to feel that you are a stupid child. As a matter of the patterns in your life, you have made some very childish decisions based on emotions, resulting in destructive consequences. It is not that you are stupid. Catherine, that is the furthest from the truth; however, because you 'think' you know 'everything' and in disrespect you interrupt my counsel, you are going to have to learn from your own experiences and consequences."

He continued, "My heart aches to know that you are going

against what I know is best for you. My advice is to see you through the 'right now' and assist you to your destiny. This decision you are about to make is going to cost you. Are you willing to pay the price that you have priced yourself? I plead with you to know that I can foresee what you can't. It's called life experience. Many times, my daughter, experience trumps knowledge. Unfortunately with your interruption today, you have already made your decision. You are going to allow the little knowledge you do have to override both the knowledge and experience that I have survived and walked through. My daughter, I have many scars, and only by God's grace am I able to sit her with you today, still alive."

Humbled by his calm words for a moment, pride suddenly swept in taking her captive as the painted pictures of her mind led her away by the lies disguised in romance, success and invincibility, she made a decision in that moment to ignore the voice of wisdom and heed to the voice of what would become a path of shame and burdensome guilt.

Does this scenario bring back memories of your youth? It does for me.

Just as the fictional scenario, the life lessons in my youth were unfortunately based on ignored wisdom from those who loved me the most. I continue to have to learn even in my adulthood. It would have been one thing if the Holy Spirit had led me in an area that would have seemed absurd, yet without doubt was based on the Word of God, leading me to honor my parents and others. However, in my case the decisions I made were based on the inexperienced, romanced, unrealistic conjured up thoughts in my head leading me away from the Word of God, resulting in dishonoring not only my wise advisors, but also dishonoring myself.

Through these choices that I made, I was led to roads of destruction that I could no longer tread upon. The fear of knowing that I could not do it anymore my way led me in the turnaround on the road to repentance -- asking God for His beautiful forgiveness.

In this leading to the path of repentance, I know my heart has answered the call of God's voice,

empowering me by His glorious, rich love to influence many young women who are about to make life altering decisions. I must echo His voice, leading them back to the unfailing love of God and His Glorious Word led by the Holy, Majestic Spirit of God.

Life lessons -- they are beautiful reminders of when we depend on God and His Spirit being confident in His Word knowing that He is our teacher, we become teachers of life; versus life becoming our teacher. Experience may trump knowledge, but God's Spirit who guides us through His Word, trumps both life experience and knowledge leading us to the abundant life of what God longs for us to experience and know and that is HIM!

Do you know Him?

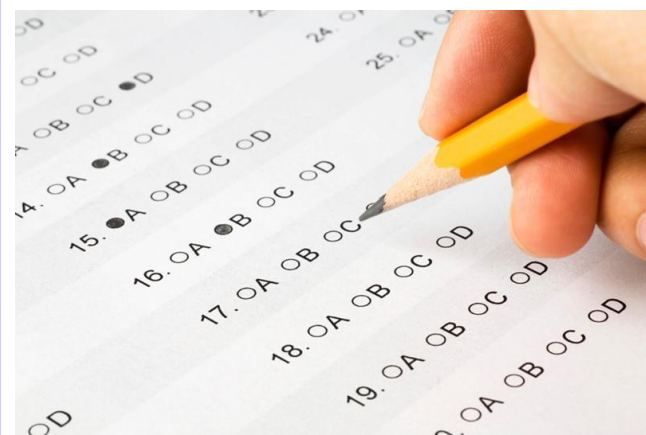
~ Teresa Criswell

Encouraging. Passionate. Dramatic. Crazy. Funny -- these words describe Teresa. She is a wife, mom, writer and has a love of speaking forth God's Word with great encouragement. In her love for the Lord, Teresa shares encouragement through the Word of God and with personal experiences. She inspires others and offers hope in the midst of hopeless situations, utilizing the greatest weapons from God: His Powerful Word and our praises to God. Her love for people reveals a glimpse of the heart of God as she longs to see Truth and Freedom of God transform lives. Teresa enjoys living in Texas along with her amazing husband and two beautiful children. You can visit her at [Triumphant Victorious Reminders](#).



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## My Test



"Remember how the Lord your God led you through the wilderness for these forty years, humbling you and testing you to prove your character, and to find out whether or not you would obey his commands" (Deuteronomy 8:2 NLT).

This verse helped me understand a time of testing in my life. There was a time that I thought I was standing firm and believed that I would never fall back into sin. I loved God with all my heart, mind, soul and strength. I was overconfident and proud of how much of the bible I had read. I even looked

down on others who had struggles with sin. I remember thinking, "What is the problem? Just repent and stop sinning!" Well, little did I know, I would be tested and would fail miserably.

