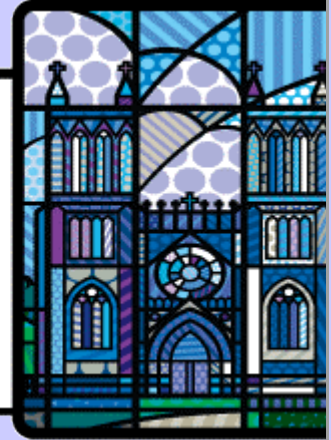


# Sanctified Together

Email and Online Publication



## April 2010 Issue: Life as a Vapor

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### A Word from the Editor

#### Beloved!



God has placed eternity into every human heart. We might try to deny it, ignore it or hide it; but it is there. Our spirits feel ageless, while our bodies grow old. Our hearts tell us we are still young, though the mirror says that our youth has died.

The human life is an oxymoron -- we are ageless mortals. We were created to live forever, yet we will experience the bitter bite of death. Flesh and spirit battle for dominance in our lives, and we struggle on where to place our focus. Are we dedicating our lives to the worry, riches and pleasures of this world (Luke 8. 14) or have we found a

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greater purpose?

James 4.14 says that we are all "vapors." In a flash, our earthly lives will be gone, and we'll stand before the throne and make account for how we lived. Did we live with our eyes heaven bound, or did our gaze not reach past the horizons of our own little worlds.

God knows our potential. He created us to do great things. Jesus is cheering for us, and the Holy Spirit is ready to guide us to victory. We just need to point our eyes, hearts and minds to the sky and listen for the soft voice of God leading our every step. We have eternity to bask in God's glory, but we only have this one chance to shine His glory into a dark world. Let's shine together!

In this issue, you will read stories written by women who have set their eyes on eternity, and who are determined to make every moment count. They are excited to share their "vapor" stories with you, and they hope that their words will strengthen your heaven vision!

"Yet God has made everything beautiful for its own time. He has planted eternity in the human heart, but even so, people cannot see the whole scope of God's work from beginning to end" (Ecclesiastes 3.11 NLT).

Shining His glory!

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## Issue Quote

"We work at denying and  
delaying getting old. then one

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day we realize it has arrived anyway. No one can change God's plan for the human lifespan; therefore, our knowledge and skills become more powerful tools than our physical appeal and strength." - Cynthia Faulkner, Ph.D.



## Living in Fast Forward Mode



Have you ever watched a movie in fast forward mode? Doesn't make much sense does it? I've watched enough movies to know that in order to get the full effect and understanding of the movie, I have to watch it at its intended pace. When I do fast forward through what I consider the boring parts of the movies, I actually find myself having to rewind because I don't quite understand what is happening and in those moments I realize that even the "boring" parts have its purpose.

Unfortunately, sometimes I treat my life with a little less respect and reverence than I do those movies. As I reflect on my life, the memories roll through my mind like scenes from a movie. However, the scenes are all in fast forward mode.

In one scene I say longingly to my friend, "I can't wait for graduation. I'm tired of high school." In an instant, I am marching up the aisle to my high school graduation. Fast forward a few years later, I say the same thing about college to another friend. The next scene I'm hugging friends with tears streaming down my face at my college graduation.

Fast forward a few months after college...I sign the bank loan to purchase my first car. The first words that come out of my mouth are "I wish the next three years would pass by quickly so I can finish paying for this car"... they did.

Three years ago I moved into my own home. When I looked at my paycheck and saw the big chunk that was missing I started to say, "I wish..." Before I could finish the thought, I heard the Holy Spirit say, "Do you really intend to wish the next 20+ years of your life away?"

I stood there shocked. Was I really wishing my life away? As I reflect back, I realize that I spent a huge part of my life wishing it away. I chose many times to glamorize, long for and fantasize about the future.

while not enjoying the gift of the present that God has blessed me with.

So many times when I witness, I remind people of the scripture, "Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2b NKJV). I encourage them to choose God today because tomorrow is not promised. Yet, I'm often guilty of rushing today in anticipation of tomorrow.

Those days that I wished away seems so vivid in my mind as if it was just yesterday I was that high school student, that college girl, the new teacher with car payments but the reality is it was quite a few years ago. Those years that I wished away seemed to have gone by in an instant... just like life.

Did I enjoy life? Certainly I did. However, in retrospect I think I would have led a fuller, richer life if I had learned to enjoy each phase without longing for the next. Consequently, after living in fast forward mode for so long, I wish I could rewind just for a moment. I'd tell the new teacher with the car payments, the college girl, and the high school senior to enjoy the moment. Regard each moment as God's gift to you because life is indeed just a vapor; and in the words of Carolyn Arends, "It slips away, just like hourglass sand."

I'd tell my younger, fretful self that God has a plan and purpose for each phase of life. Like the caterpillar cannot become a butterfly unless he goes through the chrysalis stage, neither will we become the women of purpose and destiny God has called us to be without those phases in our lives that seem hard and unbearable.

~ Bernadine McIntosh

Bernadine is a thirty something single lady who loves life, loves to laugh and loves her Lord. She has a passion for ministry to young ladies and seeks to point them to Jesus Christ, the one who captured her heart as a teenager. Bernadine can often be found curled up reading a book or writing in one. You can find her at personal blog, [Keeping it Real Girl Talk](#), and she's a monthly contributor at [Laced With Grace](#).





Would you like to know what God has rescued you from? If He's working for our good, there must be some near misses and mistakes we've been spared. Someday, maybe our Heavenly Father will draw us close and share stories of divine obstacles He used to steer and clear our pathways.

My husband and I were trying to sell our van and get a different car. On Tuesday, we found the perfect new car for us. My husband went to "seal the deal," and our oldest went along for the ride; I went the other way for a doctor's appointment with our youngest. It wasn't long before I began to get text updates, chronically the crumbling of our excitement. Our daughter gave me the play by play, seen through the eyes of a teenager listening to her dad work with the salesman. It was the wrong car for us, and we were back to square one. Having prayed that God would stop the transaction if it was not right, we realized He did just that. Imagine that!

"Divinely blocked."

While traveling weeks later, we found ourselves driving over winding roads that led through dark canyons. Signs dotted the roadsides, showing a deer lying in front of a car, warning "Wildlife on Road. Slow Down." After a long day we were ready for bed, but we found ourselves following a slow moving tanker truck blocking our progress. The posted speed limit was a goal we couldn't reach, and my husband began to get antsy. He was doing "pivot and swerve" checks periodically to see if he could pass. No chance.

"You know," I suggested, "you might just get comfortable here behind this truck. We could encounter a moose or antelope or deer, and the truck would mow it down before we even got to it. He may save our lives." Scoffing, teasing, and general jabs at mom ensued.

Two minutes later the brake lights on the truck flashed, and the tanker bobbled just before we saw what looked like a deli case, minus price tags, come flying at us. It was mangled when the truck hurled it our way, but we drove over the remains like a neighborhood speed bump.

A divinely placed obstacle, once inconvenient and irritating, prevented a disaster. Maybe it saved our lives, though we tried so hard to "get around it." Familiar Jeremiah 29:11 reveals God's heart has our good in mind - a heart not wanting harm for us. His is the heart of a loving Father who cares for our best interest. God is actively steering our lives toward the ways that are good for us.

We often pray about decisions and events in life, though we wonder and worry and whine about the apparent obstacles that get in our way. Do you find yourself "trying to pass" them? They may be lovingly placed by a caring Father, watching out for the good of His children. Keeping us from the wrong car ... or job ... or spouse ... they are divinely placed for our good.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11 (NIV)

~ Julie Sanders

Julie is a pastor's wife, mom, women's ministry director, writer, and Bible teacher who is so thankful for God's divine intervention in her life through 20 years of marriage and over two continents she's called home. She loves to teach God's Word and write about how His peace covers each day. Check out Julie's almost daily blog, [Come Have Peace](#), and her Marriage Mondays for more encouragement and info.



## Jumping In



I imagined myself standing next to Jesus, looking out at the world and watching the events of history unfold. I can't wait to jump into my life and shine the glory of God during my short years on earth. Jesus reminds me that I must stand strong in the world -- the roots of the Enemy are everywhere. He explains that I will learn all about faith and that I will no longer be completely surrounded by God's glory. However, I will feel His glory deep within my soul. It is a gift that God planted within me, but that gift is merely a seed. I will have to cultivate it.

