

city lights

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“The heavens are telling of the glory of God; and their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.”

–Psalm 19:1



Let the redeemed of the LORD say so!

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

Fall 2016

Sharing Your God Story

“... He sent him away with the words, ‘Go back home and tell them all what wonderful things God has done for you.’ So the man went away and told the marvellous story of what Jesus had done for him, all over the town.” –Luke 8:39

Cover Photo:

God’s Glory on Display

by Josh Felix at the Spiral Jetty

Interior Photos

Jon Bloom, Jim Catlin, Josh & Sharmila Felix, Bob Holder, Shelley Kancitis, Diane Kulkarni, Aaron Lippard, Naomi Zacharias, David Roper, Joshua Roper, Linda Snook, Skydiver Mark, Sarah Thebarga, and Timeless Traditions

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. *Write Your Own Story*.

Sharing Your God Story

“I think we were born as stories and we were born for stories. Which means we were born to end chapters and begin new ones. We were born for ups and downs, for surprise endings and unexpected plot twists.

As we live out our narratives, we are made to take the risk of beginning new chapters — and taking especially gentle care of others who are starting new chapters of their own.

And when we write the final words of our story, when our last breath writes, The End, we will find ourselves in the best story of all, where all of our narratives coalesce, and all of our souls belong.” – Sarah Thebarga

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

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

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

The theme for our Spring 2017 issue is:

“Lessons Learned”

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

–Roman 15:4

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

Deadline March 15, 2017

Contact: Diane at dinawriting09@gmail.com
or 435-723-8486.

SAMPLE MEDITATION: MY GOD STORY

“Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.” –Hebrews 11:6

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

–Matthew 11:28-30 *The Message*

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” –Galatians 2:20

“Jesus went without comfort so that you might have it. He postponed joy so that you might share in it. He willingly chose isolation so that you might never be alone in your hurt and sorrow. He had no real fellowship so that fellowship might be yours, this moment. This alone is enough cause for great gratitude!” – Joni Eareckson Tada

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

“With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers, as an act of intelligent worship, to give Him your bodies, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to Him and acceptable by Him. Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all His demands and moves towards the goal of true maturity.”
–Romans 12:1-2 *Phillips Translation*

“Your words were found, and I ate them, and Your words became to me a joy and the delight of my heart for I am called by Your name, O Lord, God of hosts.” –Jer. 15:16

“God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.”

– John Piper

“You did not choose Me but I chose you, and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit, and that your fruit would remain, so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name He may give to you.” – John 15:16

“For God, who said, ‘Let there be light in the darkness,’ has made this light shine in our hearts so we could know the glory of God that is seen in the face of Jesus Christ.” – II Corinthians 4:6

“As brother stands by brother in distress, binding up his wounds and soothing his pain, so let us show our love towards our enemy. There is no deeper distress to be found in the world, no pain more bitter than our enemy’s. Nowhere is service more necessary or more blessed than when we serve our enemies.”

–Dietrich Bonhoeffer

*Love One Another
as I have Loved you.*

John 13:34

“We never pray against our government or call down curses on them. Instead, we have learned that God is in control both of our own lives and the government we live under. God has used China’s government for His own purposes, molding and shaping His children as He sees fit. Instead of focusing our prayers against any political system, we pray that regardless of what happens to us, we will be pleasing to God. . . . I didn’t suffer for Jesus in prison. No! I was with Jesus and I experienced His very real presence, joy, and peace every day. It’s not those in prison for the sake of the gospel who suffer. The person who suffers is he who never experiences God’s intimate presence.”
–Brother Yun, *The Heavenly Man*

True spiritual awakening is “when God has free course to speak into your life and there is no resistance to His voice.” –Carter Conlon, Times Square Church, NYC

My Dad's Passing

Jim Catlin – Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

My Dad passed away ten years ago. It was not expected. Newsmen employ a detached phrase. There were “complications” in surgery. Or more precisely, at the end of the surgery. Heart valve replacement. The doctor had warned him that at his age, 84, there was a 20% fatality rate but he had been so attentive to his health that everyone pushed aside the numbers. His mind was still sharp. His step was quick.

While the surgery was a success, in the end, his heart simply wouldn't restart. A machine takes over the job of pumping blood so your heart can be motionless during the procedure. As the cardiologist explained it me, his heart had just gotten used to resting during the procedure and preferred to stay that way.

The scene in the waiting room afterwards was right out of a TV drama. Throughout the day, looking up from my magazine, families came and went. Smiling doctors entered the room. Relieved families hugged. Now late in the day, they were all gone. I sat with my brother and my Mom alone in this expansive waiting room with a mounting sense of dread.

We were called into an adjoining room, a small, private room, where the cardiologist and the hospital's chaplain soon joined us. I felt so bad for the surgeon. He was clearly upset. He and my Dad had enjoyed an unusually friendly relationship so he was losing a friend and not just a patient. I had to counsel him and reassure him of my confidence in his skills, having done everything possible. His difficult smile was appreciative. And when the chaplain found out that I was a pastor he was visibly relieved.

During this time in the private room I turned away from the discussions with the surgeon and the chaplain to see my Mom's vacant stare at the floor. I spun around and knelt on one knee in front of her, intersecting the spot at which she was staring. I took her hand, looked into her eyes and said, "What a blessing God has given you to have two sons like us that love you. We will take care of you." Her face lightened slightly, still bludgeoned by the sudden grief, and her eyes said what she couldn't speak. She was thankful. I will never forget that face.

So we did just that. For many weeks, Dorothy and I tag-teamed flying from Utah to Spokane to stay with her. We made arrangements for her to move closer to my brother

in Oregon. Then we had an epic moving expedition a few months later and she resettled into a wonderful assisted care place in Albany.

In a year's time, she was gone too.

As I write this, I experience again what I so often tell others in grief. That is, grief never goes away. You never "get past it". But you do learn to live with it and, over time, this new emotional hitch-hiker transforms itself. At first, all it can talk about is loss but then, more and more, it's all about fullness.

It reminds me that it is God who arranges our paths such that our road in life is sprinkled with people not of our own choosing, friends and family alike. They are not incidental. They are deliberate, hand-picked, undeserved blessings to us. And this present grief, transformed as it is, causes me to look up at the sky and smile and thank God for His wisdom in connecting me with someone now gone.

Sure. I would have liked more time with them but boy, how I enjoyed the time we had! The ongoing ache, as painful as it is, serves a welcome purpose. It calls my heart to thankfulness. So I break from what I am doing, lean back for a moment and I relive countless moments shared.

My loss has become a window into my fullness. A fullness orchestrated by a loving God who, through the nearness of many, shows me that His nearness is my good.

Formally trained as an engineer, **Jim Catlin** keeps pestering the Creator about why He made things the way He did. And for the last four decades, those questions have



become more focused on the weightless and enduring issues of the heart and less about the mechanics of matter and energy.

Jim and Dorothy just celebrated 40 years of marriage and have four grown children. Jim serves as pastor at Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah.



Boulder Mountain in Fall. Joshua Roper Photography.

QUICKNESS

by David Roper – Boise, Idaho

*“My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
They come to an end as the thread runs out.” —Job 7:6 NEB*

As I look back on my 83 years of life I'm impressed by the swiftness with which these years have flitted by. It seems but yesterday that I was young and now I am old.

Sages have described our life-span as a shadow, a dream, a moving mist, a spray of flowers that promptly withers, an m-dash between the birth and death dates on our gravestones, a bird in flight—“as though a sparrow flew swiftly through the hall, coming in by one door and out by the other” (the Venerable Bede).

Job states the truth baldly: *“Life is short and full of trouble”* (14:1). (A friend of mine adds, “You have to eat to keep up your strength.”)

It's not the troubles of life that concern me, however; it's the thought that my life will be finished before I am. So many things on my bucket list are yet uncompleted, so many projects undone. As Job put it, the thread will run out before the fabric I'm weaving is done.

There's a bit of a problem with the text because no one knows the meaning of the word with which Job ends his comparison. Parallelism suggests that the word usually translated “without hope” is part of the illustration taken from weaving. Hence the New English Bible translates, *“My days ... come to an end as the thread runs out.”*

Peterson paraphrases, *“My days come and go swifter than the click of knitting needles and then the yarn runs out—an unfinished life!”* (Job 7:6 –*The Message*).

Indeed. So many trout streams I've scouted that I'll never fish. So many trails I've traced on contour maps that I'll never walk. So many projects that Carolyn and I have dreamed about that we'll never complete. So much to do; so little time to do it.

But I have achieved the one thing for which I was created, the thing without which nothing else matters: I have come to know and believe the love that God has for me (1 John 4:16).

Poet Henry Vaughn writes,

*Thou art a toilsome mole, or less;
A moving mist;
But life is what none can express:
A quickness which my God hath kissed.*

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



<https://dhp.org/authors-and-artists/david-roper.html>



“EXTRAordinary: because nothing is ordinary with Jesus”

Four youth and three adults from Main Street volunteered last July for Week of Hope in San Diego, California.

One Shirt, Two Shirts, Red Shirt, Red Shirts...

By Karen Holder—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

As a “Red Shirt” Volunteer Staff member for Group Mission Trips, I pack my suitcase light and never have to worry about what to wear for a week. I get up early in the morning, usually by 5:15 am, grab a clean red T-shirt and a pair of denim or khaki pants, and I’m ready to go for the day until bedtime around 11:00 pm. Easy, right?

Before I answer that question let me give you some background on how my husband, Bob and I got started.

We have been serving as Red Shirt Volunteer Staff on Workcamp and Week of Hope mission trips since 2004. It began when our youngest son, Joel, encouraged us to apply for volunteer staff. For the next couple of years, it was a family affair for the three of us.

Joel had been on several Group youth mission trips as a high school youth group member with our church and then after college he served on staff with Group as a Site Writer. For him it was a life changing experience.

Our first workcamp experience was in Monument Valley, Utah on Navajo land. Joel was a Site Coach, helping youth through the mechanics of construction in repairing homes. Bob was the Photographer/Program Assistant. My job was Cafeteria Host/Hospitality Team Member. Those have been our tasks for these many years serving on staff.

Easy? I would put it in the category of “not complicated.” My responsibility is to create a welcoming and pleasant atmosphere in the kitchen/cafeteria and at camp by working alongside the summer staff to organize the kitchen/cafeteria; keeping tables cleaned and floors mopped; helping prepare breakfasts and dinners; preparing and organizing the lunch line early in the morning for the crew breakmakers; filling five-gallon water jugs with ice and water for crew to take out on site—Bob is a huge help and a take-charge kinda guy for that task; interacting with the campers

during meal times and during our own youth group evening devotions; and establishing a good rapport and relationship with the summer staff.

With long days, often hot conditions, heavy lifting, little sleep, and being bone weary, we face lots of problem solving, and a continuous letting go of ourselves to give and serve others. But it is so, so worth it and rewarding! Colossians 3:23-24 says, “*Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.*”

Over the years, I have found myself in a position of encourager to the cook staff at workcamp or the young college students who are the paid Red Shirt Summer Staff for Week of Hope. While we count and package meat and cheese slices, lettuce, and condiments for sandwiches for each of the 15-40+ crews, we talk and laugh and share. I so enjoy getting to know these wonderful women, hear their life stories and deep faith in God. And often the opportunity comes to pray with them over something in their lives.

It was no different this past summer, 2016 in San Diego. One of the young women on summer staff was distraught about an event in her past that needed to be shared with her family who would be coming to serve the very next week. She had never felt comfortable to tell anyone but a grief counselor about it until that day when she and I were sitting together preparing lunches. She had not even told family about it and now, as part of her testimony, it was going to be made public.