I prayed every day, read the bible, served in my church, and attended many bible studies. Then, work got really busy, so I thought I should take a break from Bible studies. Slowly, I stopped praying every day, and I read the bible every other day...then once a week...then once every two weeks.

I remember thinking, "God knows my heart. He knows I love him. I know he will always be there."

Then, I was tempted. Over and over again! There was a struggle and I would get convicted most of the time but I was being tempted in almost every weakness that the enemy knew I had! I was tempted to drinking, to being prideful, to losing control of my anger. I remember the fight in my heart, my mind, and my soul. It was far from what peace was. I knew what peace felt like because I had begun a relationship with God. The past two years I had been a journey of getting to know my creator. I had a deep intimate relationship with him.

When I should have run to him in prayer, I slowly walked away from him. I eventually gave in to sin. I went from having an abundance of peace and joy to none at all! I felt chaos in my life. It happened quickly! I remember getting on my knees on one occasion and praying to God, "Give me my peace back!" But I did not get it back, because I was deep into sin. I asked him for forgiveness, knowing that I was going to sin again the following weekend or even that same day. I would pick up the Bible on occasion, just because I felt so horribly and I craved some order in my life. Every time I picked up the Bible he spoke to me even in the midst of my sin. He reminded me of his grace and mercy.

I don't remember the exact breaking point, but I had one. I remember the prayer so vividly. I got on my knees and cried out to the Lord, "I need you! I can't overcome this without you. Rescue me! Forgive me of my sins, cleanse me from every wrong. Please, God, help me! Remove the temptation. I don't want to sin anymore. I just want you!" I truly repented that day. I remember feeling peace overcome me.

During this time of testing, I had prayed similar prayers; however, this one was different. Why, you ask? Because, I truly did not want to sin anymore. I came to God with a remorseful heart.

I'm here to tell you that He rescued me from a sin that could have ruined my life and he has given me more than I deserve. But most of all, I have my peace back. He has given me an understanding and compassionate heart for those who are struggling with sin. There is a quote that I have heard many pastors use. "Your misery will be your ministry." I believe this with all my heart.

Here are some things that have helped me overcome temptation.

- Pray for God's help.
- Study the Bible regularly so that you are reminded of how He wants you to live.
- Seek friends who love God and can offer help when you are tempted.
- Run from anything you know is wrong.

Remind yourself that it is easier to stay out of temptation than to get out of it!

"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard. 24 Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins" (Romans 3:23-24 NLT).

*Jesus, thank you for dying on the cross so that I may be forgiven. I ask in your precious name, to give me strength to overcome temptation when it comes my way. I know that you are faithful and will always provide a way out. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.*

~Angie Estrada

Angie loves God, her husband and their two children with all of her heart! She also enjoys serving in her women's ministry, [EmpowHer!](#) She teaches a discipleship program called [One on One with God](#), and she is currently on a mission trip to teach in Romania. She has a heart for women who are lost and broken, and her compassion helps the mind redemption in Christ



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## Angels



There is something to be said about angels. I don't think they are the soft spoken, matronly, white winged creatures we think they are. At least the one I met isn't. She smokes too much, loves Mexican food and has a bad history for falling for the wrong men. I'm sure she wouldn't have passed her angel schooling with a 4.0 but that doesn't matter because you see, she has heart! One of the biggest hearts I've ever seen!

I met her last year at this time. She walked into that restaurant we were waiting at with a crooked smile on her face. She was 5 feet tall and 130 pounds soaking wet. Her belly was swollen and she held it lovingly. I knew she

was special. You know that feeling you just get about people. A week later we met again when she laboured for hours and pushed our son into the world. I held him and cried with joy. We were all hugging and laughing and in and amongst it all I saw her smile.

I often wonder what was going through her mind at that moment. Was it love, relief, sorrow, hatred... I know what I felt...I felt a twinge of guilt. Why was it me that had the means to care for him? Why was it me that was born with this overly responsible head on my shoulders? Could I do it if it were the other way around? Could I love this much? You see not only did she give us her child that day. She gave us a piece of her heart. I saw it that day. I saw it in her eyes.

It was surreal at first. I just knew I would wake up from this dream. I had so many times before. Was he real? Was he really ours? I wondered if I would be enough for him. Can I really give him all she wanted us to give, all he deserved and more? Would I know what that was?