I don't understand why Jesus is so emphatic. I won't forget! How could I forget? God is the Creator of the Universe! Jesus introduced us! How could I ever forget the millions of angels singing His praises or how the mountains and the skies cry out His glory or how I have knelt at His throne worshipping Him and filling myself with His love, peace and majesty? How could I forget heaven? Heaven is life; earth is merely a test, a sport, a challenge -- created to teach, strengthen and develop me. I'm playing to win. I want to come back to eternity a champion!

Jesus gives me a smile. He sees my determination but knows that I have much to learn. He tells me that He will give me three things to help me win on earth and shine the glory of God. He gives me the Holy Spirit. I receive this when I accept Jesus as savior of my earthly and eternal life. The Holy Spirit will be the power of God in me, guiding me through the Enemy's weeds. He gives me the Bible. I must read this Book over and over again because my human heart is naturally sinful and eager to stray. The more I read

the scriptures, the more God's promises fill my heart and take root. And He gives me other people. Jesus said that I will be able to see Him through the lives of other Christians who are walking by faith. They will encourage, motivate and edify me. They will help me win my race, and I will help them win theirs; however, we must live in harmony.

Yes, I know, Jesus! I know! I'm ready to go. I want to be Your hands and feet. I want to show the whole world what they are missing when they reject God. I will be a leader of the Gospel! I will shine Your glory in every crevice of darkness I see!

Jesus' face becomes serious. He stares in my eyes and waits a second before giving me His last words of advice. He tells me that He will have to break me. He will have to beat down every aspect of my flesh, because only then will His glory shine through. He says this process hurts, and it continues until the day I see Him again in heaven. But, if I learn to separate my spirit from my flesh, I will find great joy. Only when my flesh dies, will my spirit radiate the glory of God.

But I don't have flesh, yet. I do not understand pain, heartache or loss. I've never been without God, so I've never experienced sin. All I've ever known is love, joy and beauty. I start to feel a little homesick, and Jesus wraps His arms around me and strokes my face. He doesn't say these words out loud, but I feel them in my heart.

"When the pain becomes unbearable, and you have lost your way, just look to Me, dear daughter. I allowed my flesh to be dominated by the world, so that God's glory could pour forth. You must fill your life with that glory and shine it brightly. Draw close to me, and I will draw close to you."

Jesus tells me that it is time for me to go. The family, nation, culture and time He has chosen for me is ready for my arrival. I look at Jesus face to face one last time, and I can't help but say these words:

"I promise You, Jesus. I will return to You broken, tired and used up; but I will come back victorious. I will shine Your glory."

John 17.1-5 NIV:

"After Jesus said this, he looked toward heaven and prayed: 'Father, the time has come. Glorify your Son, that your Son may glorify you. For you granted him authority over all people that he might give eternal life to all those you have given him. Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began.'"



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 contributing for [Internet Cafe](#). She and her husband lead a church homegroup and enjoy homeschooling their three children.

## Vapor



What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

A mist.

A vapor.

In trying to capture that visual in my mind, I imagined boiling a pot of water for tea. The kettle begins its eerie wail and I rush to turn down the flame. The baby on my hip reaches chubby hand to grasp the cloud swirling heavenward. Fingers wag, feeling for what is in front of him, meeting with no resistance. The billowy steam is now condensation on the cabinet, remnant of what once was.

Such is a life.

That truth sunk into my gut in the precious months following my marriage. Three months past our wedding, Brian and I discovered we were expecting. Young and vibrant, we loved this tiny life deeply, making giddy plans. We dreamed for a lifetime...and then, at twelve weeks, a heart ceased to beat. Before a breath was given, it was taken away. Still young and now sobered, we mourned this tiny life deeply. A vapor.

The following year, another precious life was entrusted to us and, with bated breath, we watched him take his first gasp of air. The first weeks were hard. Accustomed to pictures in books of contented babes in cradles, we were astonished to discover, our baby didn't fancy sleep. For fourteen days, we took shifts, nodding off while nestling him upright next to our hearts. Each night, as soft snores escaped his lips, we would settle him into warmed blankets, only to have him re-waken. In a stupor, New Daddy would rise to begin midnight apartment pacing, and Baby fall asleep on his shoulder before they reached the other side of the room. Desperate for assurance, I called my mom near tears. "How quickly it will pass," she promised. But these few days felt eternal and I was not convinced. How can she know? Maybe my baby will be one who never learns to sleep! I dreamed of uninterrupted hours of rest. Lying down. In my bed. Never again, I thought.

That baby is seven now. Last night, I tucked him under blankets, said goodnight with a bear hug and a prayer, and left him to drift off amid giggles with a brother. In his own bed. And I in mine. A mist.

Another baby boy shares my bed tonight. At thirteen months, he prefers sleeping with legs draped over my stomach. but rarely am I tempted to pray for a quick passage into his independence. Instead, I want

to hug him tighter, squeeze him a little longer, maybe even walk him around the room in the bleary hours of the night, because I know he, too, is a vapor.

All men are like grass. With a husband employed in lawn care, we are well acquainted with grass.

And all their glory is like the flowers of the field. In springtime, he works long hours as the foliage grows and grows, soaking in sunshine and abundant rain. Green stains the hem of his pants, evidence of his livelihood.

The grass withers and the flowers fall. And in autumn, his labor slows. He returns home, trudging through the crisp path to our doorway. His days end early as yards begin to prepare for their winter sleep. Another season is passing. A vapor.

But the word of the Lord stands forever. It is the condensation on the cabinet, the evidence of what we can no longer see. While we cannot hold the mist of life in our hands, we hold His word for an eternity. What hope we have in Him!

~ Kristin Shockley

Kristin is, above all, a child of the King. She is also wife to her best friend, Brian, and mother of 4, ages seven and under...and #5 is on the way, due in September! Kristin is a homeschool mama and avid reader of children's literature. Though she is the teacher, she finds that often the daily happenings of life are teaching her! She shares her gleanings on her personal blog, [Bits and Pieces From My Life](#) and has also written for online publications, including [Internet Cafe](#) and [5 Minutes for Mom](#).



## I'm Here Now and That's Enough



I was watching the movie, *Shadowlands*, a few years ago, and C.S. Lewis (Anthony Hopkins) said this "I don't want to be somewhere else anymore. Not waiting for anything new to happen, not looking around the next corner or hill. I'm here now, and that's enough."

There was a time when I was obsessed with the mailman. I would look out the window twenty times a day to see if his truck was down the block where he always parked it. Once the truck finally got there, my obsession went from looking out the window to watching the clock. I knew it would take approximately an hour and a half for him to get to my house. Sometimes I would get irked because it took longer, in which case the mailman would get a lecture about being punctual, and not stopping to talk to every Tom, Dick and Harry along the way.

I don't know exactly what I expected to get in the mail. I guess I was so desperate for something, anything good to happen. So I put my hope in the mailman to bring me glad tidings from Publishers Clearing House, or a letter from a book publisher saying they wanted to publish my book.

Mark would tease me about my neurotic tendencies, but he got sucked into it too at times. One spring day a few years ago, we were keeping a close watch on the mail because we were expecting our tax refund. We took turns watching for the little white truck, the clock, and anything else that moved. And then - glory! The mailman finally arrived. Mark waited a respectable amount of time to retrieve the mail so he wouldn't appear desperate to the mailman, and then he reached into the mailbox and found the big yellow envelope. He was beside himself with joy, and he whooped so loud that the mailman looked back to see what was going on. And so Mark was caught in the act, red-handed.

The trouble with this sort of psychotic behavior is we never appreciate the moment we're in; we're always looking for something better around the corner. Matthew 6:31 says, "So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" or in my case "What shall I get in the mail?"

As I meditated on Matthew 6:31-34, I began to understand that seeking God's kingdom would automatically line up all my ducks in a row without any effort on my part. From then on I traded in my kingdom for God's. I started spending the first hour of each day with God. I worshiped Him, sat quietly in His presence, or kept my nose in the Bible.

