

REMEMBERING AND CELEBRATING
GOD FOR HIS FAITHFULNESS



K
I
N
G



K
I
N
G
S



PRINCE

THE



O
F

G
O
D'
S
W
I
S
D
O
M
P
R
O
T
E
C
T



T
R
U
E

PEACE

VINE



L
I
G
H
T



W
O
R
L
D



O
F
T
H
E

COLLECTED PIECES FROM
GOD'S REDEEMED

Living Hope



God's Wisdom Project:

**Remembering and Celebrating
God for His Faithfulness**

**Collected Pieces
from
the Redeemed**

This book is dedicated

to our Savior, Jesus.

It is for His glory

that we have written

our stories.

"Our hearts are stirred by a noble theme as we recite our verses for the King. . . ."

Psalm 45:1

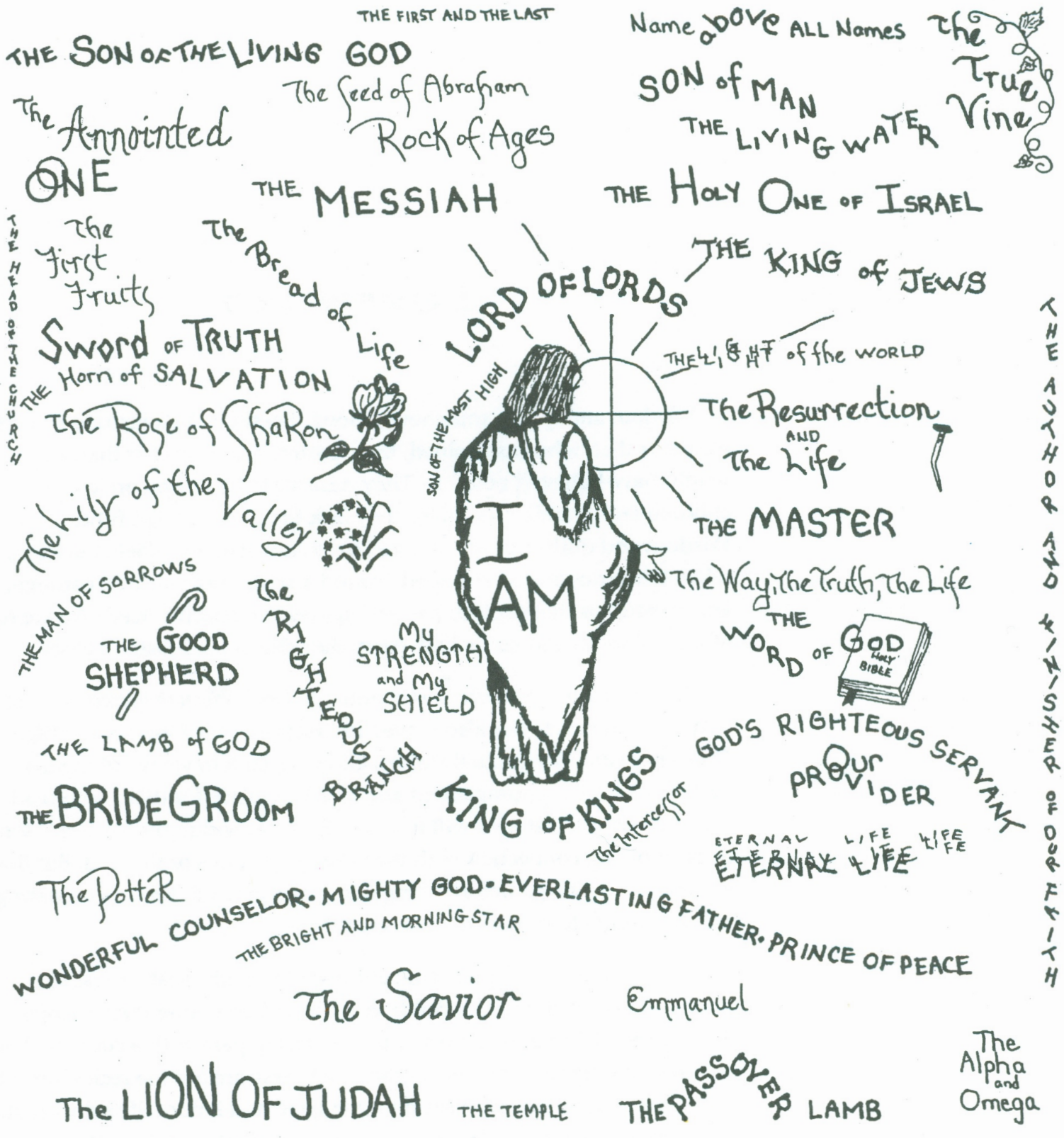
Eyes Only

DIANE KULKARNI--BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

I submit *God's Wisdom Project*
to **The Almighty** in an
envelope marked "Eyes Only."

(Of course, I'll send my SASE.)

With surprising inclusions and
elaborate suggestions of His own,
the return envelope bulges with
shimmering silken threads of kaleidoscopic
hues that I can spin and interlace,
embroider, and edge in gold. Myriad
possibilities for my poetic journey--
He shares them all with me.



"Jesus is Lord"
Sue Brooks
1996

FOREWORD

Wisdom and quilts, somehow, belong together. Both include concrete elements that, when assembled, form patterns much richer than we would have believed possible. They deserve to be passed on to our children and grandchildren, for they link the past with the future. Wisdom and quilts may be allowed to sit, unused, on a shelf; but both, when taken down and wrapped around a soul, offer warmth, courage, and awareness that another has anticipated our specific need—we are not alone. Wisdom and quilts both carry the echo of the Master's touch.

Each of the women who contributed to *God's Wisdom Project* has not only felt that touch, but also woven its fruits into the fabric of her life. They share their individual stories, allowing Him to weave of them a quilt that offers encouragement and a resting-place for those who read. As is His way, the stories will find touch points within the readers' own lives, allowing connection with the very deep places of the soul. But that is hardly surprising. Before a single line was penned, He was preparing readers' hearts to receive the messages here.

Many of this quilt's pieces are cut from the cloth most central to women's lives: helping our children grow and accepting their changes, finding friendship in unexpected places, facing pain with a courage that is only possible because of God's grace. Yet these are not the recitations of the habitual optimists who see only the good and ignore life's darker side. They are the earnest declarations of hands made strong through years of

persistent faith, of hearts that have known doubt and pain, and still survived and been renewed because of His very real power.

Our God is relational. We walk with Him, we stumble, we cry out, and He is there to lift us up in the most unexpected ways. We stand amazed; we thank Him, and gain the vision to take the next important steps. And little by little, the pattern comes into clearer focus: we gain a fuller sense of who He is. The echoes of this new awareness resound in our human relationships, as one person's victory or pain becomes His instrument in the life of another. In sharing these stories, in identifying what is most essential to our humanity, we experience a fresh glimpse of God's Wisdom.