We sat together, with tears running down our faces, hugging each other and praying, allowing God’s EXTRAordinary love wash over us. I recalled what Jesus said: “*And the King will say, ‘I tell you the truth, when you did it to one of the least of these My brothers and sisters, you were doing it to Me!’*” – Matthew 25:40

This is just one example of life on our mission trip this year. “EXTRAordinary: because nothing is ordinary with Jesus” was the theme for 2016 Week of Hope. And it was! It is such a blessing to work side by side with other Red Shirt staff, youth and adults.

So why Group Mission Trips – either Workcamp or Week of Hope? It is EXTRAordinary...Grow in your walk and faith in Jesus...Serve others...and Lives are changed!

I have
**NO GREATER
JOY**
than to hear that
my children
walk in the truth.

III John 1:4

A brief history about Group Mission Trips (formerly Group Workcamps Foundations):

Group Mission Trips include Workcamp and Week of Hope. It is a subsidiary of Group Publishing, the Sunday School curriculum publishers. The first workcamp was launched in 1977 after a devastating flood in Loveland, Colorado. Youth from the surrounding area gathered together to help with relief efforts.

Over 20,000 youth and adults have participated in week-long mission trips each summer since that first workcamp. They come from across the country, from small and large churches, to serve on crews doing community service and home repairs.

2017 will mark the 40th year of creating mission experiences, nationally and internationally, with the emphasis on spiritual growth. Being Jesus-centered, the lives of everyone involved, from participants to residents to co-sponsors to summer staff, are transformed.

Karen Holder has been a Brigham City, Utah resident since 2005. She has been married to Bob for 42 years. They have two grown and married sons and three grandchildren ranging in age from 7 to 17 years old. Karen has been an Early Childhood educator and Christian Children’s Ministry worker as a Teacher, Child Care Center Director, Trainer/Mentor, ECE



conference speaker, Sunday School teacher and curriculum writer for almost 50 years. She is the recipient of the Eastern Washington Association for the Education of Young Children (EWAIEYC) Early Childhood Professional of the Year Award.

Karen hobbies include playing games, sewing, and cooking for large gatherings

Karen hobbies include playing games, sewing, and cooking for large gatherings

The Joy of Serving

by Bob Holder—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

For just over 11 years now, my wife, Karen, and I have been serving with Group Mission Trips. This past summer we served in San Diego and surrounding areas with a part of Group Mission Trip called Week of Hope.

Four youth from Main Street Church, Anais Barrientos, Madeleine Felix, Tyler Johns and Marcus Marelli, and one other adult, Sharmila Felix went with us.

I was one of the photographers, media and program assistant, lunch maker, water boy and overall helper—wherever there was a need, I stepped in.

Over the years I have seen God work in young teens, ages 13-18. It is an incredible experience every time. Over 100 youth come from all parts of the country. As photographer, I am able to see each and every one of the teens during their greatest community service.

In San Diego this summer, there were a total of 17 crews and nine sites. Each crew had six members (teens plus one adult). They worked in nursing homes; on a horse ranch for children with disabilities; in help centers/food pantry and preschool/day camp for homeless and underprivileged children; at the Ronald McDonald House, and with community neighborhood clean-up. They also sorted

clothes and useable household goods for the San Diego Rescue Mission to be sold in their thrift store. Not one teen complained about the heat, no matter what job(s) they were assigned.

They came from different parts of the country without knowing with whom they'd be working or where, but after a week together, they formed new friendships and gained a deeper desire to serve God and others.

With lessons in the evenings and fun times, it made for a great opportunity to serve in areas of San Diego that otherwise would go untouched. Our theme for this year's Week of Hope was "Extraordinary—because Jesus is not ordinary."

Serving Jesus *is* Extraordinary. Working with the Youth was Extraordinary. Serving with the Adults was Extraordinary. Our team from Main Street Church went beyond what most would consider normal or ordinary during their week of service.

For me, God was present throughout every day. I saw the Joy of the Lord on the teens' and adults' faces as they went about their assignments.

Bob Holder was born in Illinois, moved to California



where he attended college and met his future wife, Karen. They married in 1974 and moved to Brigham City in 2005 after 18 years in Spokane, Washington. They have two sons and three grandchildren. Bob is retired and enjoys leading a men's Bible study group.

His hobbies include photography and gardening.



2016 Week of Hope Team from Main Street Church. L-R: Tyler, Sharmila, Bob, Karen, Anais, Madeleine, and Marcus.

Crew Reflections on Week of Hope

by Anais, Tyler, and Madeleine
—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

During Week of Hope, I had the privilege of working at the church where the program Heaven's Windows is based. There they had many different services for people in poverty, including free lunches for children, reading to children, a fresh food pantry, and a clothing closet. All of these are free and are all based on donations from the community as well as local businesses. Everyone in my crew did a little of everything, but each of us had different experiences.

This opportunity showed me how to put aside all of my personal needs and worries and just wholeheartedly serve the Lord. Most of the people have been stuck in *give* poverty for a long time and this program is the only thing getting them by. It humbled me to see what they had gone through and yet still managed to smile. Having us at this work site gave the program participants a chance to see the Lord's light through us and put a smile on their faces.

I am very thankful for this opportunity and am extremely thankful for everyone who helped us get there. Through donations or time given to help us, everything was greatly appreciated. —Anais Barrientos

*“Jesus said: Here I am among you
as one who serves.”*

Luke 12:27

In San Diego, my team was assigned to the San Diego Rescue Mission. We sorted clothes and housewares, like lamps and picture frames and worked with another crew that stayed at the same church as us.

We met a woman who, despite being in a wheelchair, helped as much as she could, which really showed God at work in her. I also saw God engaged in us as we worked as hard as we could each day.

At the Rescue Mission, one day we ran out of things to do and left early. On the last day, the man in charge was crying tears of joy. He said, “I am so happy that you came

and helped! I hope the next group that comes will be hard workers like you have been.”

I could tell that he saw God alive in us while we were there. Personally, I felt like I had accomplished something and that God had helped us all the way. Even when we got off track, God found a way to get us back. —Tyler Johns

“Amid all the clamor and din of
this visible and audible world, listen
carefully for God's quiet voice.
Listen to Him in the Bible. Talk to Him
frequently in prayer. Look for Him in
your circumstances. Seek Him. He is
with you wherever you go.”

—David Roper, *Our Daily Bread*

Over the course of the last two years, my attitude has been none other than downright sinful and moody. Typical teenage behavior, but that doesn't make it right. I was disgusted with the person I had become: flawed by the imperfections of the world and a lack of desire to change.

I can't exactly explain what was going on, but during Week of Hope—a single week away to serve God and others—I totally immersed myself in the experience. I'm really not sure how to describe the feeling of this. It was like shedding skin, being re-born. As layers and mediums and hues of ugliness and anger and derivative behavior suddenly began to melt off, I felt as if I was becoming somebody else. Somebody who wasn't so self-absorbed. It was such an unbelievable feeling

I'm incredibly happy that I went that week. I learned that we ourselves can be chiseled away by the hand of God, to become a masterpiece created by God Himself. I learned that certain things are traps, set up by the Devil meant for us to fall into and stay stuck. I learned that through God, we are extraordinary. We are His, and I couldn't ask for anything more.. —Madeleine Felix

"For God, who said, 'Light shall shine out of darkness,' is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." II Corinthians 4:6



Set your mind on things above. Photo: Sharmila Felix

The Reason For The Hope Within Me!

by Sharmila Felix, Youth Leader—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

This was my second year attending Week of Hope as a youth leader and I won't lie—inside, I was trembling with fear at the thought of even going, let alone being in any sort of leadership role. When I read descriptions of the word "introvert" and "anxiety ridden," it is like someone has cracked me open and discovered the code.

I recalled to mind the story of Moses and how he went from making excuses (not qualified, not smart enough, can't do it, not able to speak clearly) as to why he couldn't go to Pharaoh to request the Israelites be given freedom, to just getting to the heart of his issue, which is "I don't want to." And then the anger of the LORD burned against him. (Exodus 3:11-4:14)

Having the anger of the LORD burn against me causes me to quake and quiver enough to be obedient and lay aside camping and social interaction fears. I managed to eek out the words "Lord, help" and as He is always faithful to do, He gave me His strength to close my mouth, stop my whining, pack up my cot and go. It wouldn't be the first time He would remind me that without Him, nothing is possible, but through Him, all things are possible. (Philippians 4:13)

He provided for all legs of the journey—a safe vehicle, provision in our overnight stay, a group of great kids who

were in love with Jesus. My anxiety was still present, but any time I would feel it rise, I'd confess it and pray, and He would quiet my flapping about.

One morning, we had a devotion as a large group before heading out to our worksites. Each person was given a penny. The focus of the devotion was on Luke 21:1-4: the widow who only had two coins and gave them freely to Jesus. We were asked to find something we considered a weakness, place that on the coin, and then put the coin in the basket as an offering to God—a turning our weakness over to Him in surrender.

As we closed our eyes in prayer, the list of my weaknesses seemed to be a mile long. So, I asked Jesus, "What is the weakness you want me to surrender to You today?" He brought to mind public speaking. Whether in front of a crowd or even in a small group, ugh, I just detest the thought of speaking! I feel like I'm always stumbling over my words, and if I have to hold a paper to read from, my hand will furiously shake.

I agreed with Him with a confident "yes, Lord," and hopped out of my seat and pitched that penny in the basket and headed for the door. I hadn't even reached it when one of the staff came to me and said, "We'd like you to play a part in our evening program tomorrow

night." My heart sank. *Already, Lord? Really? In front of everyone?* And yet, what could I say? "Sure. I'll do it." I heard the words actually exit my mouth, and I wanted to throw up.

The next day during our lunch devotion, the question was asked "When have you been labeled by your sin and how difficult was it to overcome?" Most of the kids in my group were too shy to share, so I shared a little generic background about my rebellion in high school and how humbling it has been to move back to the town where I grew up, encountering people to whom I was once cruel and offensive, and now that I am redeemed in Jesus, I must apologize to them and seek forgiveness, and to be prepared to give a reason for the hope in me (I Peter 3:15).

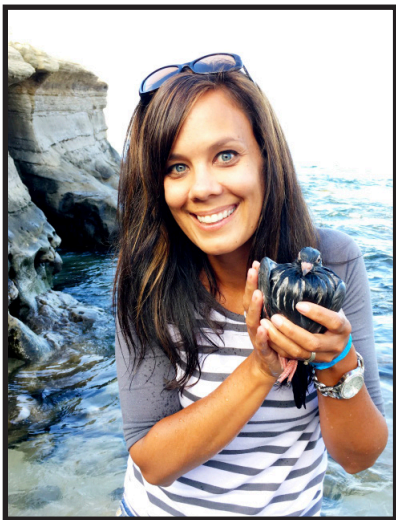
Evening came, faster it seemed than it had all week, and the lights were dimmed for our evening program. I listened for the words that were my cue to take the stage, and acutely aware of every single footstep among the silence of the crowd, I made my way to the podium. I was to read a first person account of the woman who was a prostitute. I began to read, expecting my voice to crack, the anxiety to well up and cause me to shake and tremor, but there was nothing but calm and peace.

Soon, I wasn't even reading from the page, just looking at the faces in the crowd, describing in this woman's voice "my" past--my decisions and interactions with the men who abused me. Then I encountered Jesus.

Normally, I can't talk about encountering Jesus without crying--I can barely pray out loud without crying--but there was no breaking down, just clearly describing what had taken place as I encountered this Man, this Jesus, who loved me and forgave me and delivered me from my past.

In that moment, I knew without a doubt that I had been filled with the Spirit--that it was Jesus speaking through me, through the story of this broken woman, that it had nothing to do with me at all. I had surrendered that weakness to Jesus and He exchanged my weakness for His strength. What a blessing to be used by Him.