Here's an example of what He gave me in return. One day while I was in my room worshipping Him, out of the blue He said "Here comes your chair." I guess I should back up a bit. I didn't have a chair in my bedroom, so when I got tired of standing, I would sit on the floor, which resulted in a back ache. I secretly wished I had a rocking chair, but I knew that was a non-necessity, so I never mentioned it to anyone. So right after God said "Here comes your chair," I heard a commotion downstairs, so I went down to see what was going on. It was Mark and one of our boys carrying a rocking chair into the house! God laid it on Mark's heart to buy me a chair without my even asking for it!

So what do you say? Are you ready to trade your kingdom for His? It beats putting all your faith in the mailman. All he's good for is a pile of bills, at least that's all we ever got. I'm finally in that sweet place where I can say, "I'm here now and that's enough." No, that's more than enough!

"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" (Matt 6: 33-34 NIV).

~ 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 and Paradise](#) is where she dabbles in poetry.

## Life is a Vapor



"Life is short," that's the thought that see-sawed in my mind three weeks ago, as my family and I sat in the frigid temperatures, watching firemen work to put out the fire that tried to engulf our home. There we sat in our Suburban, the nine of us: scared, cold, hungry and dazed.

Scripture tells us in James 4:14 that we don't know what tomorrow holds for us. We learn that our life is nothing more than a vapor-like boiling water that has been forgotten, we're here one minute and the next

minute we're gone.

One thing I'm finding out at 43 is that with each birthday, I think about life and the shortness of it. It scares me that the brevity of life is on my mind more than ever before. Beloved, we all are fading away. Of course, all of us hope to grow old, but the truth is- even as I grow old, my age doesn't seem like it's old enough for me to die. What's old enough anyway? Many of God's children who loved and served Him faithfully die at what we consider young ages. The end of this day has not been promised to us, regardless of our age. Therefore, it's not wise to think that being a certain age will exclude us from life's vapor. Thinking about the brevity of life coming at any age, I'm reminded of William Borden and Jim Elliot.

By the age of 25 William Borden was dead, but his statement is one that I wish to engrave upon my heart while I continue living: "No Reserves. No Retreats. No Regrets."

Jim Elliot died at the age of 28 and one of his famous quotes is: "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain that which he cannot lose."

It seems that both men at relatively young ages had already pondered "the brevity of life." They learned what Psalm 90:12 teaches, "To number our days," and years later, I and others write and speak about the wisdom that came from the heart of these two souls.

What can we do to purposely begin "numbering our days," in order to present our heart of wisdom to God, in the realization that life is a vapor? We can:

- Give God all of us. Give Him our whole heart and let Him work through us.
- Pray and ask our Father to enable us to get His will done in our life.
- Recognize that life is short and live our life like we believe that as fact.
- Appreciate every relationship God has blessed us to have and learn from them-see the blessing

of the lessons in even the difficult relationships.

- Inventory the direction our life is taking and set short and long-term goals. Being sure, if God gives us health and life, to accomplish some of the goals.
- Praise God for our life! Appreciate and love the portion of life that He has bestowed upon us!

~ Angela Ambroise

I will go ahead and say that I'm a Christian and wife to my beloved husband of 19 years. I have seven children that I home-school. I have a blog, [Devotions and More](#), and I reside in Texas.



## God and Souls



A friend of ours lost his wife to cancer two weeks ago. She was 39 years old. She had a brain tumor. She and her husband had three children.

What a tragedy.

This is not what God intended life to look like. He did not originally intend for us to die. Then sin entered the world and now everything is hard. Everything. But He has not left us alone. If we are His children, we have Him. And we have each other. We need each other--the body of Christ.

We need the body of Christ.

At the funeral of this dear young woman, testimony after testimony was given of how she lived her life and how she affected others because she invested in the lives of people. Those who shared spoke of a woman who loved her God, worshiped her God, hungered after her God, loved her husband, loved her children and poured herself into them. They spoke of how she ran her home, raised her children and served her husband. As I listened, one of the main things that came to my mind was that she lived her life for people. She invested her life into the lives of people!

We need to live with each other.

How else would they know how she loved her God, her husband and her children? How else would they have been able to learn from her on how to better fulfill their own roles if she had not opened her life to them and invited them in? How else would they have known of her deep hunger for God and her love of worship if she had not been real and shared her heart?

She shared her heart.

It is easy to get caught up in our lives and schedules and think we are too busy to open our lives and homes to others. It's easy to be committed to our own agenda, even our own families, and never open the door of our homes and lives to others. We can get so caught up in our duties--cleaning our house, making perfect meals, having everything in order...following our own schedules...and never allowing people to really know us and what God is doing in our lives.

Now that is a tragedy.

After the funeral service, I was reflecting on my own life. I'm sure I'm not the only one who does that after a funeral. It's a good time to evaluate one's life...when death is on your mind! The reality is that we are all going to die one day!

We are all going to die.

So what is it that I want to be remembered for? A clean house? Making the perfect meals all "from scratch"? Always being put together? No. That's not what I want. I don't think that is what God wants either.

I don't think that is what God wants.

I want to be transparent and real. I want others to know I struggle with discouragement and battle with sin, yet I cling to God. I want to leave dirty dishes in the sink after dinner and sit down and focus on people. I want to say, "I'm sorry" a million times because I am ever aware of my failure and of my need for God. I want to laugh with my children and to be Jesus to them. I want to hold hands with my husband and hug his neck every time I get the chance. I want to love, serve and respect him.

My need for God.

I want to make simple meals for lots of people, and not mind if there is mud on the floor or a dog on my couch! I want to text and call people randomly to say I love them, or share a verse, or challenge them. I want to hang out my window and wave and yell; and when people come to my door, I want to be happy to see them no matter what I am doing. I want people to be more important than material things and for God to be the center of everything. EVERYTHING. I want to love God and people.

That's it. God and souls.

Those are the only things that last - that are eternal. I want God and His people to be the most important things in my life.

The most important.

God and souls.

~ Gina Smith

Gina lives on a college campus where she and her husband live to minister to college students. She has a 19 year old daughter and a 16 year old son. She has been married to her best friend for 21 years. Find more of Gina's inspirational and encouraging articles at [Chats with an Old Lady](#).



## Flowers



If only life could be made up of my favorite moments. I love to think about the content look on my daughter, Rachel's face when she was wrapped in her daddy's arms. She would close her eyes with a slight smile that captured the essence of love. There's no safer place on earth than daddy's arms.

I love to remember what it was like to walk hand in hand with my little Rachel. No matter where we were, I felt like we were walking on clouds. I felt her cute little hand in mine and she would look up at me with a sweet smile that spoke volumes

of love. She would run to pick pretty flowers along our way and run back to me with her bouquet outstretched and say, "These are for you, Mommy!"

Some of the flowers were crushed in her little fingers and some even had the roots attached. She was so proud to give such a lovely gift to me and it was her special way of telling me how much she loved me.

Having her so late in life, my husband and I really appreciated having Rachel and always thank God for such an awesome gift like her. We had many wonderful times together as she grew up. We enjoyed lovely strolls as she got taller and taller that were filled with laughter, fun and picking bouquets of flowers.

When her wedding day came, I rushed about gathering a magnificent bouquet of flowers for her to carry down the aisle, and I saw the love and joy in her face as she proudly carried them, clutching her daddy's arm. I remember the special bouquet we brought to her when she gave birth to her own daughter with her loving husband by her side, and they would gather special flowers to bring to us in our elderly years when they visited.

I can barely remember the day I died, but it seemed that a moment after I closed my eyes, I found myself gazing into the loving eyes of Jesus as we sat in beautiful garden of heavenly flowers. What a magnificent sight to see! Just being there with Him filled every desire I ever had in my life. We were

surrounded by flowers with the most brilliant colors I had ever seen, and their sweet fragrance filled the air.

As we strolled through His garden, I couldn't resist picking some flowers here and there while we laughed and chatted. He showed me a huge, magnificent house He prepared just for me that took my breath away! Each room had a vase of beautiful flowers He had gathered for me.

Heavenly places are so much more magnificent than anything on earth; there's really no comparison. My husband and I love to ski in the mountains, stroll in the meadows, sun on the sparkling beaches, and we have all the time in the world to enjoy heaven.