Dr. Pat Schoenrade
Professor of Psychology
William Jewell College
Liberty, Missouri
December, 1999

The Master Quilt-Maker

SUE BROOKS -- MANTUA, UTAH

You, the Creator, Designer, the One,
Master Quilt-Maker, I AM, The Son,
You knew the pattern and had the plan,
This all decided before You began.

You gathered scraps from here and there,
Choosing each piece with the greatest care.
Scraps of color, of texture, unique on their own,
Yet You never had purposed them to be alone.

You laid them out after shaping and trimming,
Fitted each with the other, a "unit" beginning.
You joined them together, the work of Your hand,
Stitching and strengthening, Your purpose, Your plan.

This quilt top together, but not complete
You made it lie smooth by pressing with heat.
You then sewed the unit to a middle foundation,
For substance, for warmth, to be solidly stationed.

The last large piece You quilted on for the backing
Three pieces in one, only the binding was lacking.
So You bound it together with each side hemmed in,
The Quilt with Your purpose, Kingdom work to begin.

A work of glory and beauty by Your design,
Whole and intricate, so perfectly aligned.
Now cover the cold, the hurting, the lost,
Give them refuge and shelter, share The Cost.

ABOUT THE COVER

The Quilting Process

Our Father in Heaven is planning and assembling a quilt. This is illustrated in the cover of *God's Wisdom Project*, the book you hold in your hand. The writings and art (the quilt blocks) come from many women, living in several places on the earth, yet all are part of the finished quilt, the Body of Christ.

The purpose of the book is to edify, to share the work of God in our lives, to help and encourage others, and to give glory to God as we speak of His grace, love, and intricate work.

Knowing that the quilting process is a labor of love and care, taking both time and patience at each step, the Quilter must first select a design and then choose fabric by color, pattern, and texture to blend with and complement the pieces in accordance with the plan and design.

Imagine that you are a quilt block, unique and individual, chosen and brought together to fit with other blocks as part of a whole, for a greater purpose.

The Quilt represents a picture of God gathering His people, individuals from different places, demonstrating how He fits us together, a perfectly blended unit, His church, for His purpose and glory.

When all of the pieces for the blocks are gathered, the quilter lays them out and cuts with precision so that they fit together perfectly. This is a very important step: If one piece is not accurate, it will cause the whole quilt to be unbalanced. The next step is to sew one piece to another, pressing where they meet at the seam, to make it smooth. This is repeated to complete the unit or quilt block. All of the blocks are sewn together in various steps until there is one unified piece, the quilt top.

God's Wisdom Project

Three layers make up a quilt: the top, the backing and the batting between the two, which provides the warmth.

These three large pieces must be joined together to become one. The joining is the quilting process, traditionally done by small hand-sewn stitches which follow a pattern drawn on the quilt top to enhance the finished design. Machine quilting follows the same rule.

After the quilting process is finished, the quilt must be bound together on all sides with binding. This is a strip of fabric that closes off and finishes the edges of the quilt. The binding frames, or finishes, the quilt so it won't come apart. It is then ready to be used for its intended purpose. Most often, the quilt serves as a bed covering for warmth or adornment; it can also be displayed as a wall hanging.

The quilt is a one-of-a-kind work of art and is designed to give others joy in the beauty of its design, color and workmanship.

The parallel is then drawn: God selects, designs and brings to wholeness and unity His fine creative work in each of His children, individually and corporately, for a greater purpose. And in the process, we experience change: being trimmed (pruned), being placed where He wants us, and being pressed by His refining fire. We're bound in His love to become one with Him, a new creation, a work that reflects and radiates Him, drawing others to come and take a closer look at God's workmanship in us, and ultimately at Him, our Creator.

Sue Brooks
Mantua, Utah
December, 1999

PREFACE

The Importance of Remembering

Reading the Psalms gives us encouragement and comfort. Studying the Psalms provides us with a project. *God's Wisdom Project* grew out of my nine-month study of the Psalms and Proverbs in Explorer's Bible Study in 1998.

Three specific psalms show us practical and fascinating ways to remember and celebrate God for His faithfulness:

- ◆ Recalling our salvation experience: *"When my heart was grieved and my spirit embittered, I was senseless and ignorant. I was a brute beast before You. Psalm 73:21-22*
- ◆ Celebrating our earthly journey as born-again believers and our destination in Heaven: *"Yet I am always with You; You hold me by my right hand. You guide me with Your counsel and afterward You will take me into Glory." Psalm 73:23-24*
- ◆ Submitting to God's wisdom as we live out our salvation on this earth: *"Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom." Psalm 90:12*
- ◆ Obeying God's way to live in relationship with Him, Psalm 105:1-5:
 - 1) Give thanks to the Lord
 - 2) Call on His name
 - 3) Make known among the nations what He has done
 - 4) Sing praises, telling all He has accomplished
 - 5) Glory in His name
 - 6) Seek Him & rejoice
 - 7) Look to God's strength and seek His face always
 - 8) Remember His wonders

*"LET THE REDEEMED OF
THE LORD SAY SO,
WHOM HE HATH
REDEEMED FROM THE
HAND OF THE ENEMY."
PSALM 107:2*

God's Wisdom Project

As I began putting my thoughts together on paper about these psalms, I felt God had given me a project--and it wasn't just my solo experience and creativity He wanted. There should be a chorus of praise from women of faith, remembering and celebrating His work of faithful grace in their lives. Together, their words and their artwork would become a bright flame in the darkness of the world's unbelief and despair. They would point others to our saving Lord, Jesus.

*"O GIVE THANKS UNTO
THE LORD; CALL UPON
HIS NAME: MAKE KNOWN
HIS DEEDS AMONG THE
PEOPLE. SING UNTO
HIM, SING PSALMS UNTO
HIM. TALK YE OF ALL
HIS WONDROUS WORKS."
PSALM 105:1-2*

At every step of the project's development, I have submitted myself to God's wisdom for His direction. As a team, Sue Brooks, Randi Hunsaker, Brenda Reyes, Georgia Herod, and Sue Underhill have taken this project as their own, seeking to create a gift of beauty for God and one which we can share with others. We are thankful to our proofreaders who have been instrumental in the polishing process, Susan Behring and Judy Hartvigsen. And we are especially grateful to Dr. Pat Schoenrade for her insightful Foreword, which has unified the project with sensitivity and grace.

Are you redeemed by the blood of the Lamb? Then you also have a piece to add to this project. The Apostle Peter describes it clearly in I Peter 2:9: ". . . you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of Him Who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."

The pieces included in *God's Wisdom Project* have been submitted by women of all ages and from various backgrounds. Some live nearby and others on the other side of the earth. Their writing and artwork will inspire and encourage you.

So take a little time to read. Then pray and ask God to give you a way to remember and celebrate His faithfulness to you personally. A few pages at the end of the book have been set aside for your story.