And there he was every day watching me, loving me, teaching me. A lot about him and a whole lot more about me and what I could be.

You see, it's hard to imagine life without him. To know that just one year ago the sun rose and shone, the stars twinkled bright. They must have known him, known his spirit, his heart or maybe they just shine brighter now.

Everyday I would wake up and fall deeper and deeper in awe of him. He was happy from the beginning. Who is this happy? He is laid back and full of life both at the same time. I swear he wanted to walk at two weeks old. He smiled at me and told me stories with his eyes. I love his differences. His blondish red hair and fearless grin. I know already that he is full of a love for life and all its experiences and is afraid of very little. He loves people and going places. He is stubborn and feisty. He adores his older brother and wants to be and do everything he does and more.

I have learned a lot this year. I have learned that you could love someone so much you would go through your own pain to see them be more. I have learned that there are angels walking among us, normal people that you would never suspect are really more. I've learned that there is more to me than what I am aware of. There is more love, more strength and more wisdom. I've learned that Eli tells me every day what he needs and if I listen I can never go wrong.

I can't believe it's been a year. Our little man is one. Eli Benson Hoyt Burton born August 8, 2010.

~ Tara McNaueal

Tara lives in Atlanta with her husband Jeff and sons Jonah-6 yrs and Eli-1.

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## Graduating Seasons



My youngest daughter will be graduating this year. It's funny how many feel that when you graduate from high school, life begins. Of course once you graduate college you feel, finally life can begin. And when you land that job you've been dreaming about, we think, Now I can begin my life. And then as we reach certain milestones or encounter detours in life, we think, Today I begin my new life!

As my daughter flips through the local college catalog, she looks up at me with excitement and yet fear. She asks, "Mom, give me advice so that I can make the right choices. When does my life really begin?"

I smiled and replied "It begins over and over at different times of your life."

"For everything there is a season, a time for every activity under heaven." (Ecclesiastics 3:1, NLT)

This verse states that there is a "season" or "time" for everything that is part of human life.

As my daughter begins her steps towards beginning her grown up life, I reflect on mine. Has my life been the example that I hope will help her in making choices for her future? Has she noticed that when I failed, I tried my hardest to stand back up? Have I shown her that I learned

from my mistakes? Did she witness me forgive and forget? When I walked across the stage to receive my

degree, did she realize that I had to give up a lot to get ahead? Does she know that It's alright to say no? Has she seen me give and not expect? Can she see that I don't follow but try to lead? Can she see that I don't know everything, but want to learn as much as I can? Has she seen me deal with consequences for my past choices? Has she noticed when I give up the front seat to anyone older than I? Has she noticed that when I was shy, it meant I was going to be last? Did she hear me speak up for what was right? Has she seen me defend those that need defending? Have I shown her my pride, in my freedom to vote?

Does she know that I fear God?

I hope that my daughter lets God lead her life, and that my life lessons can somehow be her guide to a better life for her.

Today I begin my new life, as a better person, mother, sister, friend and teacher. I guess it's my season to help her season be the best that God can provide....

~ Bernice S. Rubio

Bernice is a single, divorced mother from Corpus Christi, Texas. I have two grown girls: Erica 29 and Marissa 17. I teach Special Education and love my job; it is the most rewarding career ever. When I'm not working, I love to blog, write, photograph, travel, look at art, and really do anything that lets me be creative. My walk with Christ has been a journey in which I have been blessed in too many ways to count. You can also find me at my blog <http://talkinwithgod.blogspot.com>

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## *Lessons from the Wilderness*



My mother loves to remind me of my favorite verse when I was young, Romans 5:3-5. Paul says, "Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

(NIV) It's not like I was raised in a caustic, critical environment which caused me to cling to this verse for

courage.

My sheltered life experiences were limited to sibling bickering, an occasional poor math grade, and teenage grounding. So, why would I choose this set of words in particular? Perhaps, I enjoyed rattling off the noun series like the catchy tune "with the leg bone connected to the knee bone; the knee bone connected to the thigh bone; the thigh bone connected to the hip bone..." Maybe I was attracted to the ideal of what these heavy words represented, a life sold out to Christ no matter the circumstances so that His character would be formed in me. It's quite possible I picked these verses as a result of a week-long camp experience in which I returned impassioned and ready to change the world. Not a person given to omens, I should've paid attention to what this might mean for my future.