I later learned that the microphone was not working, but amazingly, so many had clearly heard what I had said. Many of the kids, including those in my group, thought that it was my personal testimony. This still makes me laugh. No, I was not a prostitute. But yes, I was broken, a sinner separated from God, but encountered Jesus and He forgave me of my past and called me His!



Sharmila Felix is a follower of Jesus, wife to one amazing husband, mother of two delightful children, and also a mother to three cats, two Pygmy goats, four parakeets, one parrot and a dozen chickens. Life on their micro farm keeps her busy. In her spare time, she enjoys photography, interior design, traveling and exploring with her family and cooking up delicious treats.

2016. Sharmila with a baby pigeon rescued from drowning in La Jolla, California

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

Longing to Comfort

By Naomi Zacharias

Director of Wellspring International at Ravi Zacharias International Ministries in Atlanta, Georgia.

My little girl was just sixteen months old when her younger brother arrived. I rocked her to sleep every night before he came. She was not one who slept through the night, and I had wakened with every cry, holding her again at various hours and countless times in a night. As each week fell into the next she began to show her growing displeasure—her annoyance, even—at my protruding baby belly as she tried to find a place on my shoulder where it didn't get in her way. I saw this as a kind of symbolism for the impending change to her small world and tried to use those days where I had enough arms to hold each child as an opportunity to affirm her invaluable place against me.

I researched how to prepare siblings for the arrival of a new little one. I placed her tiny hands on my belly as the baby kicked and explained that he was talking to her. I took her to appointments to see his black and white sketch on the screen of the doctor's office where she lay nestled in the crook of my arm as I pointed to toes and elbows of "her baby." After many months, an appointment to my doctor's office resulted in the instruction to drive straight to the hospital, for labor had begun early. Instead, we first drove back to the house to tell our two little ones where we were going, to have one last moment as the family of four familiar to us all to navigate before receiving the tremendous gift to be five; to give them a hug and kiss before sleeping away from them for a few days; before introducing them to their baby brother whose arrival would change their world as they knew it.

I had been concerned she would resent him. But she didn't. She welcomed him, she kissed him, she longed to care for him from the moment she saw him. She didn't hold it against him seemingly at all. It was me. I had not read that, I had not prepared for the fact that it was me she could feel abandoned her or betrayed her. While always close to her daddy, she suddenly attached to him with an adhesive that forbid another to come close. As hours and days melted into weeks and then months of eternity for me, she resisted

all of my attempts to hold her, to be close to her, or to care for her even when she was sick. Each morning as my husband left for work, he had to peel her off of the safe zone of his shoulder and she would crumple to the floor in a pool of sobs that would break your heart and crushed mine. Her beautiful round, light brown eyes were flooded with an ocean of hurt, full lips trembling through the sobs. I tried so hard and so gently to get close, bending down and holding my arms out to comfort her. But she refused and angrily pushed me away, choosing to ache entirely alone. I felt deeply rejected, but even more, it literally pained me to see her hurting so much and opting to endure it alone rather than allow me to provide comfort. So I stood at the distance she demanded, tears streaming down my own face as I watched her struggle day after day. "All I want to do is to love you, to help you, and you won't let me even comfort you," I felt and audibly whispered.

And a parallel was not lost on me, with an awareness never considered before. For how many times have I refused to allow God to come close in comfort and instead in my anger and lostness, forced Him to a distance in favor of my lonely puddle of fear, confusion, and grief?

As I thought about it, I realized that I don't think I have ever gone to God purely for comfort—not really, not sincerely. I cry before Jesus when I am asking for an answer to a prayer for him to prevent, save, or restore. But when what was lost was not resurrected in the way I hoped,

I have opted to withdraw alone into my grief, with feelings of abandonment or even anger rather than know what it means to let him sit with me in the sadness of the "it will not be so."

Several years ago a good friend drew my attention to her grandmother's favorite verse, words written by David in Psalm 56:8: "You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in your bottle. Are they not in your book?" I loved this affirmation that David saw, that God recorded the wounded parts of my story. It revealed that someone—not



A Victorian-style Tear Bottle. Photo: Timeless Tradition, Inc

just someone, but God Himself—bore witness that provided a kind of validation of those tears and their birthplace. Some months later, I was in the country of Turkey and on a mission to find an old glass tear bottle. I had learned that families used to use these to bottle their tears and bury them with dear ones lost as a testament to the fact that they were loved. So at my request to find this hidden treasure, a friend took me to an old market in Istanbul. She was not certain we would find them, but there in the midst of the maze of stalls filled with jewelry and scarves was a shelf with a handful of vintage tear bottles of various shapes and colors. They were one of my greatest finds and served as a reminder that my Creator, my Comforter, keeps count of even my tears and the experience behind them.

But I still missed it, for God's comfort carries potential far greater than just keeping a journal of account; I missed that He longs to step inside.

I didn't recognize what I now see as a longing to comfort, or my role in relegating God to the sideline. Perhaps I have tended to see God as this distant presence, reminding me from lofty places of the verses that tell me to trust Him, to pray that his will be done, to desire the greater good. And while all of those desires may be right, the picture carries the image of someone you choose to avoid in your angst because while they may have the answers, they don't engage in the raw grief part of the process where words don't really find a place to sink in. Because if we are honest, true and even kind reminders of perspective can often serve to make us feel only more alone and communicate a greater sense of a failure when we are engaged—and losing—a momentary struggle to peel ourselves off of the floor of defeat, devastation, and sheer grief.

But I missed it. I did not see God as one who wants to enter into my very grief itself, the messy part before any acceptance and answer can be embraced.

It was when I stood helpless beside my little girl, feeling her sadness and desperately longing to simply be in it beside her that I caught a glimpse of how God, too, has perhaps stood on the sidelines of my grief when He longed to participate. In the thick of her sadness and limited understanding she saw me at best as one who exacerbated her pain, perhaps at worst the one who caused it. And oh, how my memory instantly put me on that familiar floor and pool of tears where, like a frightened animal, I would not let Him enter in.

This image of Jesus is one that causes me to feel like a little girl again, to easily fold into tears and want to allow him near my broken spirit and dreams. What if I could allow

him to come into that unkempt and broken space with me, not for answers or reversals, but to experience God as Comforter?

With fondness I remember a Western woman I met in a Middle Eastern country several years ago. There was an immediate ease to our conversation, even a mutual affection. She shared a story from years past when she was preparing for the mission field and learned she was pregnant with her first child. And then she told how she lost her infant son when he was only weeks old. I well remember her describing the moment of her indescribable loss; how as her husband, with tears streaming down his face, said a prayer of acknowledgement that their son returned to his maker. Instead, she cried out in protest, for she was not ready for him to go. Brokenhearted, she could not bear to think of the mission field, a journey she had imagined with the son part of that vision. And it was twenty years before she ultimately found the healing needed to go. Where do you think God was with her in those twenty years? I do not think He was angry or impatient. I think He was sitting on the floor of her sadness and grieving with her.

The Gospel of John tells the story of the death of Lazarus. When Lazarus got sick, his sisters, Mary and Martha, immediately sent word to Jesus. But Jesus did not come for three days, and in the meantime, Lazarus passed away. When finally the women heard that Jesus was coming, Martha ran out to meet him, but Mary stayed inside. I wonder if she felt betrayed or forgotten when he did not come in time for the miracle she hoped for. John tells us that when Martha returned inside, she told Mary that Jesus was calling for her, and instantly she stood and ran outside to him. I picture this wounded woman who had felt abandoned by the one person she put her faith in. And so even when she hears he is near, she doesn't go to him. But then, she hears he called her by name, and she runs. Maybe it was that demonstration that he had not forgotten her. Maybe it was because he was the only one who could really comfort her. And so she allows him to enter in to her disappointment and questions and grief.

She goes to Jesus and falls at his feet and weeps. She weeps that Jesus did not come and that her brother is gone. And what did he do? He wept. He cried with her even though he knew that the life mourned was about to be resurrected and her pain relieved. First, he stopped to grieve with her for the loss she endured—the experience of losing her brother and perhaps the many other disappointments in that story he knew she felt.

It requires a dying to the self and an awakening of heart and mind to see God as Creator and Savior, but we are

invited to a particular vulnerability to also know Him as “*the Father of mercies and God of all comfort*” (2 Corinthians 1:3, emphasis added).

God keeps count of all our tossings, bears witness to all that happened, and remembers. Jesus will sit in the lonely room where we grieve. He will come and weep even when there is a miracle to come, and how much more when there is a loss to endure. He asked Mary, “*Where have you put him?*” And she led him to a tomb. Does he ask us, too, where we have laid our loss, and when the answer is the tomb of our heart, does he also ask to enter in and weep alongside us? I believe he does—sometimes for the moment, sometimes when it takes twenty years, and for a lifetime when that is how long it is endured. Yes, we all want the miracle. But while on this temporal earth that holds both beauty to know and mortality to hold, loss is a part of our experience in living. How comforting to know that he who dwells in the heavenly heights is able—and chooses—to descend to the floor of our sorrow. Can we let him come close?

For the God of Righteousness, the Lord our Sanctifier, the Everlasting God, is also the God of all comfort today.

“Longing to Comfort,” Naomi Zacharias, *A Slice of Infinity*, August 11, 2016.

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Naomi Zacharias graduated from Wheaton College with a BA in Business/Economics. After working in sales for Coca-Cola, she joined the staff of RZIM. She accepted a full-time internship in the Office of Public Liaison at The White House and returned to RZIM to help launch Wellspring International, an initiative devoted to providing financial grants to international efforts working with at-risk women and children. Naomi has visited with women in red-light districts across Europe and Asia; foster homes for children affected by HIV/AIDS throughout Asia and Africa; displacement camps in Uganda and areas of the Middle East offering aid to Iraqi refugees; areas devastated by natural disaster; and international shelters for victims of human trafficking and domestic violence.

In 2004, Naomi authored a chapter on women and education in *Zealous Love: A Practical Guide to Social Justice*, published by Zondervan. In *Real Women, Real Faith* (DVD Volumes 1 & 2), Naomi is one of six speakers leading sessions on Old and New Testament female Bible characters. Her first book, *The Scent of Water: Grace for Every Kind of Broken*, was released by Zondervan in 2011. She has also contributed two essays included in the recently released *NIV Bible for Women, Fresh Insights for Thriving in Today's World*, published by Zondervan in 2015.

Naomi and her husband, Drew, currently reside in Atlanta, Georgia.

Tear Drop Bottle History

www.TimelessTraditionsGifts.com

The history of the tear bottle is captivating and poignant. Legends of tear bottles or lachrymatories abound in stories of Egypt and middle eastern societies. Tear bottles were prevalent in ancient Roman times, when mourners filled small glass vials with tears and placed them in burial tombs as symbols of love and respect.

In the Old Testament of the Bible, the notion of collecting tears in a bottle appears in Psalm 56:8 when David prays to God, “*Thou tellest my wanderings, put thou my tears in Thy bottle; are they not in Thy Book?*” David’s words remind us that God keeps a record of human pain and suffering and always remembers our sorrows.

Tear bottles reappeared during the Victorian period of the 19th century, when those mourning the loss of loved ones would collect their tears in bottles ornately decorated with silver and pewter. The mourning period would end when the tears evaporated from the bottle, but the bottle remained as a token of eternal devotion. . . .

Heart Surgery Times Two

By Marie Hartin – Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

*“O Israel, hope in the LORD;
For with the LORD there is lovingkindness,
And with Him is abundant redemption.”*

– Psalm 130:7

Sometimes the dark ugliness in life is necessary to show the bright light of God’s grace and love. To His Glory!

My parents divorced when I was nearly 15 years old. I have spent a lifetime now at a distance from my Mom geographically and emotionally. She remarried when I was about 17 and moved out of state. Our relationship was very shallow and had no substance to it. My Mother did not know “ME” in the degree by which a mother typically “knows” her daughter, except as a young child.