Diane Kulkarni
Brigham City, Utah
December, 1999

Pieced Together

4. <i>Eyes Only</i>	Diane Kulkarni
6. Foreword.....	Pat Schoenrade
8. <i>The Master Quilt-Maker</i>	Sue Brooks
9. About the Cover: <i>Quilting Process</i>	Sue Brooks
11. Preface: <i>The Importance of Remembering</i>	Diane Kulkarni
17. <i>Whale Watching</i>	Randi Hunsaker
20. <i>Freedom to Forget</i>	Brenda Reyes
21. <i>The Ultimate Adventure</i>	Georgia Herod
25. <i>Treasured by God</i>	Sue Underhill
29. <i>Transformation</i>	Deanna Lang
33. <i>Sanctification</i>	Jenn Davis
34. <i>God Rejoices Over You</i>	Leslie Reynolds
37. <i>Exodus</i>	Ruth Eskelsen
38. <i>Wealthy Woman</i>	Marlene Depler
39. <i>I Need a Private Time, Mother</i>	Pauleen Dolling
45. <i>Count It All Joy</i>	Joan Kramer
48. <i>God Means It All For Good</i>	Charlene Howdle
53. <i>Assurance</i>	Mary Baker
54. <i>Ever Mindful</i>	Marlene Depler
55. <i>He Will Show Compassion</i>	Erika Currier
58. <i>The Walk</i>	Sarah Overturf
64. <i>Love Me</i>	Bobbie Jo England
65. <i>With All Diligence</i>	Kathy Huff
67. <i>Dog Days</i>	Diane Kulkarni
68. <i>When Words Fail</i>	Sue Underhill
71. <i>Blessings From Loma Linda</i>	Ilene Germer
75. <i>It Only Happens to Other People</i>	Kathleen Ebeling
78. <i>Forty Dollar Bills</i>	Ginger Work
81. <i>The Power of United Prayer</i>	Wendy Moffitt
83. <i>Devotion on JOY</i>	Wendy Moffitt
84. <i>Listening for God to Speak</i>	Leslie Reynolds
87. <i>Ladies, We Are So Blessed</i>	Charlene Howdle
90. <i>Walking Away</i>	Georgia Herod
93. <i>Hold on to the Promise</i>	Alicia Murphy
94. <i>The Promise</i>	Alicia Murphy
95. <i>Lost on the Sea Of Cortez</i>	Darlene Ebeling

99. <i>The Airplane Ride</i>	Sue Brooks
106. <i>The Composition of My Heart</i>	Myra Martin
110. <i>The Father's Gift</i>	Jenn Davis
113. <i>Trusting</i>	Randi Hunsaker
115. <i>Take Time to be Grateful</i>	Spring Heflin
117. <i>Choosing to Obey</i>	Stacy Brooks
120. <i>Surrendered Clay</i>	Diane Kulkarni
124. <i>I Remember When</i>	Your Contribution

Photos & Drawings

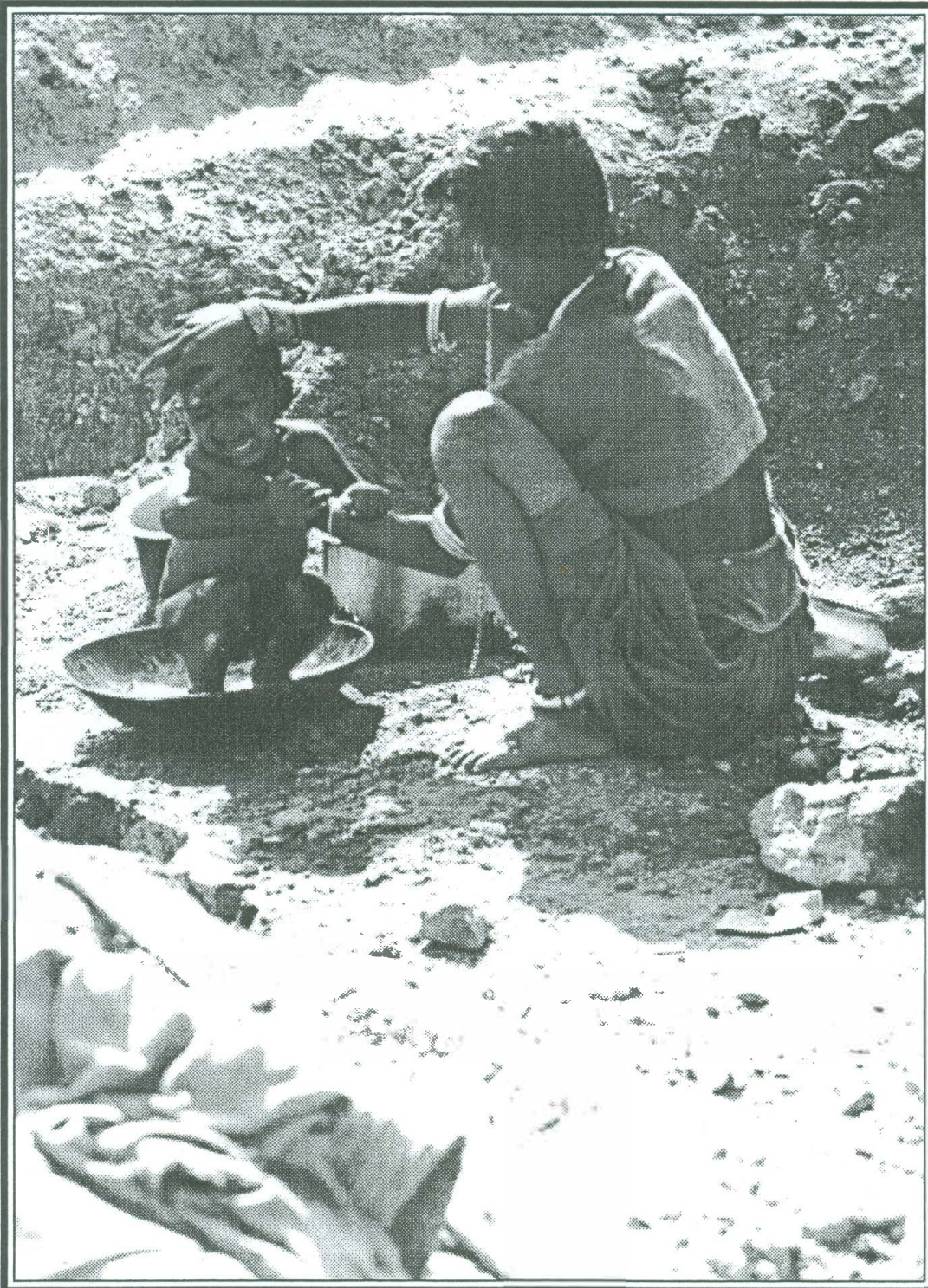
Cover: <i>God's Wisdom Project</i>	Sue Brooks
5. Illustration: <i>Jesus is Lord</i>	Sue Brooks
15. Photo: <i>God So Loved the World</i>	Diane Kulkarni
19. Illustration: <i>Whales Watching</i>	Jeff Hunsaker
24. Photo: <i>To God be the Glory</i>	Sue Brooks
36. Photo: <i>Perseverance</i>	Leslie Serna
50. Illustration: <i>In God's Hands</i>	Christy Stinson
57. Photo: <i>Hope</i>	Kathleen Ebeling
66. Photo: <i>Self-Portrait</i>	Diane Kulkarni
98. Photo: <i>The Beacon</i>	Darlene Ebeling
103. Illustration: <i>Carried in the Palm of His Hand</i>	Sue Brooks
114. Photo: <i>Mighty Eucalyptus</i>	Darlene Ebeling
122. Illustration: <i>Centered on His Wheel</i>	Jeff Hunsaker
126. Photo: <i>My Sheep Hear My Voice</i>	Diane Kulkarni

Editorial Staff

Managing Editor.....	Diane Kulkarni
Assistant Text Editor.....	Randi Hunsaker
Assistant Text Editor.....	Georgia Herod
Art Editor.....	Sue Brooks
Assistant Art Editor.....	Sue Underhill
Layout Editor.....	Brenda Reyes

The LORD God Almighty has inspired every step of the process.