Just as God led the Israelites through the wilderness with the land of milk and honey as their final destination, so he takes all of us on a dry desert experience at some point. My two year journey pales in comparison to the Hebrew children's 40 year agony. However, the progression of God's character being formed in us is similar. My desert ordeal occurred over 14 years ago, a year or so before my failed marriage. I knew our relationship wasn't flourishing despite the multitude of marriage books lining the bookshelves. Several seminars and a counselor later, divorce loomed like the judge's gavel sentencing a criminal to life imprisonment. I was in a wilderness wasteland in which I couldn't see or hear God. I felt like a traveler stuck in the Sahara seeing mirages but no water. Dry, dusty, desperate. I clung to God with my nubby fingernails on the edge of a cliff. Due to counseling advice, I kept the heartbreak to myself. I was told, "Just in case things improve." They didn't, so God and I traveled the Desert of Disappointment together. My favorite verse haunted me. Rejoicing in our sufferings, perseverance, character and hope became more than a sing-songy nursery rhyme. It was my reality. I wasn't just spouting Christianese anymore; I was living and breathing my faith.

When God leads us through the wilderness, He desires to transform us. We, like the Israelites, complain. We question his goodness and his competence. Does He realize my heart is breaking? Surely, a good God wouldn't allow this to happen. Questions assault us like a sniper's gunfire catapulting his target. "Why me?" "Why now?" "Where's God?" When Moses freed God's chosen people from Egyptian slavery, they whined and worried when he led them into the desert. They challenged God's purposes and provision, longing for their chains in fertile land rather than choosing to trust God in an unknown wasteland. The prison we know oftentimes seems more attractive than freedom in some elusive Promised Land somewhere in the far off distance. Dragging ourselves through a desolate desert isn't quite as appealing as camping on our comfy couches. Who wouldn't prefer comfort to pain? The old adage, "No pain, no gain" is unfortunately true. Marathon runners, concert pianists and Olympians realize how vital perseverance is to achieving their goals.

The Israelites left Egypt a vocal cacophony. Dissatisfied, discouraged downers, God was prepared to delete them from the desert more times than Henry VIII sent his enemies to the tower. They grumbled about food and when God provided manna, they didn't follow his instructions about how to gather it. God's displeasure is evident. "How long will you refuse to keep my commands and instructions?" (Exodus 16:28, NIV) The Israelites are just like a child who doesn't listen to a parent's repeated instructions to look both ways before crossing the street. Sick of manna, whiny Hebrews groan until God sends quail. It's an

unending cycle of demand and dispense, grumble and grant. No wonder they took the long route to the Promised Land. How many times have I done the same? When the Hebrews left Egypt, they had been exposed to pagan worship and were not an orderly group of God-followers. They needed time to grow-in their case, 40 years to become God's people. They were not ready to enter the land of promise. Wandering in the wilderness gave them time to transform into the people God called them to be. Deserts aren't necessarily places of total desolation. Plants thrive in deserts because they store water in their leaves, roots or stems. They are capable of spreading their roots wide underground so they can absorb water that may be long distances away. Certain animals survive because they are able to conserve water or tolerate high heat. Mineral resources, such as iron, lead-zinc, gold, silver, copper and uranium deposits can abound in deserts around the world. God's word speaks to us about the richness of the desert place. "Blessed are those whose strength is in you, who have set their hearts on pilgrimage. As they pass through the Valley of Baca (tears or weeping), they make it a place of springs; the autumn rains also cover it with pools. They go from strength to strength, till each appears before God in Zion." (Psalm 84:5-7)

God used my desert experience to transform me. A place of testing, I learned to trust in greater depth and thirst for Him in a way that only God could satisfy. It's the difference between drinking water or diet coke after exercise. One quenches, the other doesn't. My Valley of Baca became a place of springs. Not all Israelites allowed the desert to become a life-giving spring. Many Israelites died before they reached the Promised Land because they refused God's discipline so their faith could mature. God can use wilderness isolation for our faith to flourish or fail.

Catherine in her Bible study *Passionate Prayer* says, "Your ability to see is refined in the wilderness, for your earthly distractions have most likely been diminished or altogether taken away. Your focus will move from earth to Heaven." Just as desert flowers bloom amidst barren boundaries, so God's love resurrects and renews my heart in the isolation of my wasteland.

~ Annette Stonger

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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**Unwanted...Dead or Alive**



When I think of "life's lessons," I wish to pull up great, easy lessons that would have taught me so very much, were a breeze, and gave me fresh life, revival of my spirit. They could have been lessons that grew me into such a fine and perfect Christian woman, made me a better person, helped me become more obedient, compassionate, gracious. But, there really are no easy lessons and there are no paths to earthly perfection. In reality, life's lessons start off, in most cases, as hard, unwanted, and overwhelming to a person needing to die to self. Hands fly upward, covering my head. Tears well up. I cower beneath feelings of failure, fear, resistance, ready to run, even before attempting to learn what God even wants me to learn.