One day we were relaxing on a heavenly beach with a picnic lunch, and Jesus joined us with some special news. He said that our daughter would be arriving that very day. I was shocked that she would arrive so soon and asked if something had happened to her on earth. Jesus laughed and said that although it seemed like only days had passed in heaven, many years on earth had gone by and she had lived to a very old age.

I rushed about gathering flowers to greet her and when I turned again, I saw her walking with Jesus, laughing as they strolled through the colorful gardens. We hugged and kissed each other with happy tears and I draped her arms with my beautiful bouquet of heavenly flowers. Her face looked ever so beautiful as she smelled their sweet fragrance. She ran into her daddy's arms and I once again saw her special look of love and contentment.

Life in the Kingdom is better than any of us ever imaged. I love my walks hand in hand with my Rachel, walking on heavenly clouds. Our endless days together with our family and friends are so precious to us and now life is made up of all my favorite moments.

But the most exciting moments in God's kingdom, by far, are the splendid times in the Lord's grand throne room. Rachel and I love to dress up in lovely gowns laced with gold and precious jewels. We rush to His temple with great excitement and quickly dash about gathering the most beautiful flowers we can find. My daughter excitedly holds her bouquet for Jesus, her fingers crushing some of flowers on the edges and some even have the roots still attached. We drape our flowers on His throne and look up to see Him smile and throw us a kiss.

Sometimes Rachel climbs up on our Heavenly Father's lap and wraps herself in His warm embrace. Her face is filled with contentment and it captures the very essence of everlasting love. There's no safer place in the universe than our Father's arms. Then we run to join the dancing and singing while everyone celebrates the greatest gift of all, being in His glorious presence for eternity.

"Yes, there will be an abundance of flowers  
and singing and joy!

The deserts will become as green as the mountains of Lebanon,  
as lovely as Mount Carmel or the plain of Sharon.

There the Lord will display his glory.

the splendor of our God."

- Isaiah 35:2 NLT

~ Susan Wood

Susan Wood 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 Inc.](#), 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.



## A Fleeting Moment



On a Sunday morning last summer, I awoke early and decided to go outside for my quiet time. I enjoy spending time with the Lord in His "outdoor cathedral" surrounded by the beauty of His creation.

A gentle breeze blew as the night insect sounds faded. No one else stirred about and the birds began singing their morning songs. I sat down on my deck and began to pray, enjoying the peace and solitude.

After a bit, I looked toward the east. Though still below the horizon, the sun cast golden rays of light in a red-gold sky. I wanted to capture a photo and I went in the house for my camera. No more than three or four minutes passed before I located it and hurried back outside.

Much to my dismay, the rich hues of red and gold had changed to a pearl gray. In a fleeting moment, the beautiful scene vanished taking with it the silence I enjoyed earlier. I attracted the attention of my cat, dogs, and other neighborhood animals. Instead of the pleasant chirping of songbirds, crows called out in loud voices. Disappointed, I went back inside. If only I had been prepared.

Like that morning sunrise, our lives are but a vapor. Whether a person lives one year or one-hundred years, it is only a speck on the time span of eternity. 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) reads, "but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect..."

We should not only be prepared to defend our faith, but be ready to share it with the lost. My grandmother had a small plaque near her front door that read, "Only one life will soon be past, only what's done for Christ will last." There may not be a next time to share the gospel with an unbelieving family member. We may not have another chance to encourage a friend with a kind word or to give a warm smile to a passing stranger.

I pray that my life shines with the love of Jesus so others will come to know Him as their Savior and Lord.

~ Joan Hall

Joan became a Christian at age ten, but many years passed before she allowed Jesus to be Lord of her life. Now she is passionate about telling others about the abundant life found in Christ. She is married to her best friend, John, and they serve together in prison ministry. Joan leads women's Bible studies and loves writing from her country home in East Texas. She co-leads a writer's group at her home church and has contributed to [Granola Bar Devotionals](#). You can find her at her personal blog, [Reflections](#).



## It was Just Yesterday



It was nearing the end of the work day when my cell phone rang. "Hey, Steph!" I answered. My friend sighed and asked if I was able to talk right now.

"Uh Oh," I said to myself. "Let me wrap up and I'll call you back."

I quickly gathered my things into a clean pile then I headed to the bathroom. I picked up the phone and called Stephanie. "You sure you can talk now, Rach?" she asked.

"Yes!" I answered

"Rach, Pierson passed away."

WHAT! EXCUSE ME! OH MY GOD! I could have passed out right then and there. I was speechless and didn't know what to say.

"Rach, Rach, are you alright?" Stephanie asked.

I'm going to have to call you back," I said.

As I stood there looking in the mirror, my heart had sunk and I just couldn't fight back the tears. Pierson was my ministry partner. We worked together in ministry for more than 15 years. We encouraged and supported one another when things got rough and we praised each other when things went well. I relied heavily on Pierson to keep me steady when the church board and elders would chop me up in committee.

Who was I going to go to now when I felt the burdens of the ministry pressing me down? I suddenly felt alone and lost. In the midst of my despair, I heard a still small voice whisper to me:  
"I prepared you for this. Now do my work and I will take care of you."

The night before Pierson's passing, I felt an overwhelming sense of sadness and I do mean OVERWHELMING. I just couldn't seem to brush it off. I was just overcome with the spirit of sadness. I immediately realized that I needed to seek God and ask for His guidance and comfort.

"Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7 NIV).

I grabbed my Bible and started to read and pray and read and pray. After several tries, I began to feel His presence and I was brought to His peaceful shores. He reminded me that He cared for me and that He will always be by my side. I finally mustered up the strength to leave the restroom and headed over to Pierson's house.

When I got there, the realness of his passing came to life as I saw the crowds of young people he had personally ministered to surrounding his home. I walked in and saw his mom mourning and asking God, "Why?" His sister and my dear friend Dorothy just looked at me and that alone spoke volumes. I knew at that moment that Pierson was no more.

I quickly sprung into action and started to comfort my friends and the youth while all the while crying on the inside. I knew that God had placed me there to care for His children. After all, He had given me my own grieving session the night before. As I saw the never-ending crowds of youth coming into the house, I realized that Pierson had indeed left a legacy. At the young age of 33, he had fulfilled the task that the Master had given to him and now he had been called to rest in the Lord.

**It was just yesterday** that Pierson sat in my Bible School class and played the devil's advocate as he usually did to bring up the questions that he knew the youth were afraid to ask.

**It was just yesterday** that we sat together talking about the call God had placed on our lives.

**It was just yesterday** that we sat together and planned the youth programs and Bible studies.

**It was just yesterday...**

Today as I continue on in ministry, I have learned a few things from Pierson's book that I would like to share.

Live everyday as though it was your last.  
Share Jesus with everyone.

Leave a legacy that others will be proud to follow.

~ Rachel Ineus

Rachel Ineus is the founder of [Annointed Beauty Ministries](#) and enjoys writing daily devotions that inspire others to seek a personal relationship with God. She resides in New York City with the love-of-her-life, Kenton David. She is currently pursuing her Graduate of Theology degree at Liberty University and hopes to build a ministry that will inspire women around the world to devote their lives and families to God. Her devotionals have been featured at [Granola Bar Devotionals](#), [Faith to Write](#) and [Hebron Highlights](#). You can read more of her writings at [Annointed Beauty](#).



## The Blue Cotton Blanket



One upon a time, long ago, where blue grass grew in Main Street America, and front porch swings were a safe place to watch life go by, I packed my bags, folded up my new cobalt blue comforter with Dogwood Rose colored flowers to go out in the world and, if not meet my destiny, then hunt it down like a terrier unleashed who finds the world so big that sometimes it is hard to figure which way to go.

My comforter was there through my college career, wrapped around me as I studied, worked on projects, or just needed a comfort moment. In a college dorm room, bedding is the primary décor statement (wall décor second). My Cobalt blue comforter with its Dogwood Rose colored flowers symbolized my boldness - no weak, thinned out blue pastel or wall flower pink - no - I was going to shape my future to my dreams - Cobalt blue spoke strength, determination, adventure.