Watkins Printing in Logan, Utah has produced "God's Wisdom Project"
Comments? Contact: Diane Kulkarni • 868 N. Medoland Drive
• Brigham City, UT 84302-1648 • Email: kulkarni@favorites.com.



*"GOD SO LOVED THE
WORLD"*

*Photograph:
Diane Kulkarni
Hyderabad, India 1983*

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

Ephesians 4:2-3

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

Whale Watching

RANDI HUNSAKER -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

If God answers prayer for "small" things, does that mean He will answer prayer for the "big" things? Is God sovereignly involved in the dailiness of my life--or not?

When our business, Prototype Plastics, inexplicably dried up two years ago, I became anxious and frightened. As the days, then the weeks passed with little or no work, I found myself becoming angry with God and feeling resentful. It was an emotional struggle that affected me spiritually. I felt that God no longer cared for us, that He had abandoned us.

Thinking it might be our last annual trip to the Big Sur in California, we went ahead with plans to visit the area, this time joined by our family. Since they were along, we looked for fun and interesting things to do, and one day signed on for a whale watching trip out of Morro Bay.

The gray whales migrate from their summer feeding grounds in the Arctic waters, swimming over 5,000 miles to the warm lagoons of Baja California to breed and give birth, returning some months later along the same route. They swim five to six miles per hour and stay in shallow water (100-300 feet deep), approximately parallel to the Alaska, Canada, Washington, Oregon, California and Baja shorelines. We had observed their passage from the coastline for several years, so our mood that day was upbeat. We were excited to see these massive creatures up close.

Our group, along with a few others, boarded the *Mallard*, a sturdy, no-nonsense fishing vessel and headed out to sea. Seagulls gathered to share our snacks. Sea otters floated placidly on their backs, enjoying shellfish at leisure as we continued our west/southwest course to intercept the migrating grays. The engine churned beneath us, the motion slow and rolling, the shoreline far away--how much farther to the whales? The loud speaker squawked and a voice informed us that we had traveled the usual time and distance and would be turning back shortly if they weren't spotted soon.

*"AND MY GOD WILL
MEET ALL YOUR NEEDS
ACCORDING TO HIS
GLORIOUS RICHES IN
CHRIST JESUS."
PHILIPPIANS 4:19*

God's Wisdom Project

We were crushed. My heart sank--it felt like all the past weeks of silence and disappointment. Without much faith, I silently prayed, "Oh, Lord, You created this vast sea and everything in it, and You know where all Your creatures are. Will you please send them to us? We just can't go back without seeing these magnificent animals! Thank You, Jesus!"

Minutes later, the voice over the speaker breathlessly told us to look to the right of the boat where a school of porpoise were swimming directly toward us! They seemed to come out of nowhere and we were their destination! There were several of the most beautiful, graceful creatures in God's kingdom. They were unafraid, approaching our side quickly, swishing through the water perfectly. They turned and, as if escorting us, flew as on sea wings underneath us, beside us, before us, under the bow, racing just in front of us.

Why didn't we hit them? They looked right at us, and for a few moments we passengers and crew become one with these amazing animals. As if God's own emissaries, the porpoises pierced our hearts with outrageous joy, and we all felt incredibly privileged and chosen.

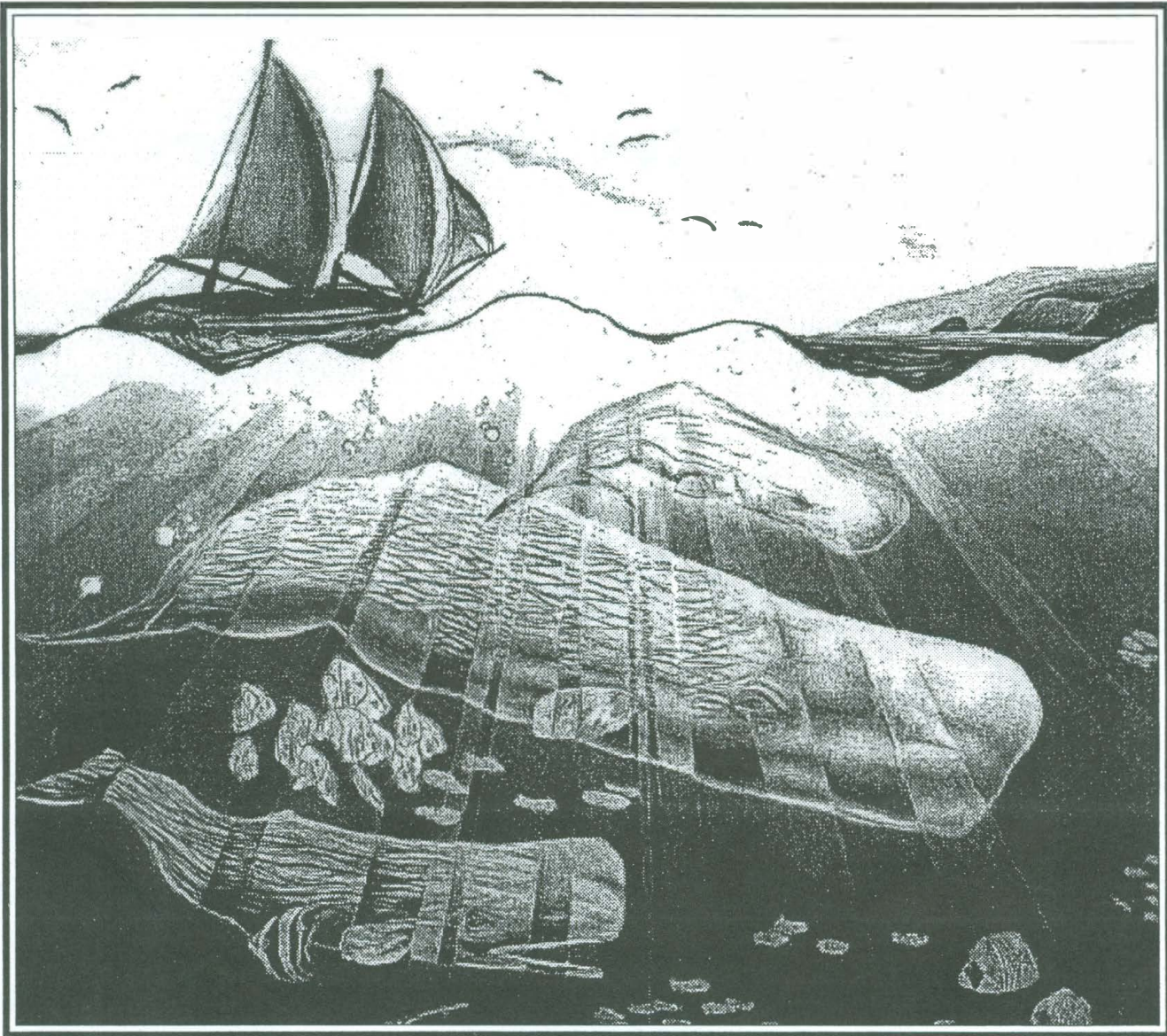
The porpoises disappeared almost as quickly as they had come, but everyone was dazed with happiness. God poured His blessings out that day upon the *Mallard*. In almost an afterthought, the Lord led us to a resting pod of whales. The engines idled, we drifted among them photographing and "sizing" them up. They were immense, weighing 45 tons when full grown, their skin a mottled gray caused by skin pigments and small crustaceans that leave the skin scarred. Some rolled lazily on the surface, some dove down and we tried to get a photograph of their tails. We saw the spouts, the water spray from their blow holes.