Of course, these lessons, wanted or unwanted, are from God Who knows just what I need. He knows I need to grow in Him: *"...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him, having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which He has called you, what are the riches of His*

*glorious inheritance in the saints, and what is the immeasurable greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His great might that He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places,...."* (Ephesians 1:17-20a ESV)

He knows I want to grow in the knowledge of Him. *"...be diligent to be found by Him without spot or blemish, and at peace. And count the patience of our Lord as salvation, just as our beloved brother Paul also wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, as he does in all his letters when he speaks in them of these matters. There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other Scriptures. You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory both now and to the day of eternity. Amen."* (2 Peter 3:14b-18 ESV) He knows I want to grow in His grace.

I am to stay focused on the One Who is Lord of my life. *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God."* (Hebrews 12:1-2 ESV) I must not run nor hide. I must stand still with eyes and ears open. How can I learn if the eyes of my heart cannot see Him, or the ears of my heart are closed to His Words? He wants me to know that He is beside me and will not leave me. We will walk this path together. Hard lessons or easy lessons, the intent is to draw me closer to my Creator. He wants to teach me His Truth. He assures me that He is molding me into a Christian woman of His making. He prays over me, loving me deeply. Calling upon His Name in darkness or in light, coming to His throne in boldness, depending upon my Counselor are steps I must take in learning His lessons, these life lessons, wanted or not.

When I look back on the lessons of my life, the only ones I can recall are those I stood and faced. If I did an about-face and ran, I have absolutely no recollection of the lesson God intended for me to learn. When I was firm in my stance, desiring to honor the One Who loves me so much that He taught me Himself, I

grew in Christ, became closer to Him, more able to be His student in life from there on out. I climbed hard mountains standing on the pathway upward, knowing He was with me. We continued to the top where God's Glory shone all about. I knew I had succeeded in learning. Sometimes, my lessons seem repetitive...."Haven't I been here before?" He teaches what I can handle today. As I become ready for a similar lesson, only deeper, harder, we continue on that upward spiral.

The sweetest gifts about facing life's unwanted (and wanted) lessons are that I get to walk with Jesus, I grow deeper in my Christian walk, and joy exudes from me for I am becoming a woman of Christ. That dead self becomes alive to Christ, a new creation. *"Yes, and I will rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and the help of the Spirit of Jesus Christ this will turn out for my deliverance, as it is my eager expectation and hope that I will not be at all ashamed, but that with full courage now as always Christ will be honored in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."* (Philippians 1:18b-21 ESV)

*Blessed are you, O LORD;  
teach me your statutes!  
With my lips I declare  
all the rules of your mouth.  
In the way of your testimonies I delight  
as much as in all riches.  
I will meditate on your precepts  
and fix my eyes on your ways.  
I will delight in your statutes;  
I will not forget your word.  
(Psalm 119:12-16 ESV)*

~ Linda Gill

Linda is a retired school teacher and children's librarian. Her marriage of 18 years is Christ-centered. They have no children. She cares for her 97 year old mother. Linda grew up as the oldest of three girls in a Navy family. Her father, a Navy doctor for twenty years, died at the early age of 46. Her mother raised the girls in San Diego, CA. Christ has been the well from which she drinks for over 16 years even though she grew up in a Christian home. She was not introduced to the incredible power of relationship with Jesus Christ until she was 45. She seeks the Truth and wants to be a light of God in the world in which she is placed, whether it be the workplace, the assisted living, the nursing home, church, one-on-one spiritual mentoring, tutoring children, all appointments with God. She loves writing these days and can be found at her blog: <http://beingwoven.blogspot.com/> where she journals her spiritual journey with Jesus.



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Beautiful Journey



"This is the day that the Lord has made; Let us rejoice and be glad in it" (Psalm 118:24 NIV) reminds us that each day is a gift and a new opportunity to finish what we've started. I don't know about you, but there are many things in life that I have left unfinished; goals I have yet to accomplish. The world would have us to believe that if we haven't achieved certain goals, we are failures. If we hear that lie often enough, sometimes we actually begin to believe it. When we find ourselves falling into that trap, the only way to combat it is with God's Truth.

While establishing and achieving goals is an important part of life, that is not what determines our value and worth. The most important goals we will ever achieve are those that line up with God's plan for our life, the ones that bear fruit. "Being confident of this, He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil 1:6 NIV). How encouraging that our good work will be completed because God is faithful. God has created the blueprint for our life, but we have to be willing to follow His plan.