Three years later, I stepped further into my future. My spirit gentled. My new comforter was Shabby Chic White with faint slashes of tea green and misty rose. My fading Cobalt Blue comforter, now Carolina Blue, found itself folded over a chair for cuddling on the couch or for taking naps.

Until my son was born. The blue seemed to brighten with a renewed vitality. Thrown on the floor, it provided a soft place to fall. As morning wore on, sleepiness pulling both of us, we'd wrap the blue around and fall into the snugly Kingdom of Nap.

When he turned 2, I decorated his Big Boy Room. He picked out a Snoopy Quilt with a blue background for his Big Boy Bed. During nap time one afternoon, when he was just 3, he dragged his blanket into my room, setting it on my bed. "I think you should have this blanket, Mom. It's so much nicer. I'll let you have it," he said as he slowly inched my fading into stone washed Corn Silk blue blanket over his shoulders and backed out of the room. "I'll just take this one since you won't be needing it now that you have my

nice Snoopy blanket."

And there began a back and forth, a sneak and take for a few years until it just stayed in his room, wrapped around him during sleep, snuggly time, movie time, and, yes, even spend the night time. Time faded the blanket to periwinkle. Not all the seams were there. That blanket went with him to college, all faded and full of memories. The pink had washed to a bleached out white.

One day, he brought The Girl home, the girl who would be his wife. They set a date. Then, one Christmas, six months before the wedding, he came home with his blanket and left it behind. The faded blue blanket just lay there. . . .

Until my 3rd son picked it up, wrapped it around himself, and wandered off with it to snuggle into sleep, watch a movie, or read, even on overnight sleepovers - terribly faded, terribly worn, terribly loved. . . .

~ Maryleigh Bucher

A wife of 27 years, a mom of 5 sons, a child of divorce become whole as a daughter of The King. With a BS degree in Journalism and MA in English from Eastern Kentucky University, I taught college composition and home school groups. Author of [Blue Cotton Memory](#), guest contributor to [The Home School Post](#), journalist, poet and creator of Standing at the Cross Roads, a program designed to break/prevent cycles of dysfunction.



## Author Interview: Kendra Norman-Bellamy



**1) How did you know that God was calling you into a writing ministry?** Initially, I didn't recognize it as ministry. What I knew for sure was that God had given me a gift to write. I knew that very soon after I sat down to create my first manuscript back in 1998. I had never attempted to write a novel before, yet it was flowing like water from a faucet, and I knew that it was God who was feeding me the ideas. I finished that manuscript and started another and then another. Inside of a year, I'd churned out three full

manuscripts. By the end of the following year, I'd written three more. Still, the realization that it was ministry didn't come until I embarked upon the mission to publish my debut novel (*For Love & Grace*) in 2002. I received an abundance of emails from people who were so touched and blessed by reading it. Then, while I was still a new and unknown author, I went to a literary retreat, and a registrant walked up to me and broke into tears as she told me how the book had saved her life. She had gone through a traumatic experience much like one of the lead characters in my book had, and she'd barricaded herself in her house because she couldn't face the world. She was angry at God for allowing her to experience

such a tragic loss, and all she wanted to do was die. Then one day a friend came by her home, placed For Love & Grace at her door, and then called her and left a voicemail telling her to get it and read it. She did, and she was spiritually revived and rejuvenated. She gleaned messages out of that novel that I didn't even realize were embedded between the pages. I knew then that it was ministry because only God could have done that.

**2) How do you prepare to write your novels?** Prayer, prayer, and more prayer! Every morning, I start my day with prayer and meditation, and in that sacred time, I ask God to guide my thought process and anoint my fingers. And He's never let me down. When I finish my devotional time, the next thing on my agenda is to hit the gym where I buckle down for a 60-minute cardio workout. And it's amazing how God constantly feeds me ideas as I'm exercising. Some days, my mind is flooded with so much that I want to stop the workout and just run to the computer because I'm afraid I'll forget it if I don't write it down right then. But it's always kept fresh, and by the time I finish my routine, shower, and get situated in my office, I'm fully equipped to take on the next scene or chapter of my current manuscript.

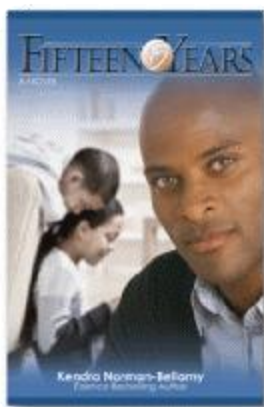
**3) What is your hope for each of your books?** I certainly want my books to bring entertainment to the readers, but I long for them to provide much more than that. More than anything, I want them to bring life to the reader. My heart's desire is that in the middle of all of the drama, romance, humor, and mystery, the readers will find hope, peace, joy, and a sense of spiritual direction for their lives. Despite the myth, Christian fiction is not written for Christians or "church folks" only. As my daddy would say, "That's a lie straight from the pits of hell." I've collected too many emails that prove differently. One that I received very recently came from a middle aged man who said that reading my books brought him BACK to Christ. If it brought him back, that means he wasn't already there. He was a backslider who, for his own personal reasons, wouldn't even step foot in the church. But he found his way back to the cross after being exposed to the message in the novel. So Christian based books reach far beyond the church. God's arms are not limited. He promised that His Word would not come back void. It reaches whomever He purposes for it to reach. That's what I hope for with each of my books. I hope they will bring restoration and LIFE to the reader.

**4) Your daughter is also a novelist. How have you been able to encourage her writing?** I'm very proud of Brittney ([www.BrittneyHolmes.com](http://www.BrittneyHolmes.com)). Her first book was published when she was just 17 years old. She's now 20 and is the author of three published novels, two of which have become national best sellers. She's a sophomore in college pursuing a double major in Journalism and Psychology, and it's a challenge for her to stay on top of her writing while balancing all that comes along with higher education. I definitely encourage her all that I can. But like me, writing comes second nature to Brittney, so it's not like she needs too big of a push from her mother. She's very self-motivated, but says that I'm the biggest influence in her life, and that means a lot to me. It's humbling to know that she looks at me and admires what I'm doing for God, and it has propelled her to do the same. I'm very thankful for that - the fact that she didn't have to look outside of her home to find a positive role model for her life. I believe few compliments are more meaningful to a parent than knowing they've made that kind of impression on their child.

**5) How do you continue to put Jesus first in your life?** I mentioned earlier that I start my days off with prayer. Literally, I put Jesus first. I roll out of bed and on to my knees. At the rising of every sun, nobody gets any of me before Jesus. That's very important to me - to give God my first fruit of the day. I don't want to wait until I go to bed to give Him the last. By then, I'm tired and sleepy, and God has been far too

good to me to offer Him my leftovers after I've given everybody and everything else the best of me. Every part of my work life is ministry based. In essence, I'm employed by God, and I love that notion.

**6) What has been the hardest step of obedience you have ever taken?** That would probably be launching the I Shall Not Die motivational ministry. I procrastinated (which is really a nice way of saying I disobeyed Him) for fourteen years on that one. God had given me the order to plant the seeds for this ministry in 1996, but I didn't want to do it. This ministry (and the book that I'm writing that shares the same title) is birthed out of a very painful time in my life, and quite frankly, I ran from the assignment because I didn't want to reopen the wounds. But God was merciful with me during my time of noncompliance, and what He showed me when I finally surrendered to His will is the blessing that this ministry is going to be to me and to those that I share it with. I'm in the process of preparing to make it a non-profit organization because there are doors that God wants to open for I Shall Not Die that being non-profit will make easier for me to walk through.



**7) Would you mind telling the story of how your first novel was published?** That's a long one, but I'll abbreviate it as much as possible. When I wrote *For Love & Grace*, I had no intention of publishing it. I had found writing to be therapeutic for me, and I had gotten to the point that I would write just for the joy of it. *For Love & Grace* wasn't the first manuscript I wrote, it was probably around the fifth or sixth. They were all in binders stacked up behind my bed - just a pile of stories that showcased God's grace and redemption. God was setting me up for this time in my life, but I had no idea. All I knew was when I finished *For Love & Grace*, something was different about it. I know it was the nudging of the Holy Spirit because publishing had never even a thought in my mind prior to that moment. Yet all of a sudden, I felt the burning desire to get this book in the hands of readers. I shopped it around to several publishing houses and received the standard rejection notices from all of them.