God had answered my "small" prayer almost immediately with much more than I could ask or think! Now my heart soared--what a wonderful God we know.

It turned out to be a perfect day. Later, the crew told us they hadn't seen porpoises for days, and that their boat often returns to shore without having spotted even one whale.

Our business was lean the rest of that year. Whenever I felt panic

"NOW TO HIM WHO IS
ABLE TO DO
IMMEASURABLY MORE
THAN WE ASK OR
IMAGINE, ACCORDING TO
HIS POWER THAT IS AT
WORK IN US, TO HIM BE
GLORY IN THE CHURCH
AND IN JESUS CHRIST
THROUGHOUT ALL
GENERATIONS, FOR EVER
AND EVER! AMEN."
EPHESIANS 3:20



"WHALES WATCHING"
Drawing: Jeff Hunsaker

Imperceptibly, my focus shifted from frustrating circumstances to confidence in the Lord and His Word:
"I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, and in His Word I put my hope."
Psalm 130:5

"EVERY GOOD AND PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, COMING DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF THE HEAVENLY LIGHTS, WHO DOES NOT CHANGE LIKE SHIFTING SHADOWS."
JAMES 1:17

rising within me, the Lord would remind me of that day at sea. He wanted me to trust Him in all things, large and small. Since such a small thing was treated with such love, how could I doubt whether or not His love was also guiding our business and every other aspect of our lives?

Freedom to Forget

BRENDA REYES -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

Satan knows exactly where to strike, doesn't he? Rather than making the changes and becoming more actively involved with Christ, I find myself throwing a huge pity-party, taking Satan's bait and playing it his way.

*"NOW THANKS BE TO
GOD WHO ALWAYS
LEADS US IN TRIUMPH
IN CHRIST, AND
THROUGH US DIFFUSES
THE FRAGRANCE OF HIS
KNOWLEDGE IN EVERY
PLACE."
II CORINTHIANS 2:14*

One of our deacons recently reminded us of II Corinthians 2:10-11. *"Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices."*

Not only was I completely blind to the Father's forgiveness, but also I allowed Satan to play his games in my life, physically and spiritually. As the Lord has opened my eyes, I've realized that I have no business rejecting forgiveness, even for my own shortcomings.

As a Spirit-filled individual, I've been forgiven and wiped clean through Christ. My spiritual life will not grow until I accept that fact and know in my heart that past failures no longer exist to weigh me down.

I am able to begin an intimate love relationship with Christ when I fall in love with the Spirit inside me, the guarantee of our salvation and relationship with the Father through Christ (II Cor. 1:22).

The Lord has reminded me of this same lesson many times throughout my life. During college, He blessed me with Psalm 36 and its application to my unsatisfied self-pity.

"They [the children of men] are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house, and You give them drink from the river of Your pleasures. For with You is the fountain of life; in Your light we see light" (Psalm 36:8-9).

Why stop and dwell in Satan's mud puddle when the Lord has prepared such a glorious river filled with His pleasures for our lives?

The Ultimate Adventure

GEORGIA HEROD -- HYRUM, UTAH

With hand on my forehead to cut the glare, I stood staring into the sky, eyes straining to catch a glimpse of the dot as it would appear through the clouds. Several others were doing the same, a bit of tension in the air. Nearby, a jumpsuit-clad young man, wearing dreadlocks, a hatpin-shaped earring, a horseshoe pin in the skin between his collar bones, and a stud in his tongue, lay back on a picnic table bench trying to spot the student skydiver.

Five and a half years earlier, on my 50th birthday, I had stood in the same spot in Rotorua, New Zealand, gazing aloft to see my then 12 and 15 year-old children and my husband come into view.

When they were safely on the ground and we drove away from the airport, I said, "I want to jump someday." While my son laughed at the idea, my daughter skeptically said, "You, Mom? You're kidding." What they didn't understand was that after having faced a cancer diagnosis, six months of chemotherapy and 35 days of radiation, being burned, blistered, and bald, falling out of an airplane would be a piece of cake! My husband smiled exuberantly and yelled, "Go for it!"

While the years passed, I remained undaunted. For five and a half years, I had said, "I'm going to do it." Six months ago, handing me plane tickets to New Zealand as a Christmas and birthday present, my husband had said with delight in his eyes, "But you have to jump." I would--but I wasn't going to think about it because I knew if I did, I'd be terrified and wouldn't follow through.

The "someday" had now arrived. I was going to tandem skydive, hooked at shoulders and hips to a jumpmaster. Once we'd spotted the student diver, I went into the nearby hanger to receive instruction and suit up. Craig, one of three jumpmasters, gathered my gear and helped me into my jumpsuit and harness, making adjustments, telling me step by step what would happen. I assumed he'd be jumping with me.

*"TRUST IN THE LORD
WITH ALL YOUR HEART
AND LEAN NOT ON YOUR
OWN UNDERSTANDING; IN
ALL YOUR WAYS
ACKNOWLEDGE HIM, AND
HE WILL MAKE YOUR
PATHS STRAIGHT."
PROVERBS 3:5-6*

As I turned around to pick up my helmet, gloves, and goggles, Mr. Dreadlocks stood beside me, hand extended in greeting. "Hey, mate, my name is Rag. I'll be your jumpmaster today." His blue eyes sparkled with excitement as he explained the procedure. "We'll climb to 9500 feet; the pilot will open the door; we'll scoot over to the edge. When I tap your shoulders, you grab your shoulder straps, smile for the camera on the wing, and fall forward." Silently, I nodded my understanding. "We'll free fall at 500 feet a second for six seconds; then I'll open the chute. There will be a jerk; then we'll make a couple of turns and come to a landing. There's nothing to it."