Last December I attended a women's ministry event at our church. My plan was to spend time with my sisters in Christ, enjoy a delicious breakfast, and listen to a wonderful speaker. God's plan was for me to hear about the need for volunteers to serve at a local pregnancy resource center. It had been on my heart for some time to serve in that type of ministry. Coincidence? I don't believe in coincidences, just divine appointments. Have faith and believe that God has placed you right where you are for a reason. It may be clear as mud to you right now, especially if you are going through a difficult time in your life, but be strong in the Lord. Be assured that the Holy Spirit will begin to reveal to you the purpose and the plan designed especially for you.

It is truly amazing that all of our days have been ordained by the Living God. I remember learning in school that the quickest way to any destination is a straight line. That's a great life-lesson for kids as well as adults. Taking the long route makes life so much harder, Amen? We've all taken some wrong turns along the way. Thankfully, we have the Holy Spirit to guide us and get us back on the right path.

Daily seeking God's Will for our lives is a beautiful journey. Pray, ask and trust. It would be so easy if our paths were like the yellow brick road, clear and obvious; but that's just not the way it works sometimes. That's where the trust comes in. "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6 NKJV).

~ Doris Swift

Doris currently lives in Florida with her wonderfully supportive husband of 27 years. She is the mother of two grown children, and grandmother of two adorable grandsons with



another one on the way! She is a lay counselor for the Grace House Pregnancy Resource Center, and serves in Children's Ministries at her church. Her passion is to share the love of Christ and to encourage others through her writing as the Holy Spirit leads. She shares devotionals and other personal stories in her blog which can be found at [Subject to Change](#). Besides writing devotionals, she is in the editing stages of her first children's picture book. To God be the Glory!

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## Lessons from the Bleachers: Taking a Knee



With four children involved in sports and other activities, our family spends a lot of time on the sidelines, especially at the football stadium. For all the hours I have spent watching tackle football, I have to admit that the game still confuses me. I'm still pretty fuzzy on what the players are doing, or even what they are *supposed* to be doing.

However, one thing I have learned is what is expected of me, the spectator. Sideline behavior has its own etiquette. At no time is this more essential than when a player is injured, and all

follow the protocol of "taking a knee." When a player falls, teammates and others on the field do this literally; those in the stands show their respect by quieting voices and actions. Usually, it isn't long before the player is met with applause as he either 1) returns to the game or 2) limps off the field. Only then does play resume. "Taking a knee" may be a game time courtesy, but it is still a sacred ritual-one considered impolite, even offensive to ignore.

Recently, I witnessed the full extent of this custom when one of our high school football players was seriously injured. Minutes dragged by endlessly as an anxious crowd watched and waited for some sign from the field. The gravity of the situation unfolded as an ambulance pulled into the stadium and a stretcher rolled across the field. At long last, #2 was wheeled away, but as he did so he slowly lifted his arm into the air, giving a heartwarming "thumbs up" to the cheering crowd.

I feel privileged to have witnessed such things, finding in them a touching reflection of something human beings have known for centuries -- that there are times when pain and suffering demand a little deference, even ceremony. Loss -- especially loss of life -- commands respect, and we who witness hurt are called to honor the hurting properly. We see a perfect example of this in the Jewish mourning ritual of *shiva*. For starters, the mourners customarily sat on low stools or the floor, symbolizing the emotional reality of being "brought low" by grief. Surely God's chosen people knew how to "take a knee."

For me, the practice raises this question: Are we giving due consideration when our "teammates" fall? Even before we offer comfort and assistance, are we pausing to pay our respects? Could we as believers "mourn with those who mourn" more thoughtfully if we, too were to "take a knee?" If we did, perhaps "football shiva" would look something like this:

- *We would be present.* Jews considered it a great *mitzvah* (literally "commandment" but usually interpreted as "good deed") of kindness and compassion to pay a home visit to the mourners. If we would be effective "spectators" we have to show up.
- *We would be focused.* For those whose lives have just been turned upside-down by tragedy, the very least we can do is to put our own concerns on hold for a while. One way to demonstrate respect is by offering our undivided attention.

- *We would be patient.* Depending on the injury, some players will need more time to get to their feet than others. It would be insensitive to rush this process. We show our respect by giving enough time.
- *We would be silent.* Silence was a key element of shiva, as visitors would not speak at all unless mourners first initiated conversation. So often misfortune leaving us embarrassed and tongue-tied, and even our most heartfelt eloquence can be so much pointless drivel to those who mourn. The Jews understood what we tend to forget-that sometimes the most comforting thing we can say *is nothing at all.* With our silence, we acknowledge both the profundity of grief and the inadequacy of human wisdom before it.