At that point I began researching the art of self-publishing. I didn't have any money to work with, but one day my brother-in-law came to visit my home and my husband told him what I wanted to do. He pulled up a chair next to where I sat at my computer and told me that he and his brothers were going to get together and give me the money I needed to make it happen. They followed through as promised, and in August 2002, *For Love & Grace* was born. Several months later, I got a call from BET Books, and the editor there told me that she'd gotten her hands on a copy of my self-published novel and wanted me to turn it into a 3-book BET series that they would publish. That was my introduction into the world of mainstream publishing, and God has remained faithful. I now write for three mainstream publishing houses.

**8) What is your greatest joy about writing?** By far, my greatest joy comes from the impact that the books have had on the lives of readers. When I get an email from someone like the gentleman who told me he'd been led back to Christ, or when I get letters such as the ones I often receive from women in prison who tell me how reading my stories have changed their lives and their outlooks on their future, that's my greatest joy. It's immeasurable. That's the kind of happiness and fulfillment that money can't buy and awards can't substitute. I know if I can change one life or rescue one soul; my writing is not in vain.

**9) Besides writing, you have founded and are involved in other ministries. Would you highlight a few?** There are a few arms of ministry under the KNB Publications ([www.KNB-Publications.com](http://www.KNB-Publications.com))

umbrella. One is Cruisin' For Christ ([www.CruisinForChrist.org](http://www.CruisinForChrist.org)), which is an at-sea ministry that I founded in 2007 as a way to commemorate Christian writing beyond books. It's a 7-day Caribbean cruise whose purpose is to celebrate artistries, across the board, that glorify God. Each year we have nationally acclaimed Christian recording artists, comedians, authors, praise dancers, mime ministers, spoken word artists, etc. who take the trip with us, and we have an absolute blast celebrating Christ at sea. Our next mission is in June of 2011. There is also the I Shall Not Die motivational ministry ([www.IShallNotDie.org](http://www.IShallNotDie.org)) that I birthed late last year. The primary focus of that ministry is to inspire and encourage everyone to live a Psalm 118:17 existence regardless of their current circumstances. It's a ministry that is based upon my own life experiences. Then there are the groups that I started just for writers. God has given me a passion for other writers. When I began writing, I didn't know any published authors, so there was no one for me to go to for answers about the craft or about the industry. I launched The Writer's Cocoon Focus Group ([www.writerscocoonfocusgroup.ning.com](http://www.writerscocoonfocusgroup.ning.com)) as a means to avail myself to as many aspiring writers as possible who might have questions about what to expect on their journeys. That group is an expansion of The Writer's Cocoon workshops that I travel the globe teaching. Additionally I created The Writer's Hut ([www.writershut.ning.com](http://www.writershut.ning.com)) which is a specialized online community for African American published writers who want to share, network, and critique with other published writers.

**10) What is your latest novel, *Fifteen Years*, about?** In this novel, readers are introduced to Josiah "JT" Tucker. He's a phenomenal success story. Brought up for the most part in the care of the state due to his incompetent parents, he was a prime candidate for the statistics, but he beat the odds. And he largely beats them because of one foster family who he was blessed to be placed with from ages nine until fourteen. He was taken from the family just before his fifteenth birthday and sent back to his neglectful mother, but not before they introduced him to the love of real family and the love of Christ. Fifteen years later, at the age of thirty, JT has graduated from college at the top of his class and is working his way up the ladder as a corporate executive in a Fortune 500 company. On the outside he's the picture of success, but on the inside he is a broken man who has not even felt like he's had an identity since being removed from his last foster home. So he sets out on a journey to find the family that he hasn't seen in fifteen years. And when he finds them, his foster parents still feel like Daddy and Mama, and his foster brother still feels like his little brother, but when he lays his eyes on his foster sister, Patrice, what he realizes is that a whole lot about people and the way your heart loves them can change in a matter of fifteen years.



For more information about Kendra Norman-Bellamy, please visit her web site ([kendranormanbellamy.com](http://kendranormanbellamy.com)).

## Substance of Life



On April 26, 2009, my niece Nevaeh Rae Wallace passed away at the tender age of 15 months. That event brought the idea of life and death to the forefront of my life. Life truly can end in a moment and when it is gone, there is no getting it back. One of the things I have pondered since the loss of Nevaeh is what is the purpose of life? I believe Jesus gives us several clues as to what matters to Him.

Jesus taught us that the greatest commandments are to "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself' (Luke 10:27 NIV). I truly believe that doing these things well brings meaning to life.

Jesus also confirms the importance of relationship when He tells the parable in Matthew 24:45-50 (NIV):

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the master has put in charge of the servants in his household to give them their food at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whose master finds him doing so when he returns. I tell you the truth, he will put him in charge of all his possessions. But suppose that servant is wicked and says to himself, 'My master is staying away a long time,' and he then begins to beat his fellow servants and to eat and drink with drunkards. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of."

In the parable, the wicked servant began beating his fellow servants and this grieved His heart. The master wasn't concerned with the fact they had let the business slide, or that the servant's management had lost his company thousands of dollars rather He cared about the way they were treating one another.

If you are like me, though, you can easily get caught up in the day to day of life and easily forget to love one another. One way I like to keep the fragility of life in the forefront of my mind is by praying Psalm 90:12 (NIV):

"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

Starting my day out this way, helps me to live my life from the perspective that my days are numbered and today could potentially be my last. Then at the end of those days, I check in with myself and ask, "Could I die tonight without any regrets? If my kids, my husband and my friends woke up in the morning and I was gone, what would their last memories of me be? Would it be laughing, loving and enjoying life or would it be crabby, yelling and arguing?" I love the days when I can say, "This was a 'perfect day.' I could go today."

It is hard to be impatient and harsh with those you love when you are reminded that it is a privilege to even have one another. Death gives you an appreciation for life and it makes you realize the value of each breath that you take. I don't know when my last days, hours or minutes will be. I don't know if I will be going home in the rapture or if the Lord will take me a different way. What I do know is that life is short, but a breath and what the Lord asks of us while we are here, is that we love Him and love one another.

That is the substance of life.

~ Jaime Farkas

Jaime Farkas has been happily married for the last 8 years to her high school sweetheart. She has two beautiful children: a 5 1/2 year old boy and a 4 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!](#)



## Learning How to Count Correctly



"I'm still older than you!" my eldest son taunts his sister, towering over her. "I'm eight and you're only seven. I know stuff better than you do. 'Specially how to play this game," he chuckle with self satisfaction.

Angrily, Ari jumps up, nearly knocking her brother down. "I'm seven and a half!" she retorts. "You can't tell me what to do! I know how to play it too!"

Brushing away a tear, Arianna runs up to me and asks, "I'm just almost as old as Anthony, aren't I, Momma? He can't tell me how to play, can he?" Anxiously, she peers at me while I let out a sigh.

"Well, baby, first of all, you're not quite seven and a half yet," I start out.

"HA!" Anthony yells, grinning mischievously from across the room.

"But," I continue, "you've been playing this game for as long as Anthony has and you both know the rules pretty well..."

Not satisfied with this beginning, Arianna interrupts me. "I am TOO seven and a half! I mean, I think I'm a 'half'. Aren't you a half, Momma?"

Well yes, I think. Technically I'm 41 and a half...but who's counting?

Liquid pools of inquisitive brown eyes stare at me - desperate for me to affirm her. It's not that Arianna's interested in me affirming her age. What she wants from me is to acknowledge the wisdom she has incurred over the years.

"Baby," I conclude, "you DO know how to play this game. You're smart and you know what to do. What's this argument really about?"

Arianna starts rattling back the problems that she and Anthony have, but I have to admit, I'm only half-heartedly listening. For my mind is stuck like glue on one fact: I'm 41 and a half.

"...and THAT'S why Anthony can't tell me what to do. See? The rules say I get to go again."

Arianna pauses, waiting for me to encourage her to keep talking, but the silence tells her that she no longer has my attention. Leaning close to my face, she starts a one word chant to bring me out of my reverie.

"Mom? Mom? Mom? Mahhhhhh-mmmmmmm?!"