I spent years yearning for something more and dealt with the ever-familiar feelings of rejection, of being judged for some reason without cause, and ended up being just downright angry at times. I felt that I was not good enough and that I was misunderstood or mistaken when I was just being myself.

Telephone contact was very minimal and the time I spent with my Mom during her infrequent visits to Utah could easily be counted as an hour or less. The times she journeyed to Utah, in which I got to see her, could be counted on one hand.

Our relationship was up and down, and I was even disowned for years because of petty reasons. Because I was hurt and angry, I did my share of lashing back with condemnation. I felt that my Mom didn’t love anyone but herself and my step-dad. I felt she was unfair in her judgments and her lack of love towards me. Relationships between my Mom and my siblings had always been distant and estranged in one form or another. This was not unique to me.

Over the years I was able to resolve those feelings with the Lord’s help and realized that I wanted to *choose* to love her, in spite of the fact that I believed she just wasn’t capable of nurturing the kind of mother-daughter relationship I yearned for. I was able to keep telephone communication going (though it was very inconsistent) and even made several trips to Arkansas to see her, but our relationship was maintained with shallowness and certainly without risk of upset.

God had been gracious to me; I remained very close to my Dad, and God placed precious people in my life who more than filled that void in my little girl heart. My Mother was a proud and stationary person all those years until God intervened.

She believes in Jesus but was never taught or disciplined in the ways of the Lord. My sister, Sylvia, has spent the past few years faithfully doing just that. Mom has gradually grown in the ways of the Lord with beautiful miracles to speak about. What a dear sister in my life and in the Lord.

The evidence of that discipleship would soon shine bright. I am now 56 years old and my Mom is 81. Our relationship remained much the same until just last year. Mom had moved to Illinois to be closer to Sylvia. A few months prior to January 2015, doctor visits revealed that Mom needed heart bypass surgery. As time got closer to the scheduled surgery, Sylvia really wanted support and help with Mom. This was a great ordeal to bear by herself with doctor appointments, tests, scheduling, preparing, still having to work, etc. I offered to come out because I really did want to see my Mom and be a help to them both.

Sylvia and I talked, prayed, planned, and in all reality didn’t even know if Mom would allow me to come. Well, as time went on, Sylvia came to a firm decision to have me come out to Illinois, regardless of what Mom thought. So we decided that Sylvia (not I – “too chicken”) would TELL Mom I was coming. Well, that worked great and Mom was very receptive to me helping. This was great news and a relief for Sylvia.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 09, 2015

I arrived in St. Louis, Missouri at around 10:30 PM. It was a two-hour drive from the airport to Sylvia’s house in Petersburg, Illinois. The weather was clear but windy. I was thankful that we didn’t have the icy roads I always hear about. On the outskirts of town the wind caused a few very small drifts on the road that startled me because the blowing snow made it so we couldn’t see the drift until Sylvia was driving through it. We reached her house safe

and sound. Finally there, I was ready and energized to help Sylvia and Mom. We have been praying for a while about Mom's surgery. Sylvia shared a great deal of research with me and Mom in preparation. With God on our side we had a confident peace about everything.

SUNDAY, JANUARY 10, 2015

Sylvia and I headed to Mom's place around 10:00 AM to spend the day. Mom was excited to see me and looked great. Just couldn't get around much. We spent time in the TV room visiting and reminiscing while Mom took it easy. We laughed about so many stories. This was the best visit I had ever had with my Mom. My spirit was so satisfied. I was at ease with being myself, which had never been the case before. I recognized the Holy Spirit working within me and in us.

One really comical memory had to do with how crooked Mom cut our bangs when we were little. It was quite traumatic for all us girls. Mom did not deny her lack of hair cutting skills. Then the most opportune moment arrived. Mom said she really wished she had been able to get her bangs trimmed before surgery, but she hadn't had the chance. I spoke up quickly to let her know that I was skilled at cutting hair and would love to cut her bangs for her. She agreed.

I was bubbling inside with giddiness at the rare opportunity to do for Mom what she hadn't been able to do for us kids: cut straight bangs. For a fleeting moment, I did think this could be a once in a life time chance to get even. Well, as the thought crossed my mind, it quickly left because I knew I would honor my Mom with my best. Now I must say it was a little difficult with her sitting in the recliner and I only had sewing scissors for hair scissors. Mom commented, "Here's your chance to get even!". I admitted the passing thought. We had a great time laughing. I did the best I could and Mom was happy with the outcome. Couldn't wait to tell our other sister, Laura, about it.

While Mom napped, I was able to change the sheets on Mom's bed and Sylvia took Sadie, Mom's teacup Poodle to the kennel. When Sylvia returned, she made us all lunch. Her husband Gene was able to stop by and join us. She made egg omelets with spinach. We had sparkling grape juice and the best bread pudding ever for desert. It was the perfect meal together. A very sweet time. Mom was in good Spirits.

We cleaned up after lunch and talked some more. Mom was all ready and packed to leave for the hospital the next morning. We would pick her up at 4:30 AM. The Pastor phoned to pray with Mom and all of us. We waited

for her to shower before ending the day, which had gone by so fast. It was time to let Mom get to bed early. I remember telling Sylvia after we had gone back to her house, whatever happens, my spirit is at peace."

MONDAY, JANUARY 11, 2015

We went to pick up Mom at 4:30 AM sharp; she was up and ready early as she couldn't sleep. We locked the house and gently led her to the car. We were on our way. After arriving to the right location, the nurse took over and got Mom signed in and took her back to get prepped. Sylvia and I went to a cool but sunny breeze way set up with chairs and coffee tables. We waited as Mom went through the pre-surgery prep, and when that was completed, we went back to be with her.

The Pastor called and prayed with Mom over the phone which was very comforting. Holding hands and giving lots of encouragement melted into deep prayer with her and over her. Just before they took her to surgery, she said, "I love you both so much!" They rolled her away down the hall. That is always a tough sight that presses into my heart.

Sylvia and I waited in a private room reserved just for us. We were briefed where we would meet after surgery with the surgeon and that we would receive calls from the operating room to keep us informed. One call would let us know when Mom is put on the bypass machine. We were settled in for the wait and still had a confident peace with everything concerning Mom.

The first phone call we received in the waiting room was to tell us surgery had begun. It was unnerving because the sound I heard in the background could only be compared to a chain saw. The next phone call was to tell us that Mom was on the bypass machine. We prayed and continued to wait.

The last call announcing surgery was finished didn't come for two more hours. I believe surgery actually started at 7:00 AM and ended after 3:00 PM. Finally, the call came for us to make our way to the consultation room. Every place we went in the hospital, we connected with a person who asked if we needed help at just the right time. We were guided at every turn. God helped us arrive where we needed to be at just the right moment. We made it to the consultation room excited to hear the report. The surgeon said, "Your Mom was a challenge—instead of four bypasses we had to do a five bypass surgery." All details aside, Mom was a challenge on many fronts, but he said he was able to accomplish all that he wanted to and was happy with the outcome. *Thank you Jesus!*

A few days passed with Mom in ICU, and finally she was moved to a regular room. Now our part in helping Mom just increased tenfold. The day-to-day caregiving that Sylvia and I undertook in the hospital was tremendous, and is another God story that I treasure deeply.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 15, 2015

We had such a nice lunch with Mom today. She ordered a cheese quesadilla and was able to eat one of the wedges. She just couldn't eat any more. Sylvia and I knew we aren't supposed to eat the patient's food, but the quesadilla looked so good and we were really hungry. Sylvia and I looked at each other and at Mom and then we each took a wedge to eat. It was yummy. Just when we were about to finish our portion, the nurse walked in, looked at us with "the eye" but didn't say anything. We just smiled. We were caught with our hands in the cookie jar. We just laughed after the nurse left – and we didn't do that again. We continued to talk and laugh with Mom. She was having a much better day.

After lunch, Mom said she would like to listen to some music. Sylvia asked what she would like and Mom thought a minute before saying, Andre Rieu. Sylvia played a video on her phone of "The Blue Danube," featuring the violinist André Rieu. It was so beautiful it almost brought me to tears. The video showed an orchestra and grand ball with women in full length, bell-shaped, white ball gowns partnered with men in tuxedos. They danced and floated to the music. The watching crowd numbered in the thousands. It was inspirational and stunningly beautiful.

The best part was the look on Mom's face. She had a deep twinkle in her eye and a big smile of pure pleasure. What a great moment. You see, God was orchestrating a miracle and the Holy Spirit was preparing us for the finale. Every moment was in His Devine control and attention.

SATURDAY, JANUARY 16, 2015

The miracle had been prepared by God's hand and was now about to unfold with a loveliness that only God can create. Sylvia was very tired and edgy today. She went to have lunch by herself in the cafeteria. This left me alone with Mom. The scenery from the hospital room window was not a joy to behold; it was a very old and dirty brick wall. I felt it had significance even when I first saw it. I thought to myself, *I wonder what God can do in a week of isolation.* The thought was intriguing.

Mom was having a pretty good day so far. She started asking me questions. I told her about my life in a short story: about raising the kids, their medical challenges, volunteer work I had done throughout the years, and how

God blessed so many as well as myself. I told her about the different jobs I'd had and how God's hand in my life brought me to the career I had now as a technical writer for the Air Force. I told her about my late husband, Bob's passing and how God touched my life and protected me and provided for me and my family, and how blessed I was to have met and married Steve 19 years before.

While sharing my story, Mom just kept staring at me. Then she said softly, "You are so beautiful. How come I don't know anything about you?"

What I said next would be something I would have never ever said on my own. You see, we were raised to be respectful and to never say anything in opposition to our parents, in any way. Plus, just common sense, and the Holy Spirit inside me would not allow me to ever say anything upsetting to someone who had just had surgery and was so sick in a hospital. Only kind, prayerful, positive words of encouragement to those who are sick, right?

The Holy Spirit controlled my mouth today. I said, "Well Mom, you remarried and chose to be solely devoted to your husband and moved out of state, which put a great distance between us."

And then she said, "Did I push you away?"

I hesitated, but I knew the Holy Spirit prodded me on as I said ever so gently, "Yes." Then Mom spoke words that would not have been spoken in her "usual" nature. She said, "I am so sorry. I guess I have a lot to make up for."

"No need to make up anything Mom, I love you so much," I said. We hugged and kissed without any emotional breakdown. God saved us that moment from a lifetime of emotion breaking through the old dirty brick wall of hurt and anger. Instead, God planted healing and strength within us. It was miraculous!

You see, the words I spoke had no condescending sound or intent in them; they were offered in love by the Holy Spirit. They had only the simple truth. It was as though I breathed and the words floated out.

Many more days of medical ups and downs were to come. More miracles through prayer took place. At every turn, God had us in His care. Even the times that Mom said she wanted to give up, God's strength was our strength, and in our weakness, He lifted us up by His strong arm.

No words can express God's perfect ability, provision, and faithfulness. It was undeniable. You see, man performs physical heart surgery, and God performs spiritual heart surgery. I rejoice in saying that the heart surgery performed

by God is divinely eternal and His loving kindness endures forever.

I was able to see Mom go into rehab January 22nd. I flew home January 23rd. God is so good.

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 5, 2015

Sylvia, called me at work at 12:38 PM Utah time. She was waiting for staff to bring Mom out so she could take her home after 25 days in the hospital. PRAISE THE LORD! January is gone, and great things are to come. Mom can't wait for Spring!

Thank you Jesus for all you have done and all You have yet to do! I love you. Thank you for Your love and healing power!