I was still trying not to think about what I was preparing to do. Perhaps I looked a bit skeptical. Two or three times he said, "You don't have to worry about anything; you're not going anywhere without me."

As we waited for clearance to taxi for take off, he told me he'd been jumping for fourteen years; six to eight times a day. After making his first jump on a dare, he was hooked. He was indeed a certified jumpmaster. "Not to worry; I'll have everything under control," he said confidently, as he checked my straps one more time.

Finally, the control tower gave us permission to fly and we began the ascent. As I looked out over the gorgeous lakes and forests surrounding Rotorua, I suddenly thought, "I should have taken some Dramamine!" Too late for that! After the plane circled several times above the clouds, the pilot opened the door. The wind pushed against us as we edged to door. "Remember, you're not going anywhere without me," Rag shouted against the rush of the wind.

After a brief Kodak moment and a smile, I closed my eyes and rolled forward. Then with arms outstretched and eyes wide, we fell above the clouds and through them. As we emerged, Rag pulled the cord and we jerked upwards, taking my breath away. What a beautiful, silent sight!

We floated gently, taking a couple of turns to get us in line for landing, raised our feet and sat down. "The ultimate thrill" had taken, at most, two minutes.

With a slightly queasy stomach, I sat safely on the ground, stunned, laughing a bit nervously. My husband came running, shouting, and applauding. If only my kids could have seen me!

A few days later, still in shock that I had actually skydived, I reflected on the experience. What an incredible act of faith I had performed. I had entrusted my very life to Rag, whom I'd never seen before. Not only that, I knew only what he told me about himself. I hadn't even asked for references or checked out his certification. I had merely taken his word that I wasn't going anywhere without him and that he knew what he was doing.

Suddenly I was aware of the Lord's presence. *My character is flawless. My record is eternal and unblemished. I am absolutely trustworthy. I will never leave you nor forsake you. You are precious in my sight and I love you.*

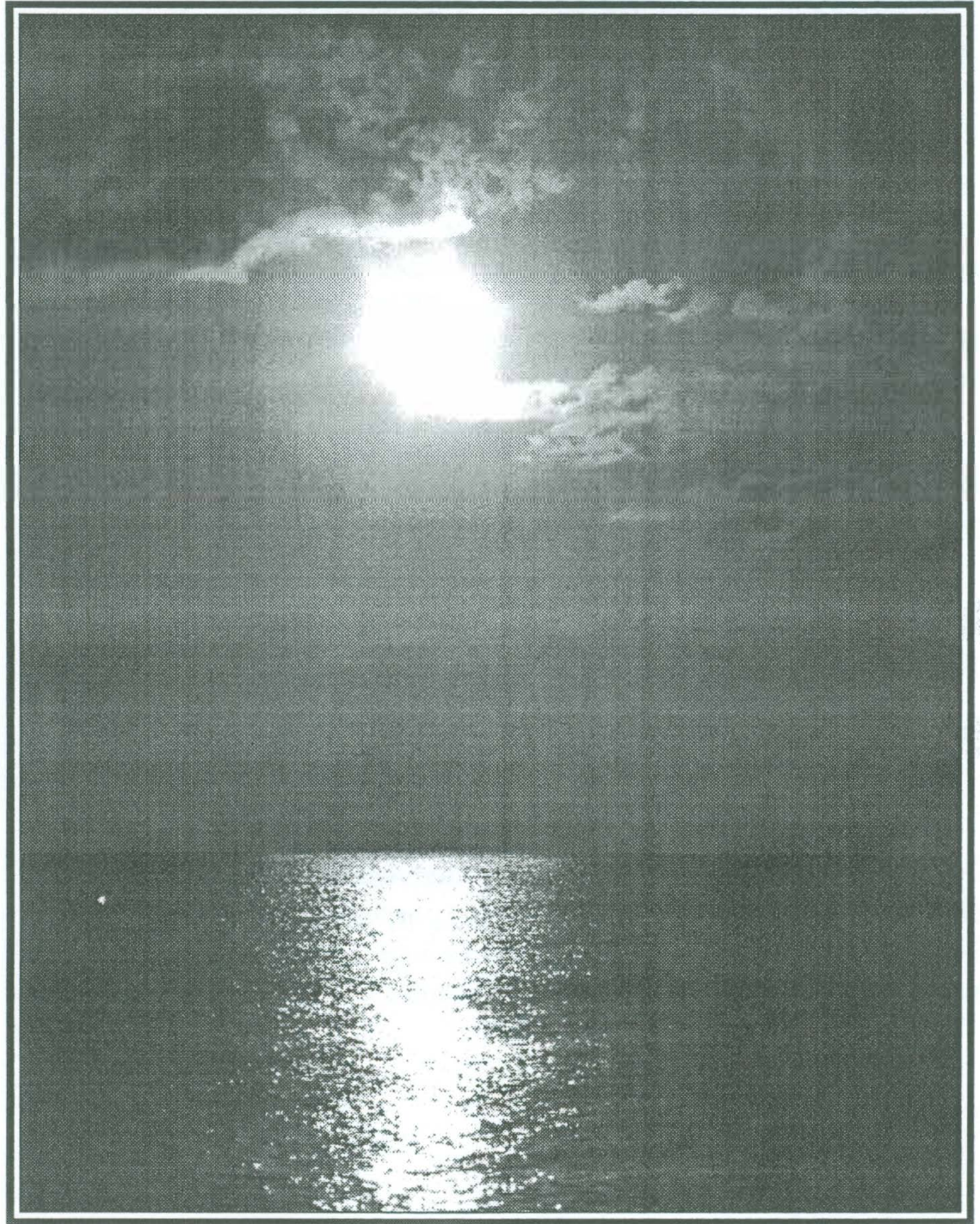
Rag had said he was in control. In fact, if I'd said, "Well, just let me do this my way for a few seconds," he would have said, "Sorry, I'm in control or we're not jumping."

But how often have I said to God, "I can do this my way," rather than yield to His authority, power, and love? Such arrogance!

Immediately my heart was convicted, and I bowed my head, confessing my lack of trust and begging forgiveness. And in the ensuing moments, just as I had resolved to jump, I purposed afresh to consciously entrust my life to the Lover of my soul, the only One who is absolutely trustworthy. Now that is the ultimate adventure!

*"TO GOD BE THE
GLORY"*

*Photograph:
Sue Brooks
Cozumel, Mexico
1996*



*"Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, Who alone does
marvelous deeds. Praise be to His glorious name forever;
May the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen and Amen."*

Psalm 72:18-29

Treasured by God

SUE UNDERHIL -- STOCKPORT, ENGLAND

Physical deafness has not stopped God's blessings. It's not clearly known how long I've had limited hearing. Throughout my schooling I was considered a slow learner, the result of a crippling stammer which held me back asking questions on what I didn't understand. No one questioned that I might have a hearing difficulty, but then, neither did I until the showing of a Flash Gordon film at the children's matinee. I remember clearly asking my sister whether she could hear the words, or was she like me and just reading the pictures?