I shake my head as if to dislodge the thought of impending mortality, but the kids misinterpret this. Arianna starts wailing, "But I'm right, Mom!!!" Anthony pumps his hands over his head in victory declaring, "Alright! She agrees with me!"

Both kids then escalate the argument to shouting proportions.

Now, I'm fully back in the present, but it's too late. Neither child has a clue what I've been thinking, nor do I have any idea what their argument is about.

All I know is I'm 41 and a half, death is looming around the corner, and I have a mess on my hands. Ever have one of those moments?

For those of us who are parents, what is it about our kids declaring their ages, especially the halves? I suppose that somehow it makes them feel taller and wiser, more sophisticated, more put together.

I've been there, and I'm sure you have too. Did you have big moments when you declared a certain age? When I turned ten, I remember running to my mother and gleefully shouting, "I'm TWO numbers now, Mom!" Or the time when I turned thirteen, I declared myself a teenager. I was thrilled, while Mom looked mortified. When I turned sixteen, I remember telling my mom, "You don't have to worry about me any more, Mom. I'm sixteen now, and I can drive myself to church. Isn't that great?"

Great? Was I insane? How could I possibly think that my mother wouldn't worry about having a sixteen year old daughter? I still have a decade left to go before my daughter turns sixteen and already I'm worrying.

Well, maybe I should cut myself some slack. I wasn't insane.

I was naïve.

When did I stop counting the numbers of my age? When did the "half" no longer seem important?

I think there were a number of contributing factors.

When I stood at my mother's grave when I was 22 years old, I felt the weight of grief that aged me rapidly. When I stood at my father's grave three years later, my spirit aged even more. And each and every miscarriage that happened during that time and the years that followed added wisdom...and more grief. But it was my infant daughter's casket in the snow that willed me to forget my age all together. For a period of time, I could not even tell you how old I was. I only knew that whatever the calendar said...it lied. I felt a thousand times older than that.

Yet, God did not see fit to leave me there in my despair and grief. Through my daughter's death, God showed me how to truly count the cost of the brevity of life - viewing each and every day as a pure gift from God above. My daughter Anna fought every single day of her life in utero to experience just one more day. One more kick. One more reason to hiccup. One more chance to remind me that she's here that and she exists.

Anna's life taught me to value my own. To realize that to walk upon this earth is not to be taken for granted, but to be cherished every single day. Birthdays are not meant to be shirked at, but embraced with all the vitality that life has to offer. My daughter taught me the value of laughter, and the necessity of tears.

Psalm 90:12 (NIV) says, "Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom."

We can number our days any number of ways, but if we don't consider the cost of them the way God would have us to, then we're still missing the point.

Is death really looming around the corner for me at my ripe old age of 41 and a half? Probably not, but then, only God knows the number of my days altogether. His Word says in Psalm 139:16 (NIV), "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." And I take delight in that. Yes, my time on earth is brief, but then again, this life is not about this life. It's about living life in an earthly utero, before we are birthed into eternal life. Someone once told me that a baby experiencing birth and everyone experiencing death have this in common: It's painful and dark at first, but there is great joy and light and love waiting on the other side!

Yes, compared to eternity, our time here is a mere breath, but I simply think that's because God wants to prepare our hearts for eternity with Him. I'd also like to romantically think that this is about as much time as He can stand being physically apart from us as well.

I trust God's heart towards each of us. I trust the Days He has written down in His book. I trust that His timing is perfect for each one of us, even if those days seem tragically cut short in our eyes. They are not cut short in His eyes. His will is perfect - like His love, like His peace, like His understanding.

So maybe I should stop geeking out over being 41 and a half and embrace it with aplomb. Anna would want me to. And so does our Lord.

Psalm 39:4 (AMP) says, "Lord, make me to know my end and [to appreciate] the measure of my days-- what it is; let me know and realize how frail I am [how transient is my stay here]."

I'll either see you here, or there, but for sure one day - in the air.

~ Holly Baxley

Writing is easy. You just poke your heart with a pen and bleed out the truth. Holly Baxley will tell you this with a wry smile. That's why I deal with so much writer's block. It takes a lot of guts and mental preparation to donate one's heart to the public, and even then, one is never quite fortified to deal with the consequences. You find that your heart becomes larger & tender to the world around you. Your ears pick up the voices of other writers, who are as passionate as you are in spreading the Word of Truth to the lost and dying. Your arms become linked with fellow sojourners who understand your own journey, having experienced similar bumps and twists in the road. And your spiritual legs become strengthened in the Lord as you experience Him in fresh, dynamic ways with each new leap of faith. Yes, once you donate your heart through writing, there is no going back. You will be changed and glad for it. I am. After all, writing is easy. Check out Holly's songwriting and speaking topics at [Holly Baxley](#) and her personal blog at [Sing Over Me](#).



## Life and Death



I pull the covers across my face, hiding from the dark. What was that sound? Did I hear footsteps? Branches scratch the window. I peek. A shadow moves and, though alone, I sense...a presence. Trembling, I pray for protection and, after awhile, drift into sleep... and nightmares.

That was my life before Christ. Death lurked around each corner - car crash, choke on a burger, get cancer or hit by random flying debris ... at any moment I could die.

Praise God, I'm free of that constant fear.

I do think on death often, though. I'm not watching shadows, brooding or wringing my hands, but I don't know how many days I have, so am I making the best of today? If I would die tomorrow, would I be pleased with how I invested today? How I spoke to my kids and husband? How I thought, prayed, acted?

Did I waste today?

Sound depressing or pessimistic? I hope not. I hope you see focus, motivation and purpose - that's

exactly what happens when I think about life, death and eternity. Maybe that's why Ecclesiastes 7:4 (NLT) says, "A wise person thinks a lot about death, while a fool thinks only about having a good time."

To Think About Death Does a Few Things:

- **Humbles me** - I can not continue to believe and act as though it's all about me when it's clear that I control neither my beginning nor end.
- **Aligns Priorities** - If I die next week, what would quickly disappear from my list of things to do? Suddenly my time, words and energy begin to align with God's priorities.
- **Eternity-Minded** - My actions and choices have eternal impact. Suddenly everyone is an eternal being, not just an 'annoying neighbor' or a relative to 'put up with.' Everyone walks toward eternity daily. Do I help or hinder their progress toward Jesus?
- **Motivates** - If this is my last week with my children, what would I want them to know? I want to help guide them into an eternity with Jesus! I don't know about you, but it sure lights a fire under me to do all I can right now! No, I don't get it right every day or even every week. I waste time and squirm from responsibility with the best of them. The more we seek God though, the more we live for Him.

Some Helpful Verses:

"It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart." - Ecclesiastes 7:2 (NIV)

"Rescue those being led away to death; hold back those staggering toward slaughter."  
- Proverbs 24:11 (NIV)

"The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever." - Isaiah 40:8 (NIV)

"Break my heart for what breaks yours. All that I am for your kingdom's cause As I walk this earth into Eternity." - Amen! ( Lyrics from 'Hosanna' by Hillsong)

~ Kimberly Dawn

Kimberly Dawn Rempel is an active disciple of Jesus, mom to 2 toddlers and a writer. Join her in her journey to joyful motherhood and purposeful living at [Little Minute](#).



## ...as a mere breath!



"O Lord, make me know my end  
and what is the measure of my days;  
let me know how fleeting I am!  
Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths,  
and my lifetime is as nothing before you.  
Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!"  
- Psalm 39:4-5 (ESV)

Pondering, I find I am fearful that I am nothing but a vapor. That I do not count. That no one notices me. That I am not making a difference in this world. Yet, it is the world that yells loudly in my ears to be, to do, to follow the crowd, to eat this or that, to act or look in certain ways; and these messages go on and on.

"What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (James 4:14b ESV).

What is my life? My life is a vapor, a mist, a breath. This is all the more reason to be all that God has created me to be and to do. For today I could breathe my last and utter my final word. My thoughts remind me of the victory I have with every breath according to God's Word. I rejoice!

Seventeen years ago, I was given a new life from the Lord. As I spend time with Him, He guides me and teaches me. His Love permeates my heart. "We love because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19 ESV). His Light radiates from my face as I become more like Him. "And we all, with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit" (2 Corinthians 3:18 ESV).