Set Your Mind on Things Above. Photo: Diane Kulkarni

Marie Hartin lives in Brigham City with her husband, Steve. She is the mother of four and grandmother of 11 and the great-grandmother of one. She treasures the time with family and enjoys crafts, painting, and music. She has worked mostly as a technical writer and instructor. She has been involved with many types of ministry, believing that God equips her for serving others because of her own family's various challenges and personal suffering. She attends Main Street Church and ministers there through music, prayer, and writing.

September 1, 2016

It is coming up on eight months since our heart surgeries – hers and mine – with 100 percent recovery. Our relationship is sweeter and deeper still. To have lived to witness such redemption, after 40 years wondering, I am eternally grateful.

“I will give them a heart to know Me, for I am the LORD; and they will be My people, and I will be their God, for they will return to Me with their whole heart.”

Jeremiah 24:7

“The great physician, as our Creator and redeemer, specializes in the heart business. Broken hearts, angry hearts, selfish hearts, greedy hearts, and all kinds of hearts, can find an answer in Christ.

All He asks is that we come to Him and turn from our self-defined ways. Thankfully, the power to change rests in the hands of One whose power and goal it is to change us.” – Stuart McAllister, RZIM

So you want to change the world: it starts with you

By Sarah Thebarger

Looking back on my interview at Yale's PA program, I try to remember what I meant when I told them I was going to change the world some day.

In my mind, "changing the world" mean that I was single-handedly going to fix broken systems and places around the globe and that, because of my efforts, the entire world would be a radically different place.

I didn't even know exactly what I was going to do for the world. I just felt energized and optimistic and, though Baptists don't use this language, divinely anointed and appointed to do something special and major in the world.

And then, a year after I finished PA school, I was diagnosed with breast cancer.

"Okay," I thought. "This could be my big break. A book about my cancer experience."

I imagined writing a literary masterpiece, with an insert of glossy photos that chronicled my journey.

I asked my mom to take pictures. Even when, after the mastectomy, I was in horrible pain. Even when, a week later when I was discharged from the hospital, I looked like a heroin addict coming down from a bad high — thin, pale, with bruises on my arms and dark circles under my eyes.

I thought I was going to write about being tough and resilient and unscathed by having breast cancer at 27. There is so much competitive language used about cancer. You battle it. You beat it. You fight it. And I was sure that after competing with cancer, I'd come out on top, with a book deal in addition to epic bragging rights.

But that's not what happened at all.

After I got out of the hospital, I went into the deepest, darkest depression I have ever experienced in my life. I remember driving to the ocean, staring at the waves, and crying for hours. I remember that, on the days I didn't have to be at work, I would lay in bed for the day, staring at the ceiling, because I couldn't think of a reason to get up.

The girl who was going to change the world some day was now the girl who couldn't get out of bed.

I was supposed to have reconstructive surgery three months after my mastectomy, but I was so traumatized by the initial surgery, and in such bad emotional shape, I put it off for

a year. And then, during that surgery, they found that my cancer had recurred. This time, it was the most invasive, aggressive type of breast cancer you could get.

After that, I went through chemo, four more surgeries, radiation, followed by more chemo. And then I almost died of pneumonia.

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow said, "The best thing one can do when it is raining is to let it rain."

So, for six months after I got out of the hospital, I just let it rain. I let it be hard. I stopped fighting the darkness. I stopped resisting my negative emotions and all the anger I had at God for letting this happen to me. I allowed myself to acknowledge that I was a very broken person who needed a lot of grace and a lot of love.

To put it simply, I was deeply humbled by the experience. I didn't nail the cancer journey. For a long time, I didn't want to write or talk about it. I resented and resisted being a "cancer patient."

In addition to becoming humble, I became empathetic. Suddenly, I understood what it was like to live under the dark cloud of depression. I understood what it was like to be an unsavory version of myself, incapable of doing any better. I understood what it was to stand in need of my family's love, acceptance, grace and encouragement, even though I was unable to give them anything but tears and anger in return.

My body and my spirit were shattered by the experience.

On my days off, every morning I made coffee and sat on my couch in the living room, reading the Bible and journaling for hours. And every morning I ended up face-down on the living room floor, praying, weeping sometimes yelling — into the carpet.

It took a long time and a lot of tears, but I finally came to the place where I surrendered. "I give up," I said to God. "I don't understand it. I don't like it. My dreams are shattered. But here are the pieces — do whatever you want."

And then. Slowly, almost imperceptibly, things began to shift. I began to look forward to the future instead of dreading it. I began to imagine what God could possibly do with the broken pieces I had surrendered. I began to laugh

at how emotionally messy I was instead of crying about it.

The Japanese have an art form that mirrors this phenomenon. It's called Kintsugi. Artists purposefully shatter ceramic vessels and repair them with expensive lacquer flecked with platinum or silver or gold. Vessels that have been shattered and glued back together with expensive glue are far more valuable than vessels that are unbroken.

Paul said, "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." For the first time in my life, I understood that verse — not with my head, but with my heart.

And then Jesus referred to himself as the Living Water.

I began to see those verses as overlapping truths. I was like a broken jar of clay. But the Divine Love that had carried me through the horrific journey was a well of Living Water that sprang up in me, and it began to spill out of me. Not in spite of, but because of, all the cracks.

I became a much more compassionate medical provider. I noticed the desperate look in a Somali refugee woman's eyes on the MAX train in Portland because that's the look I'd had in my eyes, too, when I first moved to Portland with nothing but a suitcase of clothes and a broken heart.

I learned that when I said, "I want to change the world some day," it had to start with me being humbled, broken and honest. It began with me changing my posture towards the world.

I wasn't looking down on desperate people who needed help; I was one of them.

I didn't have pity for people who were suffering; I had compassion towards them — a word that literally means "to suffer with."

In the conversations I've had with hundreds of college students over the past year who tell me they want to change the world, I say, "That's great! Just know that first — it starts with you."

You have to be humble, and realize that you're just as broken as anyone. That you're not deigning to offer your services to people in need; you are as needy as anyone. Maybe you don't need clean water or food, but you do (at least sometimes) need extra grace and love and mercy and second chances.

You need to be honest about the places in which you are broken, and surrender to the Potter who uses the expensive

lacquer of Divine Love to piece you back together.

You need to acknowledge that the source of joy and compassion welling up in you is "from God and not from us" — in the words of Jesus, it's this spring of Living Water that will sustain you and supply you with water to sprinkle on the parched world around you.

So you want to change the world?

Remember that it starts with God changing you.

Acknowledge your brokenness. Let God clean you from the inside out, and piece you back together with Love. Surrender to the Living Water that wants to spring up inside you.

Then stand back.

And see what happens next.



Sarah Theborge studied medicine at Yale and journalism at Columbia. Her memoir, *The Invisible Girls*, details her journey of having breast cancer at age 27, and how a family of Somali refugees helped her heal from the experience. All of the proceeds from the book go into a college fund for the five Somali sisters she wrote about. Sarah is also a spokesperson for Compassion International. She currently lives in San Francisco.

Posted on <http://sarahtheborge.com/blog/>: 26 Jun 2016.
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“We want to avoid suffering, death, sin, ashes. But we live in a world crushed and broken and torn, a world God Himself visited to redeem. We receive His poured-out life, and being allowed the high privilege of suffering with Him, may then pour ourselves out for others.” –Elisabeth Elliot



Kintsugi: More Valuable Than the Unbroken. Photo is used with the permission of Sarah Theborge

*“Surely our griefs He Himself bore,
And our sorrows He carried;
Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten of God, and afflicted.
But He was pierced through for our transgressions,
He was crushed for our iniquities;
The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,
And by His scourging we are healed.” Isaiah 53:4-5*

“What God seeks in every individual is not just companionship based on his intervention, but communion with Him based on his indwelling. That is what makes the difference when a building is collapsing. It is not whether a hand grabs your hand and rescues you from the carnage; it is that no matter what happens, his strength empowers you to rise beyond the devastation.”

–Ravi Zacharias, “On the 15th Anniversary of Sept. 11, 2001: Life, Death, and the Search for God.”

Editor's Note: In the last issue of *City Lights* (April 2016) we featured a 1997 interview with a member of our congregation, Bob Ebeling who, at that time, was an engineer in the Space Shuttle program at Thiokol Corporation. In 1986, he was one of the few who opposed the launch of the Space Shuttle *Challenger* because of the cold weather in Florida. *Challenger* unfortunately exploded shortly after takeoff and for the next 30 years, Bob suffered with immense guilt and PTSD as a result of his inability to sway the decision-makers to delay the launch and save the astronauts' lives.

Between the time his wife, Darlene shared her faith journey included below and 2016, her trials intensified, especially since 1986. But in January of this year, National Public Radio (NPR) interviewed Bob for the 30th anniversary of the *Challenger* disaster. Ivy Lippard, his granddaughter said, "After that news story broke, so did the weight my grandpa had carried for so long. A public outcry with letters reaching from around the world helped heal his heart that was deeply marred and scarred. NPR did a second story; and shortly after, grandpa passed into eternity a free man."

To Do All Things

by Darlene Ebeling—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

The hand of God has guided and led me throughout my life. He has enabled me, but I didn't know it at the time. The Apostle Paul said he could do all things because Christ strengthened him (Phil. 4:13). I believe God also strengthened me to endure my own trials.

I grew up in San Diego, California. After attending church with friends as a teenager, I discovered my need of God. I was especially drawn to the idea of becoming a new creation, a new person in Christ. "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" (II Cor. 5:17 NIV)

I wanted that, and I longed to know God, so in 1943 at the age of 15, I followed the Bible's direction to accept Christ as my Savior.

The first indication I had that something positive had happened was a new desire to be obedient to my parents. I joined a Bible club at high school where we met every morning before school for prayer and once

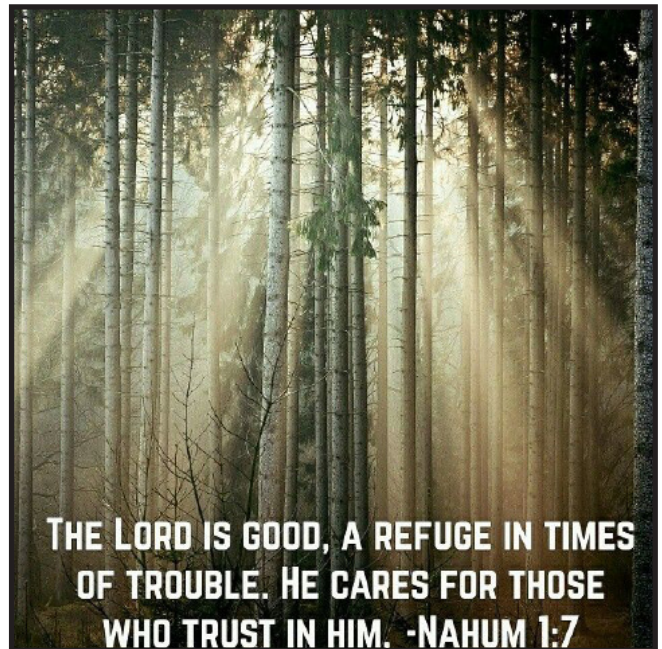
I remembered what Darlene told me during Bob's 1997 interview, that throughout all their trials as a family, she knew that God was drawing her closer to Himself. "I can tell you that without God it would have been very bleak. I've experienced the comfort and assurance of Jesus in the midst of a lot of pain," she said.

The passage that's meant the most is Philippians 4:4-7:

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 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."

"This passage has been with me for a long time, getting me through the dark and sad days. I know that God hears. He's Someone we can really turn to," Darlene said. "Watching someone you love going through an ordeal is difficult, but I prayed for Bob the whole time."

You can hear the last interview he gave for NPR's focus on the 30th *Challenger* anniversary: <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2016/01/28/464744781/30-years-after-disaster-challenger-engineer-still-blames-himself>



a week for Bible study. As I studied the Bible, I became aware of God's standard for righteousness. I found the Christian life exciting and new every day.