While there is still plenty I don't get about football, I've learned a lot from this time on the bleachers, thankful for wisdom I can utilize on *and* off the field. I realize that I don't have to make sense of life in order to participate in it, and while I may be clueless as to what to say or do, God is still able to use me to serve others. Finally, I've learned that suffering should turn me instinctively to God. When we get knocked down by life, before I do anything else, I need to lift my gaze to the Comforter, Healer and Giver of Life . . . to humbly, and respectfully, take a knee.

~ Pamela R. Watts

God taught Pamela long ago that it is because of Him we have a story to tell, and it is for Him that we tell it. Pamela's pastor taught her that her writing is a kind of "literary sanctification" -- being refined by God through her story-telling. He is refining her just now in her latest work, *Measuring Up at Last: Realigning Your Way to Freedom in Christ*, which can be found at [www.measure-of-grace.blogspot.com](http://www.measure-of-grace.blogspot.com). She live in Waco, Texas, with her husband and four children, who give her lots of stories to tell -- and who also refine her!

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A Love Lesson



While driving my daughter to school today, I was teaching her about God's love. But while I was talking, out came the jewel - an insight from God. As I was speaking, it was like I was also in the audience listening to the words and learning what God was saying through me. Here's the jewel that God gave me.

God is the very source of love and without Him love does not exist, just as life does not exist apart from Him. He is the creator, the source, and the root of love. He is the generator of love. Just as a generator produces power, God is the generator of the power of love. We cannot feel love or have love apart from Him. All people have His love shining on them. Their stewardship of this love causes the blessings or problems in their lives. How we handle our love portion given to us is important.

The love He gives us is subject to proper stewardship.

Poor stewardship results in heartache and pain for us and others. We are designed to have a love relationship with God. A portion of the love that God gives us is meant for Him. When we slice off part of the love meant for God and give it to someone or something else, that person or thing becomes an idol. When we are young and have love relationships, we slice off love that is meant for God and give it to another. It ends in heartache and we are emotionally injured or we injure someone else. Those relationships fail because they are not in the love plan.

When God wants us to marry, He brings us our mate -- just as He presented Eve to Adam. He will present our love partner to us and give to us the love He Himself has for that person, a special new love. We have a responsibility to love that person with the love God has for that person, entrusted to us and meant to move through us. Our stewardship is to stay within the parameters of the love portion God has given us to love them with.

If we go outside of the boundaries of our love portion, we will suffer consequences. If we abuse the boundaries, we will have heartache in our marriage. If we slice off a portion of the love meant for our spouse and give it to another, it becomes adultery and we have robbed our spouse of the love that was meant for him or her alone.

We are designed to be a tool in God's hand--with arms and legs--to portray and channel His love for our spouse through us. Our actions and words are a portrayal of God's love to our spouse. When I make a mistake, God doesn't put a spotlight on my error and condemn me. He is gentle and loving, encouraging me to do the correct thing. This is how God desires for us to treat our spouse's mistakes--with love and gentleness. Any other response is outside the love boundaries and not our place.

Perhaps we were married before we were saved and following Christ. We didn't have the benefit of Jesus presenting our spouse to us for marriage. Then we've been adopted into God's family, but adoption gives us all the benefits of sonship. We wear His name and are still a child of God with all the benefits of being a child of the King. We then adopt the love portion for our spouse that God has reserved for us. God still desires to show His specially designed love that He Himself has for our spouse through us. We need to identify and discard the love for our spouse we ourselves invented and receive from God His love for our spouse and walk in it.

I, for one, choose to accept the responsibility for the stewardship of God's special love for my husband and to be a tool of love in God's hand--God breathed, God inspired.

"Don't just pretend to love others. Really love them. Hate what is wrong. Hold tightly to what is good. Love

each other with genuine affection, and take delight in honoring each other" (Romans 12:9-10 NLT).

~ Susan Wood

Susan is a founding member of Catskill Mountain Christian Center and has served in compassionate ministry to the homeless of New York City and the victims of the Chernobyl disaster in Belarus. She worked for CitiHope International where she also served as outreach programming director for Christian radio, coordinating a variety of New York City ministries. Susan and her husband, Jonathan, founded [The Raptor Project](#), a rehabilitation and educational effort with birds of prey. Susan, Jonathan and daughter Rachel travel the U.S. on tour each year producing bird shows and exhibits in 28 states. She has been featured on Cornerstone television and CBN. In between road tours, her family divides their time between their New York home and a home on North Padre Island, Texas, where they are members of [Bay Area Fellowship](#).