Only ten years old at the time, I remember the sudden shock of isolation, of being left on the outside. As a child I met Jesus through the Bible stories. I loved to put myself into the main character -- as David fighting Goliath, or young Samuel recognizing God's voice for the first time. And, like Zacchaeus who had climbed a tree to see Jesus, so had I, imagining the whole of my school were there to see Jesus choose me. I was 11 years old and knew I had found a friend in Jesus. My heart skipped with excitement as I made plans to let Him in on my hidden secrets, share my loneliness and the pains of rejection. I would talk to Him at night, under the bedclothes, I decided. And this I did.

Years later, while I was practicing as a nurse, my hearing difficulties became obvious to those with whom I worked, but with a little understanding and the help of hearing aids, I communicated reasonably well. It hasn't always been easy, especially in those times when I have to fight my way to understand lips hiding behind a beard, or when I am forced to sit opposite a window leaving me nothing but a dark outline to read of the person facing me.

The hardest part is being misinterpreted or misunderstood by some hearing people. For example, at one hospital where I worked, I was made to wear a sign across my chest saying, "I AM DEAF --PLEASE SPEAK CLEARLY." I found this a humiliating experience. People would lean right over me. To have them shout at me was even worse. All I could see

were the whites of their eyes and their elasticized lips.

Over the years my hearing deteriorated, with the doctors repeating, "Nothing can be done." I found it frustrating and lost my confidence in simple everyday tasks -- answering the telephone, talking to anyone other than friends and family. My longing was to carry on a conversation and to keep it going, to share a joke and laugh with friends, and not some half hour later! For years I hid behind friends, contributing my acknowledgment through a smile or a nod of agreement. It was far easier for me to let someone else do the talking and free myself from further embarrassment.

*"A BRUISED REED HE
WILL NOT BREAK, AND A
SMOULDERING WICK HE
WILL NOT SNUFF OUT."*

ISAIAH 42:3

Although I kept a relationship with God, I had not grown, seeing myself as the droppings from the Potter's wheel. I felt I didn't qualify for God's workshop, so I took a back seat like the disabled man who sat for 38 years watching others get a blessing. And like this man, I made hundreds of excuses as to why I could not work successfully for God. Then one day, like the man at the pool, I came face to face with Jesus.

God told me that impaired hearing does not stop His blessings. His

Word to me through Isaiah 42: 3 was, *"A bruised reed he will not break, and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out."* He told me, in spite of my disability and my undeveloped relationship with Him, that He still loved me. Listen to what He says: *"The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be His people, His treasured possession"*

The KJV calls us a "special" people, meaning jewel (Deut 7:6). Did you know you were treasured by God? Two years ago, an unexpected knocking came to my heart's door, leading me to join hands with God through the e-mail. My God-given friend in the United States asked me to share a Bible study for women through the keyboard. I panicked, wondering whether I could give them what was expected of me, and my fears of holding them back had me refuse her kind offer straight away.

But God came back, knocking, persuading me to go with Him. I liked the idea, partly because my hearing difficulties would not be a problem and the thought of "swimming in the God-waters" with other Christians excited me. I accepted my friend's offer and received a copy of Henry Blackaby's workbook, *Experiencing God*.

At the end of each day, the study questions prompted me to write what had become my most meaningful statement or Scripture and to explain why. For example, Blackaby said, "God develops character to match the assignment." My response was this: Why hadn't I seen this before? I hadn't realized the full significance of God's assignment and my character being part of the same package, that we cannot work (pleasing God) without living as He desires. Think about it. How can an actress play her role without the personality belonging to the character?

In the same way, God was asking me how I could write for Him if I haven't the patience to sit as His pupil and be taught by Him? And how can I sit next to the hurting and be what Jesus would be to them if I have not allowed God to first develop an intimate relationship with me through my hurts.

To be able to have Him immerse me in God-waters, then set me free to travel cyberspace with what He has been teaching me is more than I ever imagined it to be. I am amazed at the wonders of technology today, that God's thoughts, His blessings can be shared as they are catapulted across thousands of miles in seconds to hit right on target.

He never misses. God has blessed me, and continues to bless, whether through a study, or by learning something new that invites others to "splash-in-my-puddle." It may be a verse from the Bible or something I've read which pushes me to say, "I've got to tell somebody."

In those stressful times, too, having a way to share God through my fingertips has been such a blessing. It is amazing how easy it is to tap

"NOW HE WHO SUPPLIES
SEED TO THE SOWER AND
BREAD FOR FOOD WILL
ALSO SUPPLY AND
INCREASE YOUR STORE OF
SEED AND WILL ENLARGE
THE HARVEST OF YOUR
RIGHTEOUSNESS"
II CORINTHIANS 9:10

away on a keyboard those very personal things I might not even tell a best friend sitting next to me. Only God could orchestrate something like this, which does not put the hearing impaired at a disadvantage because we are on the same "hearing" level as we converse with each through the computer screen.

Joining hands with God through the e-mail has brought God from the hallway to the living room of my heart. There is no pressure. I send what I want to send, no matter how small. Whatever I send and receive, the blessings are meaningful. Surely this must be of God for His Word says, *"Go now, write it on a tablet for them, inscribe it on a scroll, that for the days to come it may be an everlasting witness"* (Isaiah 30:8).

Being a part of a women's Bible study through the e-mail has made me realize the need for more women to share God this way. God created a hunger in me to set up a group in England. My testimony was confirmed by God, *"Now He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will also supply and increase your store of seed and will enlarge the harvest of your righteousness"* (II Corinthians 9:10). I have shared with women and been wonderfully blessed by them.

Transformation

DEANNA LANG -- MANITOU SPRINGS, COLORADO

Certainly all were surprised; most were also skeptical. A few felt a little embarrassed, as if I had just uttered a self-incriminating statement. Then there were those precious few who, knowing of God's love and grace in their own lives, praised His Name and celebrated with me.

"When did you quit smoking?" and "Good for you!! You finally did it!" How was I to respond to these congratulatory remarks?

It was clearly God's work, not mine that transformed me in a moment from a three-pack-a-day smoker into a NON-smoker.

After over 20 years of smoking, my life was no longer controlled by the habit I had embraced since my late teens.

I had stopped smoking for two separate, three-year periods, but always it was a struggle to stay away from this habit I loved. During those smoke-free times, I worked very hard at being an "EX-smoker," but I just couldn't seem to get the desire for a cigarette out of my system. I missed those puffs terribly, and it was simply through sheer will power that I resisted the temptation to light up. Eventually, the addiction overcame my will to abstain, and I started smoking again. The event that took place in 1986, however, was decidedly different.

I suppose it was an ordinary summer day. I have no clear recollection of anything special happening. Perhaps the children went to the neighborhood pool for lessons and fun, or we visited friends, or they visited us. During the 1980s, my husband's two daughters lived with us and our young son, and the days were typically filled with much activity. When I went to bed that night, I had no idea that my life would be completely different by morning.