Just before graduation, I went on my one and only blind date with Bob Ebeling. Two years later, we married. He wasn't a Christian, so I stopped going to church and as time passed, I hardly read the Bible. I was still a deep believer, but I didn't practice my faith. I was a backslider.

Five children were born to us over the next six years. As they grew older, my aunt, Ruth Popejoy who had been a missionary to Ecuador for the Christian and Missionary Alliance Church, provided transportation for all of the children to attend Sunday School every Sunday with her. On Easter and Christmas, Bob and I attended; however, Bob always came home upset because the pastor dwelled on wanting to see us more often than twice a year. I felt a great need to get right with God, but I didn't do anything about it then.

In 1962, we moved to Brigham City, Utah. I began attending the Christian Reformed Church, and gradually became more active, finally recommitting my life to Jesus. When reading the Bible during those days, I see now that God was preparing me for what lay ahead. The Scriptures that impressed me the most involved God's faithfulness, His peace, and His power to keep those who trust in Him.

In May, 1973, the spring run-off had swollen the creek which flows through out backyard. Through the front window, I saw our three-and-a-half-year-old grandson, Lance, playing happily with a neighborhood boy, but within five minutes, Lance had fallen into the creek and was carried rapidly downstream. He was rescued 15 minutes later, but never regained consciousness. He died that night. Of course, I blamed myself, but no one accused me.

Just watching my family's intense grief heaped more guilt on me, but through it all, I felt the presence of God. I didn't understand why Lance had to die, but I knew God was with me. A verse that meant so much to me then was, *"And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus."* —Philippians 4:7 NIV

Two years later, our only son, Verle, committed suicide. He'd been unhappy for a long time and hadn't found any help. Heavy drinking and LSD produced nightmares and voices in his head. I believe that he felt he was in our way and that we'd all be better off without him. That's why he did it. To me, his wasted life was the greatest of tragedies. I suffered, but not as much as my husband, Bob. Instead of becoming bitter against God, however, Bob started going to church with me. Together our faith prepared us to face the death of Bob's father who was living with us at the time.

Shortly after his father passed away, Bob became a Christian and was baptized. Two of our daughters publicly accepted Christ.

Looking back, my daily life with Jesus prepared me to face trouble and not succumb. I was able to cope because I had learned to lean on Him, to find comfort in His Word.

"We also rejoiced in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance. . . (and) 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 to us."

—Romans 5:3-5 NV

Darlene Remembering. Photo: Sharmila Felix



"O God, You have taught me from my youth,
And I still declare Your wondrous works
and miraculous deeds.
And even when I am old and gray-headed,
O God, do not abandon me,
Until I declare Your strength to this
generation,
Your power to all who are to come."

Psalms 71:17-18

Editor's Note: The next stories are written by two of Darlene's granddaughters, reflecting her enduring faith legacy passed on to them.

Grandma's Gift: New Life in Christ

by Ivy Lippard—St. Petersburg, Florida

"But from everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear Him, and His righteousness with their children's children."

—Psalm 103:17

A New Path. Photo: Marsha McLaren.



Darlene Ebeling, my grandma, is brave and compassionate and walks through life with such grace. If you don't know her, you should! My grandma's life has been notably scarred with more tragedy than most people endure in a lifetime, yet it does not define her. She has somehow managed to keep going, keep smiling, and keep loving the ones God has placed around her. She's an amazing example of how to walk through the darkest places and the deepest losses and still find joy.

I've always deeply loved and admired this woman that God has placed in my life. She's lived Jesus and lived Him well with her quiet and gentle demeanor. She's taught us to always look at life through the lens of a camera, and to write memories on the back of life events so we can keep track of everything. She loves life and lives it to the fullest. She's been an extraordinary example of generosity and grace.

When I was young, my life was littered with chaos and turmoil. My home wasn't a stable place and my sisters and I loved to find peace and solace at my grandparents' house. My grandma babysat us often and whether we were sitting in her cozy living room or the dark veneer wood table in the kitchen, we knew you were deeply loved in this home.

Some of my fondest memories are of sitting on her living room floor, hitting the record button on the tape player

while simultaneously hitting the play button on the one next to it I would sing along: *"The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me, I stand alone on the word of God, the B-I-B-L-E."*

My faith was laid because my grandparents would make the drive across town every Sunday morning to faithfully take my sisters and me to church with them, and in those early morning Sunday school classrooms away from my chaotic life, many seeds were planted.

One of the most amazing blessings about my grandmother is that she worked hard to give herself to her grandchildren (pieces of herself), and we knew she truly loved spending time with us. Grandma always made sure we knew we were loved and wanted. She filled our summers with sewing classes so that we could learn the important skills, and took us on special dates to fine arts events like ballets, orchestras, and operas. From camping to cooking, grandma made sure to include us every step of the way in her life.

Through the years, my grandma has passed down so many important things to us: generosity, compassion, a servant's heart, and the importance of forgiveness. However, the greatest gift to me was a new life in Christ. All the times my grandmother had gone out of her way to bring me to church during my childhood paid off when I met Jesus the first time as a pregnant, unwed, very lost teen. When I found myself in trouble, my grandparents once again swung their doors wide open for me. They offered love and stability, a roof over my head with the only condition being that I go to church with them every Sunday. It didn't take long before the gentle whisper of Jesus penetrated my heart and one incredible January day, I was born again.

My grandparents have gifted me a legacy of Christ, of compassion, and a love for God that I hope to pass on to my children and grandchildren. My grandma didn't just talk Jesus, she's lived Him loud. Even in her quiet and gentle spirit. Thank you, Grandma, for being the best grandma in the world. I hope one day that I can be just like you.

When we brought Grandma here after my grandpa died earlier this year, we knew we wanted to do something special. I wrote to NASA and sent emails to individuals at the Kennedy Space Center, including the reporter who did the NPR reports.

NASA contacted me and said they had a special VIP tour planned for Grandma on Sunday, July 31. The Director of KSC planned to meet us and be her guide. She said she hardly slept thinking about how much this would have meant to Grandpa.

NASA choosing to honor my grandma in my grandpa's memory is a HUGE deal. I thought they would much rather not bring to light and relive their own mistakes that cost those astronauts their lives. It would have been easy for them to overlook my letters, but so many years later, they not only chose to honor my grandma, they treated her like a queen.

Her entire life and dreams had been shattered by the *Challenger* disaster, but healing happened when she visited Kennedy Space Center that Sunday. It was a time of joy, of reflection, of pride and of sorrow all rolled into one enormously encouraging day.

Thank you NASA, Robert Cabana, Director of KSC, Howard Berkes, NPR News, and friends for being a part of her journey and her healing.



Darlene with Robert D. Cabana, Director of K.S.C.

“But you remain faithful to the things you have been taught. You know they are true, for you know you can trust those who taught you.”

—II Timothy 3:14

Ivy Lippard lives in St Petersburg, Florida amid some beautiful beaches. She's the imperfect wife of one great guy and mom to four. She runs a small bakery and stays so busy she almost didn't get this written. She's a lover of all things, but especially Jesus and cake. She is so thankful for grace and her grandparents!

Taste and see that the Lord is good... Psalm 34:8

CakeAffection.com





Darlene in Tandem with Mark. 2016

My Grandma is Love

By Summer Jensen—Las Vegas, Nevada

When I think of my Grandma Darlene, I think of Love. She loves me. That’s how all grandchildren should feel when they think of their grandmothers. Her love is a different kind of Love. It is one that only comes from the Holy Spirit. I have great memories of her, all tidbits of memories that become the picture of my grandma. I can’t say that she was the one who brought me to my faith in the Lord, but I can say that her steadfast love for Jesus is a mainframe of my memories, and my walk in Christ.

One of my happiest places as a child was at church with my grandma. I would sit next to her on the pew and feel the love that she had for God’s Word. One of my most prominent memories is her playing her viola in church. I loved how she worshiped as she’d play *The Old Rugged Cross*, *In the Garden* and *Go tell it on the Mountain*. Her Joy of playing for her Savior mimics what I imagine David doing with his harp.

I think of the lyrics of *In the Garden*: “He walks with me and talks with me, and tells me I am his own.” In all the storms of her life, she knows this to be the truth to calm her troubles. Through her suffering, she lives with faith that could move mountains. I have never seen her angry, or heard her yell. She is calm in the Love of Jesus.

I recently got to celebrate her 88th birthday with her by tandem skydiving. She has been a devoted, submissive wife and for many years had wanted to go skydiving. However, Grandpa was terrified of heights and forbade her to go, saying “Not on my life!”

But this is the year of firsts for her. Grandpa died in March, so Grandma, 88, went skydiving. She and I got in a plane and fell out to the ground. She was so calm. Even going up she didn’t seem at all bothered by nerves. In every photo of her jump, she was content and happy. It is so symbolic of

her life, that even when she is falling, she can be calm and hopeful.

Her tremendous faith in Jesus is what will impact our family for generations. She never gives up on people. She consistently would hear “No” from her family and friends when it came to church and Jesus, and the next moment, hour, day, week, even years later, she would still be asking them to join her with Jesus.



She has shown me that once is never enough.

Be persistent in sharing the Love of God because it never fails.

Her patience and kindness are what set her apart in my memories as more than just Grandma. She is Love.

*Love never gives up.
Love cares more for others than for self.
Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.
Love doesn't strut,
Doesn't have a swelled head,
Doesn't force itself on others,
Isn't always "me first,"
Doesn't fly off the handle,
Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,
Doesn't revel when others grovel,
Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,
Puts up with anything,
Trusts God always,
Always looks for the best,
Never looks back,
But keeps going to the end.*

1 Corinthians 13:4-8



Summer Jensen lives in Las Vegas Nevada. She is a mom with five beautiful children who loves antiques and serving others.

In John 16:23–24, Jesus makes a stunning, sweeping, glorious promise to us:

“In that day you will ask nothing of me. Truly, truly, I say to you, whatever you ask of the Father in my name, he will give it to you. Until now you have asked nothing in my name. Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full.”

“Many of the greatest gifts and deepest joys that God gives us come wrapped in painful packages.”

If we ask God to help us love our neighbors as ourselves (Mark 12:31), what should we expect to receive? Answers that seem inconvenient and irritating because they force us to give unexpected attention to a neighbor (whom we might not put in that category [Luke 10:29]).

The Unexpected Answers of God

By Jon Bloom. Source: [desiringGod.org](http://www.desiringgod.org)

<http://www.desiringgod.org/articles/the-unexpected-answers-of-god>

So we ask the Father for things we long for because we want the full joy He offers us. And we don't ask for trivial or fleshly things, because we know what the Apostle James says: *“You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions”* (James 4:3). No, we pray for greater faith, love, holiness, wisdom, discernment, experience of God's grace, boldness, and joy in God, while praying for less satisfaction with worldly things.

Unexpected Answers

Such longings and prayers are sincere, and God loves them and loves to answer them. But we do not know ourselves very well, or the depth or pervasiveness of our sin, or what it really requires of us in order to receive what we ask for. We can't help but have unreal, romantic imaginations and expectations about what God's answers to our prayers will be.

Therefore, we are often unprepared for the answers we receive from God. His answers frequently do not look at first like answers. They look like problems. They look like trouble. They look like loss, disappointment, affliction, conflict, sorrow, and increased selfishness. They cause deep soul wrestling and expose sins and doubts and fears. They are not what we expect, and we often do not see how they correspond to our prayers.

What Should We Expect?

If we ask God for greater, deeper love for Him, what should we expect to receive? Answers that give us a greater awareness of our deep and pervasive sinful depravity, because those who are forgiven much, love much, but those who are forgiven little, love little (Luke 7:47).