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## *Content as a Turtle in a Sewage Canal*



In the New Orleans area, our two most common road dividers are "the neutral ground" (a.k.a. the median) and canals.

If you don't know your way around the city and especially its suburbs (Metairie, Jefferson, Kenner, etc.) you are highly likely to become frustrated with the amount of canals you run into when you think you can head in a certain direction and find your way. Once you come upon one, you have to creatively maneuver your way around it through a series of turns and u-turns. (Can you sense that I speak from experience?!)

So, though I have had many newcomers' days of driving frustration in learning the lay of the land in this town that I love, I think I can now safely say I have mostly got it figured out...mostly.

My current frequent work-day commute takes me down the famed "West Esplanade" (rhymes with lemonade, by the way...and yes, it is the one mentioned in the song "[New Orleans Ladies](#)" by LeRoux...go ahead...sing it now, I know you want to...).

What do you think is the main divider of this busy road? Yep---a canal.

As I am scurrying along with traffic to and from work, I often glance (or gaze if traffic is backed up) at the

activity in the canal. Life is happening in that algae-covered, murky basin. I guess those egrets, speckled ducks, and turtles didn't get the memo about their sub-par living environment.

Turtles are often lined up on rusty pipes sunbathing in a peaceful contentment I actually envy.

Occasionally one or two will take a dive into the dark abyss to cool off then come and perch themselves back in their sunbathing spot. Egrets glide along low near the water then alight on some of the same rusty pipes. Not an apparent care in the world. Red, black, and white speckled ducks waddle along the grass right near the busy road then make their way to the inviting water as well. I think I've even seen some chickens hanging out with them, too.

You know, I have learned a lesson from those canal-dwellers and I think you can as well.

No matter what our life circumstances and surroundings, contentment is the only way to go. The peace that comes with being truly thankful for our many unrecognized blessings and with trusting our Maker, Jesus Christ, to protect and provide for us--that peace is unexplainable and unmatched. That peace comes with contentment...or maybe it's the contentment that comes with peace. Hmmm...which came first--the canal chicken or the egg?

Do you have the contentment of a canal dweller?

Pray today for that peace that is indescribable. You may just find yourself pleasantly surprised by it once God brings it to you. I can't explain it, but it is true and real.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

~ Philippians 4:6-7 (NIV)

"The fear of the LORD leads to life: Then one rests content, untouched by trouble."

~ Proverbs 19:23 (NIV)

"The LORD gives strength to his people; the LORD blesses his people with peace."

~ Psalm 29:11 (NIV)

"You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you."

~ Isaiah 26:3 (NIV)

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid."

~ John 14:27 (NIV)

~Haelie Heard

Haelie is a follower of Christ, wife, mother of a six-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](#). 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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## Dream Lake Prayer



The path is steadily upward, well traveled. I walk slowly and purposefully, age causing me to stop frequently. Yet each pause allows time to reflect, rest and marvel in the simple beauty of a lone bluejay, a chipmunk rolling in the dust, a spray of colorful wildflowers growing from a small cleft of a rock.

As the elevation rises, the sounds of traffic lower. The crisp mountain air softly blowing on my sun drenched skin. A fragrance of pine sends its soft aroma. Each shadow lends a chill to the air.

As I look upward, towering granite sentinels make me feel small in their majestic presence.

Towering snow capped peaks formed millennia ago remind me of God's majestic handiwork. Time slows. Reflection and contemplation begin with the absence of the cacophony of daily city life. No annoying phone alerts, urgent appointments -- just solitude and quiet.

As I enjoy the pristine alpine lake and see its clear calm waters, I feel a prayer rising up within me. It's a sonnet of gratitude and praise to the Great Creator of this rugged beauty. Step by step I whisper the words to "How Great Thou Art." God has been with me in the daily struggles of city life and meets me while seated at the peaks of these towering places. Within each person, there is a prayer waiting to arise if only he or she is willing to slow down and take the time to see the beauty of God's handiwork.

~ Keith Wagner

Keith has been married to his beautiful wife for thirty-seven years -- the same number of years that he's been a follower of Jesus Christ. He and his wife raised their two children in a Christian home. Their son is an E.R. doctor, and their daughter is a school teacher. They are now enjoying their new life as empty-nesters. They adore their three grandchildren and love watching them grow, learn and flourish.

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