He allows me to focus on His world through His eyes. I know that each breath of mine is His. I cherish the moments with Him - seeing through His eyes and listening through His ears. I trust Him to walk with me through the brightly lit fields of spring flowers and through the harsh realities of nursing home life. We walk together and . . .

- By His grace, I care for my 96 year old mother, loving her no matter where her mind is or isn't today, massaging her feet with peppermint lotion, keeping flowers, fruit, and favorites in her room, reminiscing, reminding.
- By His tenderness and compassion, I am able to love elderly nursing home residents with kind words, a touch, a smile, a drink of fresh water.
- By His joy, I just love several children whose mothers work as nurses' aides at the nursing home. I read, hug, and talk with them. Through His eyes, I watch these precious, well-behaved young ones spend hours in this place waiting for their mothers, touching the hearts of elderly ones in their innocent, wholesome, unconditional ways. I am amazed and know it is by His Power.
- By His tender mercies, I take my seventy-eight year old Alzheimer-ridden brother-in-law for a

ride so my husband and his visiting sister can have an hour alone.

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me." " And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me'"(Matthew 25:35-36, 40 ESV).

The beauty of reflecting Christ enlarges my life. But slowing down so as not to miss an opportunity does not come easily in today's hectic pace; yet with each breath, I will try. This is my life...one breath. Let not my last breath come because my light has yet to shine and my love has yet to love. I pray that I may be used up for my LORD.

"I will sing to the Lord as long as I live;  
I will sing praise to my God while I have being."  
- Psalm 104:33 (ESV)

~ Linda Gill

Linda Gill is a retired school teacher and children's librarian. Her marriage of 16 years is Christ-centered.

They have no children. She cares for her 96 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. She loves writing these days and can be found at her blog: [Being Woven](#) where she journals her spiritual journey with Jesus. You can also find her at [Granola Bar Devotional](#) and [Quiet Time Ministries Cafe](#).



## Healthy Reminders



Our children only live at home for a short while. This is a limited amount of time to give them the tools needed to lead a healthy lifestyle. Here are some suggestions for healthier diet that you can pass onto them.

Replace sodas with water or Crystal Light.

Replaces juices with the actual fruit instead because many juices are filled with sugar (even if say they're healthy) and children only need 4 ounces of juice per day.

Replace red meat in favorite meals with lean turkey, chicken or fish.

Replace junk food snacks with low-fat snacks, fruits, or chocolate covered raisins/nuts.

Replace fried foods for baked or grilled foods.

For children over age 2yrs -- Replace whole milk with 2% milk or fat free milk. Also, these children only need 2-3 servings of milk a day.

For teenagers -- consider replacing fast food with frozen dinners that show exact calories and already have portion control done for you.

For fast food eaters -- start by replacing your usual meal with the kids meal. For kids and adults, choose the kids meal (with drink) which already has 600-700 calories! Non-exercising teenagers and adults only need about 1500-2000 calories per day so this is still plenty of food.

If you want to eat salad -- replace the fast food salads with a salad from home. Fast food salads have hidden calories, so buy veggies or pre-cut, pre-packaged salads then add your own low-fat, low-calorie dressing.

At the movies -- No matter how hungry your children/teenagers think they are, only give them the kid-sized popcorn and drink. Small popcorn is already about 600 calories.

Some restaurants have calorie info on their website. Check this before going out to restaurants. Always feel free to get a "to-go" box when eating out. Save that food in the refrigerator and that's one less meal to prepare later!

Avoid pressures of daily "home cooked meals" by preparing large amounts of food on the weekends then storing it in the refrigerator. Use the saved time during the week for homework or exercise activities.

Always eat breakfast! Skipping meals does not help with weight loss. It tells the body to hold on to what it already has.

Also, encourage at least 30 minutes of continuous exercise on most days of the week. Children should be on a sports team year-round, whether through the school, church, or YMCA. Choose sports like soccer, track, baseball, basketball to allow them to be healthy and make friends along the way. Discuss options with your children and get them moving today!

~ Kelly Coleman, M.D.

Doctor Kelly Coleman is a native Houstonian who did medical school in Galveston, residency in Corpus Christi, and now is back home working as a general pediatrician. She has a passion to work with childhood obesity.



### This Vaporous Life (Issue Poem)

As the sun peaks over the horizon,  
brilliant hues of color radiate outward.

Darkness begins its miraculous  
transformation into light.

A new day dawns,  
bringing new graces  
and new mercies.

The temporal once again  
manifests itself and we  
glimpse a new today.

A today that belongs to the Lord.

Our life's brevity lies solely  
in the Hands of our Creator.

He holds our tomorrows,  
and numbers our days.

He measures the whisper of our lives  
by the breadth of His Hand.

Our todays are fleeting.  
Our tomorrows never promised.



Our yesterdays to be cherished.

Life indeed is a vapor.  
Rising like a mist and  
evaporating into eternity.

We are cast on this earth  
like a shadow.

Merely the breath of God -  
exhaled at birth and  
inhaled at death.

Our temporary existence  
replaced by our  
eternal home  
With our Savior.

~ Beth Herring

Beth Herring 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 5 1/2 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 4 His Glory](#).



## Closing Prayer: The Vapor Psalm



"Whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away."

~ James 4:14 NKJV ~

"LORD, make me to know my end, And what [is] the measure of my days, That I may know how frail I am. Indeed, You have made my days as handbreadths, And my age is as nothing before You; certainly every man at his best state is but vapor. Selah"

~ Psalm 39:5 NKJV ~

After reading these reminders of who I truly am in comparison to You my Eternal God, I am humbly

reminded as I ponder, "I am truly nothing apart from You."

My frailties and shortcomings are a reminder in my every breath, which brings me closer to my end on this earth, yet closer to my beginning with You. My mind is truly drawn to the 'cliff of vanish', unable to comprehend eternity in the midst of this dimension that has an end.

Lord, as I am humbled with great awe. All those things that I stir with great anxiety and worry within my soul are truly a waste, especially in the midst of my life that is just...a vapor.

The beauty of Who You are, in the midst of who I am, truly brings me to Your All-Consuming Fire that disintegrates the wood, hay and stubble of this life. I desire Your eternity inside of me. This life has an end. The physical 'case' that carries my spirit will one day return to the dust of the earth. The only thing that will remain on this earth will be just that: remains.

Lord, I am reminded of what my life is in comparison to eternity. I need to make the obedient choice to remain in You: the Immovable, Everlasting God. As I remain in You - loving You with all my heart, soul, mind and strength - I can also pour forth Your love upon my husband, children and others with whom I come across on a daily basis; especially the ones who are not celebrated or lovable. The only way this can truly take place is by remaining in You. I find confidence in You as I obey Your will, moment by moment. I must truly worship You in the midst of a life that desires to worship everything else but You.

Thank You, Father, for You are Everlasting God! You are Eternal! You are The Beginning and The End. Yet, You have no beginning and no end. The thought of You brings me to exuberant praise! I am in awe, wonder and humbled by Your All Powerful, Matchless, Glorious Majesty! I pray that even in the midst of the vapor of life, that my life will declare Your glory to the end of my life. Hallelujah to My Holy, Righteous King. All Holiness, Glory and Honor belong to You! Your Holiness, Glory and Majestic Honor are more than worthy to be praised forever and ever. In Jesus' Mighty, Triumphant, Victorious, Glorious, Lion of Judah Name. Amen!

~ Teresa Stevens Criswell

Encouraging. Passionate. Dramatic. Crazy. Funny -- these words describe Teresa Criswell. 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](#).



## Issue Photographer



Cheryl Ann Tooley is a woman on a mission. After years of heart-wrenching infertility, she was blessed with her first miracle child, a son named Asher Holden, now 2 1/2, conceived via in vitro fertilization. Against all odds, she is now pregnant again at 41! Cheryl loves Jesus, her trucker mogul husband, children, her incredible circle of Godly friends, all things [Bay Area Fellowship](#), writing, photography and horses. She knows God has a wonderful plan to use them all for His Kingdom. Her family blog is [The Tooley Times](#) and her photography website is [Cheryl Ann Tooley Photography](#).