If we ask for God's nearness because we believe that it is good for us to be near God (Psalm 73:28), what should we expect to receive? Answers that break our hearts, for God is near to the brokenhearted (Psalm 34:18).

If we ask God to make us living sacrifices (Romans 12:1), what should we expect to receive? Answers that break and humble our hearts because the sacrifices of God are a broken spirit (Psalm 51:17).

If we ask God for a deeper experience of His grace, what should we expect to receive? Answers that oppose our pride and humble our hearts (James 4:6).

If we ask God for His kingdom to come (Matthew 6:10) in our own lives and in the world around us, what should we expect to receive? Answers that reveal our deep spiritual poverty, because the kingdom is given to the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3).

If we ask God to satisfy us with Himself so that we aren't so easily satisfied by the world's mud puddles, what should we expect to receive? Answers that cause us to be increasingly aware of the evil and suffering and injustices of the world, because those who hunger and thirst for righteousness will be satisfied (Matthew 5:6).

If we ask God for greater wisdom and discernment, what should we expect to receive? A steady stream of mind-bending, confusing answers that are difficult to understand and work through, because our powers of discernment are trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil (Hebrews 5:14).

If we ask God to *“increase our faith”* (Luke 17:5), what should we expect to receive? To be repeatedly put into situations where we discover that our perceptions are not trustworthy so that we are forced to trust Christ's

promises, “for we walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7).

If we ask God to help us “walk in a manner worthy of the Lord” (Colossians 1:10), what should we expect to receive? Answers that require more humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another in love (Ephesians 4:2) than we thought possible. Answers that might result in destitution, affliction, and mistreatment, the common lot of many saints throughout history “of whom the world was not worthy” (Hebrews 11:38).

“With regard to God’s answers to prayer, expect the unexpected.”

If we ask God to help us stop serving money so that we can serve Him more wholeheartedly, what should we expect to receive? An uncomfortable amount of opportunities to give money away, expenses that deplete reserves we’ve been stashing away, maybe even a job loss — answers that push us to us despise (ignore, turn away from, release) money and cling to God (Luke 16:13).

If we ask for our joy to be made more full (John 16:24), to experience more happiness in God, what should we expect to receive? Answers that cause earthly joys we once thought gain to become empty, hollow, and loss and that push us to search for the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:8).

Expect the Unexpected

When God begins to answer our prayers, we often find His answers disorienting. Circumstances might take unexpected courses, health might deteriorate, painful relational dynamics might develop, financial difficulties might occur, and spiritual and emotional struggles might emerge that seem unconnected. We can feel like we’re going backward because we are not clearly moving forward. We cry out in painful confusion and exasperation (Psalm 13:1; Job 30:20) when what’s really happening is that God is answering our prayers. We just expected the answer to look and feel different.

This being true, we might be tempted to not even ask God for such things. I mean, who wants unpleasant answers to prayers for joy?

Don’t be deceived into this short-sighted thinking. Remember Jesus’s promise: “Ask, and you will receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:24). If the path to full joy is sometimes hard, and Jesus tells us it is (John 16:33; Matthew 7:14), that is no reason not to take it! What do you want? Low, shallow, thin joys? No! Go for full joy!

And remember what the writer of Hebrews tells us:

“For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

With regard to God’s answers to prayer, expect the unexpected. Most of the greatest gifts and deepest joys that God gives us come wrapped in painful packages.



Jon Bloom serves as author, board chair, and co-founder of Desiring God. He is author of three books, *Not by Sight*, *Things Not Seen*, and *Don’t Follow Your Heart*. He and his wife live in the Twin Cities with their five children.

Be joyful
in hope,
patient
in affliction,
faithful
in prayer.
Romans 12:12

Keeping a Prayer Journal

"I have found it a great blessing to treasure up in the memory, the answers God graciously gives me in answer to prayer. I have always kept a record to strengthen the memory. I advise the keeping of a little memorandum book. On one side – say the left-hand side – put down the petition, and the date when you began to offer it. Let the opposite page be left blank to put down the answer in each case, and you will soon find how many answers you get, and thus you will be encouraged more and more, your faith will be strengthened; and especially you will see what a lovely, bountiful and gracious Being God is; your heart will go out more and more in love to God, and you will say – it is my Heavenly Father Who has been so kind, I will trust in Him, I will confide in Him through His Son." – George Muller

<http://www.georgemuller.org/quotes>



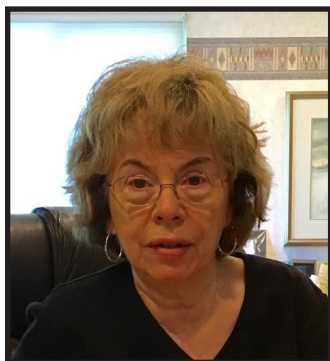
Weaving a Life Raft From God's Promises

by Shelley Kancitis—Ogden, Utah

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever.”
—Psalm 118:1

The earthquake came in the middle of the night devastating the mountainous, Italian village so completely that the mayor said, “...but now the town is no more. We will keep on digging. Hope is the last to go.”

The mayor is partly right. Intangibles like hope hang around for awhile. But for believers, hope never disappears. Our hope is in the Lord and in His promises that endure forever. We may be sitting in the rubble of a natural disaster or in the rubble of our dreams with no help in sight. That is when we must weave a life raft from God's promises. God is good, and His love endures forever. If we hang on to this hope, it will oat us through the most violent of storms and into a future bathed in His love.



Shelley Kancitis: I am a born again Christian who is deeply grateful for my salvation. My high school sweetheart husband was in the military, so we moved frequently including three moves to Utah where we live now. I was both a regular educator and a special educator. One of my passions is being a volunteer tutor for children with dyslexia. We are loving the retired life and often have books glued to our noses!



The Reason I Paint

By Linda Snook – Salem, Oregon

I paint, not because I believe I have talent, not because I have had lessons, not because I know what I'm doing. I paint in remembrance. If you journey back in time with me, I will explain. But what I hope you take from this part of my life story, is how loving and generous, faithful and merciful my Lord is. He answered my prayers, even before I completely turned my life over to Him.

In 1976 my husband, Dave and I were living in Utah with our three-year-old daughter and four-year-old son. We came to Oregon on vacation to visit Dave's family. It was dark when we arrived so I really hadn't seen the scenery of the Willamette Valley until the next day.

As we were discovering the area, I saw Mt. Hood for the first time. It's difficult to put into words what an impression it made on me. I grew up along the Wasatch Mountain Range, but seeing the "Majestic" Mt Hood rise above everything around it, planted a deep and inexplicable connection in me. I felt I had come Home! I belonged! Crazy, since the only other time I had been in Oregon (which I don't recall) was when I was a year old. But there was a feeling of connectedness that I had never before experienced. At the time I didn't understand, but years later, it became clear.

While we were sightseeing all around the Valley and at the Coast, I became convinced that we needed to live here. Then, as our vacation ended and we traveled back to Utah, I felt grief in my heart and my spirit. I felt my sense of "belonging" fade and my "connection" broken.

Within a year, we received a call about an elderly owner of a saw-sharpening business who was looking for someone to lease with an option to purchase his shop and equipment since he had been hurt and was no longer able to work.

Immediately we made plans to move to Oregon. This was my dream come true; my prayers answered! Or at least, that's what I thought. Little did we know what we were getting into. But when you're young, innocent, trusting and compelled beyond understanding, you take risks.

We had been informed the business was good, stable and profitable. Perhaps it had been, but by the time we arrived to sign the lease, the owner hadn't been able to work for months and the clients had gone elsewhere.

We felt betrayed and deeply concerned. We were led to believe that all we had to do was start working and the money would follow, like any other job. We knew this industry and understood the kind of work that was required, but we didn't know we would have to build the business back up from scratch. *How were we to provide for our family? Where was the money going to come from?*

Thankfully, with Dave's parents' help, allowing us to live with them, and with the 55 cases of produce I had canned in Utah, we knew we had a roof over our heads and food to eat. Beyond that, everything else was questionable.

We worked 14-hour days, seven-day weeks, rebuilding.... No! *building* a business, and tied to a two-year lease. I prayed! After the most difficult two years, with extremely exhausting days, weeks, months, we were ready, able, and prepared to purchase the equipment and the business as agreed in the lease.

However!!!! The owner, in the grips of greed, decided—knowing we didn't have funds to fight a legal battle—to doubled the price. We realized we had no choice but to go out of business. We knew further financial dealings with him were unwise, and we didn't have resources to secure a conventional loan. Plus we were not going to pay double the price, for a business that we had built and equipment that we had repaired and brought up to quality standards. I prayed!

We thanked our clients for their business and began the difficult process of explaining that we were shutting down. To our surprise, our clientele started helping us any way they could to keep us in business. In the two years we were in operation, we had become the top tool sharpening business in the Salem area, and they didn't want to see us go.

Once again we were faced with starting anew, but this time, we had the support of many clients and vendors throughout the area. One client built an addition to his building, to our specific needs, and rented it to us for just what we could afford. Other clients and vendors kept their eyes open for equipment pieces that we needed. So with a loan from Dave's grandfather to buy equipment, we started again.

It was during this time that I happened to be home and caught a television program on oil painting. I had never painted, I barely could draw a recognizable image, but I "sensed" I could do this. I didn't have canvases but I did have a massive amount of worthless saw blades. *Could I paint on those? Why not!*

So I pinched together \$10. and purchased the smallest beginner set of oil paint tubes and a brush, and I started to paint. To my surprise, I actually could do it. I painted Oregon—the place I felt at home. I painted Majestic Mt Hood. I painted the beach. And I painted waterfalls. Our clients began purchasing my saws.

A neighbor who made jewelry that he sold at the gallery in Lincoln City, offered to take my saws out, too. He thought the tourists would love them, and I couldn't afford to take them myself. To my amazement, the saws sold and I received the proceeds by mail.

"Whoever believes in Me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them."—John 7:38



I knew all along that while I was painting, this ability was a gift from God, an answer to my prayers for financial help. But even more, it was a way He used to reveal Himself to me in a profound and personal way.

It was through painting that I came to understand why I was drawn to Oregon. Majestic Mt Hood is a representation to me of my Majestic God! The Pacific Ocean represents to me the expanse of God! Oregon's beauty reveals to me our Creator God!

I painted between 1978-1980. A friend visiting from Utah took us to the coast and Lincoln City Gallery where I saw my painted saws on display for the first and only time. I stopped painting in late 1980 because God had other plans for me. I had started doing volunteer work and was looking for a job with medical benefits. God gave me a job working for the State of Oregon in April 1981 without even an interview—that's another "God Story!" After that I didn't have time to paint.

He used all of the trials with bad people and bad experiences, to drop me to my knees and get me where He wanted me. He planted the desire in me to live in Oregon. He gave me appreciation for His Creation. And He placed me in a community where a faithful saint,

would teach me about “living all out for Christ” vs. just believing there is a God.

While painting I’m reminded of God’s provision and faithfulness during the trials of my life. He inspired. He directed. He provided. And we grew closer! That’s why I paint.

“When I stand before God at the end of my life, I would hope that I would not have a single bit of talent left, and could say, ‘I used everything you gave me.’” -Erma Bombeck



Linda with Dave and their three youngest grandchildren.

Linda Snook currently lives in Salem, Oregon. Happily married to Dave for 45 years, she has one son and a daughter-in-law with three granddaughters; and a daughter with a grandson and granddaughter, living nearby. She retired nearly three years ago after 31 1/2 years working for the state of Oregon. She finds she is as busy as ever. She now enjoys working a few hours a week in the office at the family business she and Dave started in 1977. Working alongside Dave, their son and grandson-when he’s not in college, brings her great joy. She is also currently mentoring several young girls in the arts of sewing, embroidery, crochet, knitting, scrapbooking and oil painting.

She worships at Emmanuel Bible Church and is actively involved in ministry and Bible Study groups. She is always open to opportunities to share her passion and love for the Lord, and the Good News of Jesus Christ. She and Dave use their business, Snook’s Saw Service INC, as a ministry outreach, by providing Christian resources to the public. She knows the power of prayer and has prayer journals recording requests and answers to hundreds of prayers. She has a heart for all non-believers and refers to them as “Pre-Christians,” praying Titus 2:11: “For the Grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.” She knows every new life in Christ is a reason to celebrate and give God the Glory.

EACH OF YOU SHOULD USE

*whatever GIFT
you have received*
to SERVE OTHERS

AS FAITHFUL STEWARDS OF

God’s Grace

IN ITS VARIOUS FORMS

I Peter 4:10

“Whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of them when He comes in His glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels.” – Luke 9:26

Taste and See

By Rebecca Adams—Kansas City, MO

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." —Matthew 5:6

I didn't know I was starving.
And I didn't realize I was so parched either.
But then I began to nibble at some crumbs and taste fresh water drops.
I became insatiable.

My husband and I were in seminary and had been walking through the darkest times in our marriage and personal lives to date. I was coming to terms with an abusive childhood, had suffered through post-partum depression, and had realized I needed to rebuild everything I thought I knew about God because most of my foundation was a lie.

Simultaneously, my husband was working through significant anger issues. Our marriage careened rapidly towards divorce. I was pregnant with our 4th child. We had just begun homeschooling our daughter. We lived in a 900 square-foot apartment on seminary campus where we were supposed to be learning about being ministers of God's Word. It was insane chaos.

But God used that fire to begin to show me LIFE. As the Father tenderly pursued me and showed me His unconditional love and His true character, *"I found His words and I ate them, they became to me a joy and the delight of my heart"* (Jeremiah 15:16). His Spirit of love transformed my broken heart and His Words brought me ever deeper into His fullness. He showed me richness and treasure and authentic, relational life through Scripture. And I found myself wanting more and more and more of Him.

As I continued growing, I leaned into the beauty of biblical community. I chose to walk with others and to let them walk with me. We spent time together studying Jesus and learning what it meant to live and a life of love before Him. We shared stories of what God had done in our hearts and we were encouraged and emboldened to live more authentically. This was God's design for His Bride!

The Spirit had been prompting my heart to step out in

faith and obedience to share what I had learned with other women. This abundance I had found in Jesus was meant to be shared and I desperately wanted other women to experience Christ the way I had! After two years of praying about it and wrestling with God about it, I surrounded myself with a core community of Jesus-following-women, and we started Gracefully Truthful ministries based on the three aspects of depth I had experienced: Deep Scripture truths tied to everyday life, creating a community for women to lean into each other, and extending the opportunity for women to share their faith stories.

Gracefully Truthful grew from my heart, but the passion was God's and He has used this ministry to invite women in to what He does best in a life given to Him – transform it! Stories of dramatic life change, women seeing Jesus in a new light, and learning new tools to help them study God's Word deeply for themselves has brought depth and intimacy to many women. And the Gracefully Truthful partners, are always praying for more. More stories, more depth, more discovery, more life change, more Jesus.

Whatever your past, whatever your journey looks like, whatever your story entails, we want to join you in it! We want to partner with you and walk life together as we embrace the fullness of God in our everyday lives. Not one of us has all the answers, but together we are seeking after the One who does!

Join the Gracefully Truthful Community, journey with us, share your story, and encounter the Father God who desperately loves you enough to bring you true, lasting transformation through an intimate relationship with Him!

Rebecca Adams: I have been married for an amazing thirteen years to the man of my dreams, Chris. Together, we have eight beautiful children, one that runs with Jesus, six that run around our house, and one that dances inside me for now!

I love the gospel and I love seeing Jesus transform lives with the incredible power of His love delivered through the profound mystery of the Almighty's grace and truth. I am passionate about unleashing Jesus' transforming power in my own life, in the lives of my treasures that I've been entrusted to parent, and the lives of those around me. My highest aim is to love people the way Jesus loves me for in doing so, I'm reflecting the love of a God who gave up everything to rescue me from myself.

I also happen to thoroughly enjoy running, coffee with chocolate, reading good books, laughing with my kids, and dating my husband.

<http://www.gracefullytruthful.com/>



Power Belongs to God. Kolob Canyon, 2016. Photo: Diane Kulkarni

A Psalm of Commitment and Praise

By Rochelle Kelleher—Main Street Church in Brigham City, Utah

You are my King, my Love, my Hope;
I know better than to trust anyone else.
You love me more than I know.
To have life, I must have hope in You.
I must trust You completely.
You have never failed me and won't start now.
You have my best interests in mind.
Others say to trust them, but I know
They will let me down and hurt me.
They are flawed and full of sin.
You are perfect inside and out.
You are trustworthy at all times.
Even when I hurt and cry,
You hold me tight and never let go.
There is no one that comes close to You,
No one that compares to You;
You and You only will I trust.



Rochelle Kelleher was born and raised a Mormon. Three years ago she had her name removed from Mormon Church membership rolls and started her journey in the Christian world. She lives in Brigham City, is married to a God-fearing man, and they have three children.

Dear Dr. J. I. Packer,

It's been 27 years since I read your book, *Knowing God*, and discovered a key that has unlocked the door of journey blessing for me. I carry this precious key safely, but I'm always ready to share it with other travelers. These 157 words have provided the perfect instruction about "What to do while waiting and walking the Highway of Holiness."

"How can we turn our knowledge about God into knowledge of God? The rule for doing this is demanding but simple. It is that we turn each truth that we learn *about* God into matter for meditation *before* God, leading to prayer and praise *to* God . . . Meditation is the activity of calling to mind, and thinking over, and dwelling on, and applying to oneself the various things that one knows about the works and ways and purposes and promises of God. It is an activity of holy thought, consciously performed in the presence of God. . . . Its purpose is to clear one's mental and spiritual vision of God, and to let His truth make its full and proper impact on one's mind and heart. . . . And it is as we enter more and more deeply into this experience of being humbled and exalted that our knowledge of God increases, and with it our peace, our strength, and our joy."

Shelf Life: A Morning Meditation

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



I set aside the shelf-at-eye-level in my bathroom for the place to pause and mindfully "reset" my heart and attitude before heading out for my day. Phrases, verses and images compel me to linger awhile and remember God's instructions:

- Set your mind on things above
- Dwell on whatever is right, lovely, true. . .
- Love selflessly, unconditionally
- Remember that He is worthy of praise and my commitment
- Recall His glorious promise: "*If I take the wings of the dawn, if I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, even there Your hand will lead me, and Your right hand will lay hold of me.*"
- Rejoice in His presence
- Know that He is "*the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice*

and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight."

- Be revived and comforted daily by His Word
- Receive His wisdom and respond with gratitude
- Walk by faith, not by sight—not relying on my own understanding
- Commit myself to serve in humility, depending on God to guard my heart and tongue
- And praise Him for giving me a promise and fulfilling it within a few days: "*I will be with your mouth, and teach you what you are to say.*"

Being fortified by contemplating God's Word on my meditation shelf, I head for the toaster and a hot cup of tea to spend some time with my husband over the morning newspaper. And *bang!* I'm slammed with earth's reality: a planet in constant, bloody rebellion against

God, the earth, and other people. I read about human beasts led by Evil, battling the King of the Universe on every level!

Given a choice, I wonder why anyone would want to side with Satan when his trademarks are consistently death and destruction. History is littered with corpses of all kinds illustrating that story.

Reading today's version of man's continual struggle for control and power, his political lies and hypocrisies, resulting financial chaos, endless wars, abject loss and corruption on every level, our world being trashed for a buck, and the helpless starved to death for political advantage, I—*Enough already!*

On the way to the comics, I pause to peruse the pages of obituaries to see if I know anyone who's passed into eternity. That's what you do when you're entering your 70th year. My grandmother said one day when passing an impressive cemetery, "People are just dying to get in there." The smiling faces on the newspaper's pages remind me that none of us lives very long, and it matters very much what happens in the dash: **1946-20__**.

After fixing a second cup of tea, I sit down again, put the newspaper away, and open my Bible to the Gospel of Luke to read and address the study guide's questions.

Looking closely at the text, I'm drawn into the story and find myself rubbing shoulders with the multitudes jostling for a place to sit down and listen. There's no doubt that the gracious words of Jesus about what it means to be truly blessed are compelling, and startling.

While listening to Him, I am aware of the mass of misery around me, their desperation for freedom from all kinds of oppression and for His healing touch. Their fear of suffering and death is palpable.

Jesus' words stir my soul, so I linger and offer my help to the women who are serving Him and His disciples. After a meal, everyone is exhausted from the demands of the day, but when we turn in, Jesus forfeits His rest and goes off alone to speak with His Father. How I'd love to know what They say to each other.

The next morning as I follow Jesus into the small town of Nain, my attention is riveted when He approaches a poor widow walking beside the coffin that holds her dead son. Jesus' tears reveal His deep compassion for her, a woman held captive to sorrow and the finality of death.

Approaching her, Jesus gently urges, "Do not weep." Then He addresses the corpse. "Young man, I say to you, arise!" And he sat up and began speaking. The crowd is suddenly still, all of us terrified, in a state of shock! Who could have even conceived of such an idea, much less

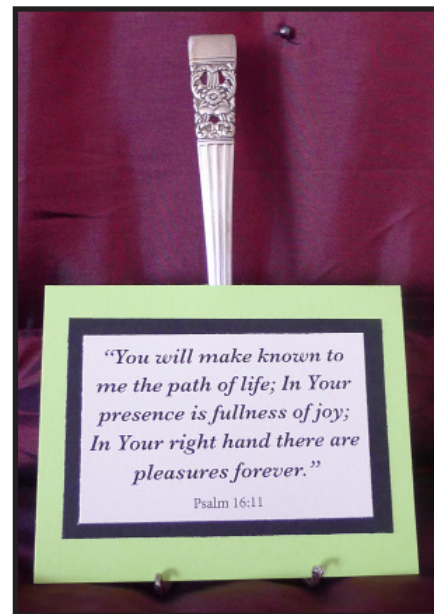
been able to exert the power to do it?

Watching the multitude surge forth to touch the Master, I am among the many openly praising God. It's hard to put all of this together at the moment, but I know that I have surrendered my life to Jesus, that He has accepted me into His Kingdom, and that we will be together in Heaven forever.

"Master," I tell Him when we have a minute, "everyday that You give me breath on this troubled earth, I will follow You. I want to pray like You do, and follow Mary's example of sitting at Your feet to listen and heed Your teaching. Is that the way to become Your yielded, in-the-process-of-being-a-transformed-woman?"

Writing these words at my kitchen table, I sense a dialogue between Jesus and me has begun, and that He'll answer my question in a surprising way. I know from experience that through written meditation and being receptive that His truth will, as Packer said, make "its full and proper impact on my mind and heart."

Just then, Jesus offers me a new way of thinking about my journey life, both here on earth and in Heaven forevermore. Within minutes, I have added His gift from Psalm 16:11 to my Meditation Shelf.



"This is my life work: helping people understand and respond to this Message. It came as a sheer gift to me, a real surprise, God handling all the details. When it came to presenting the Message to people who had no background in God's way, I was the least qualified of any of the available Christians. God saw to it that I was equipped, but you can be sure that it had nothing to do with my natural abilities. And so here I am, preaching and writing about things that are way over my head, the inexhaustible riches and generosity of Christ."

Ephesians 3:7-8 *The Message*



"My eye is not on the density of the fog, but on the living God, who controls every circumstance of my life." –George Muller



My Story

by _____