I woke up in the middle of the night coughing, not the coughing that

*IT WAS A BEAUTIFUL
NIGHT, AND I
EXPERIENCED A SENSE OF
MY SMALLNESS AND
VULNERABILITY AS I
GAZED UP AT THE NIGHT
SKY. SLOWLY THE TEARS
BEGAN TO FALL, AND I
BEGAN TO PRAY.*

sometimes accompanies an illness, but the kind that comes from too many cigarettes, the kind that doesn't go away. I'm sure the last thing I did before falling asleep that night was to enjoy one last smoke before turning out the light. The evidence was still in the ashtray on the nightstand, and the cigarette pack and lighter were there for me to reach for first thing in the morning; it was my usual routine.

I was aware that the coughing had been more bothersome lately, and that night it seemed almost to threaten me. I got up quietly, pulled on a light bathrobe (even summer nights in Colorado can be cool), and went downstairs to our family room at the back of the house.

Instead of sitting on the couch, I went to the window seat, where I could look into the back yard and up at the stars. It was a beautiful night, and I experienced a sense of my smallness and vulnerability as I gazed up at the night sky. Slowly the tears began to fall, and I began to pray.

I knew that God had the power to answer prayers, and in my desperation, I turned to the only One who could do what I needed. I went down on my knees that night, emptied my heart, and choked out words of praise, thanksgiving, and supplication to my Lord and my Savior. I did not make any demands or promises; I simply asked Him to do what I was sure was humanly impossible!

"Lord, if it is Your will for my life and Your purposes, please take this poison from me." I continued praying for a while longer, aware of my complete faith that God had heard my prayer and of my utter dependence upon Him. I didn't know what His answer would be, but I believed with all my heart that He would be faithful; and, even if the answer was "No, child; not this," I knew that I had entered into a new relationship with Him that was completely independent of His answer. My transformation from a believer to a follower of Jesus Christ had begun.

I went to bed exhausted, but confident of God's love and faithfulness no matter what the outcome. I didn't know how or when God would answer my prayer, but I was clearly aware that my life was in His hands, where it had always been.

When I awoke the next morning, I immediately realized that something was different! I got up, dressed, and went downstairs to prepare breakfast without having a cigarette. After breakfast, I leisurely enjoyed a cup of coffee without reaching for a smoke! Did I dare tell anyone that I didn't even WANT a cigarette? Then I noticed something else -- the cough that had been troubling me for so long was gone! It was not just "improved" -- it was not even there!

I decided I'd better tell my husband what had happened. He listened thoughtfully, asked a few questions, and then told me that he believed, too, that God had answered my prayer, and in a big way. It seemed to us that a miracle had occurred. As I described my attitudes and feelings, we both realized that God had removed my addiction and completely healed my body!

The addiction was so utterly gone that I felt AS IF I HAD NEVER SMOKED! I think I felt just like the man, blind from birth, whose sight was restored by Jesus. In John 9:25, the blind man said, "*One thing I do know. I was blind but now I see!*" I felt exactly the same way: "One thing I do know. I was addicted and now I'm not!"

Trusting in God's power, I gathered the ashtrays, cigarettes, and lighters that were in the house and tossed them in the trash, without any concern that I would want them ever again.

As the days and weeks passed, however, a small seed of doubt crept into my thinking. I wondered if my experience was some sort of hysterical, spontaneous healing; I had read about such healings, and knew they were only temporary. Was this really God's work? And if it was, then what would He want from me in exchange for doing this miraculous and life-changing deed? Would He want me to give up my comfortable life and become a missionary in a land far away?

God's Wisdom Project

For a while, I told no one else about what had transpired; I wanted to see if the "cure" was permanent, and I didn't want God to be blamed if it wasn't! I also wanted to meditate about it and listen to God's words to direct my next steps. I tried to keep my focus on Jesus, take one day at a time, and trust that still-strong sense that this was, indeed, His handiwork.

Of course, everyone in my family and circle of friends noticed that I was no longer smoking; and when they asked me how I was able to quit, I wanted to just say, "God did it; I asked Him to take it all away, and He did." After giving this answer only a few times, however, I quickly found out that it was quite unacceptable to many people! I found myself in heated discussions about God's ability or desire to answer prayer, and sometimes even about His very existence! I had not anticipated the disbelieving responses to my testimony; again, I felt just like the blind man of John 9!

This reaction only reinforced my reluctance to share my experience with others, and I learned to say little when directly asked about it. This, however, was not acceptable to ME! I wanted to give God the glory for this great thing that He had done, and I needed to find a way to express myself that would open a door to further conversation, not slam it shut. I finally settled on this answer: "Well, now, it was truly a miracle, and if you'd like to hear more, I'd be happy to tell you about it sometime." I am continually surprised by how few people, and which ones, accept my offer; and I am constantly amazed at the work that God does in the lives of those who do listen and want to know.

Today, more than a dozen years later, I am the same as I was that first morning -- no cough and no addiction. God's healing was total and complete and for the rest of my life.

My doubts have long since vanished, and, though I'm still in Colorado, God has shown me exciting ways to serve Him through my church and community. Every day I thank Him for what He has done, and is doing, in my life. God knows my deepest desires and needs, and I have learned to share everything with Him, confident that He will listen and will answer. Praise God! Hallelujah!

*GOD'S HEALING WAS
TOTAL AND COMPLETE
AND FOR THE REST OF MY
LIFE. GOD KNOWS MY
DEEPEST DESIRES AND
NEEDS, AND I HAVE
LEARNED TO SHARE
EVERYTHING WITH HIM,
CONFIDENT THAT HE WILL
LISTEN AND WILL ANSWER.
PRAISE GOD!*

A decorative border made of black ink, featuring stylized flowers and swirling vines that frame the central text.

Sanctification

JENNIFER DAVIS – ALBANY, OREGON

Set me apart in righteousness,
let me walk in Your holiness.

Make me a lampstand in a world of
darkness,

A vessel of my Master's fruit,
nourishment for the lost.

To quench hunger and to offer a Hope.

Set me apart, create me new.

Sustain me, my Lord, as Your work I do.

Consummate me, finish Your good work.

Bring me to worship and to bow at
the Father's throne.

I love you, my Lord, may Your heart be
my own.

God Rejoices Over You

LESLIE REYNOLDS--SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

*"...AS THE BRIDEGROOM
REJOICES OVER THE BRIDE,
SO SHALL YOUR GOD
REJOICE OVER YOU."*

ISAIAH 62:5B

The Bible refers to Jesus as the Bridegroom and those who belong to Him as His Bride. Speaking for myself, I love the idea of being the bride of Christ, but often it seems more like a romantic fantasy, or some distant possibility rather than a reality for here and now. I write to share this true story about a dear friend of mine, to encourage all who belong to Jesus, especially those single members of the Body of Christ, and to remind us all that He is our all-in-all, here and now.

Just prior to our family going on vacation this summer, my girlfriend and I conspired to get our husbands together. We settled on a picnic at my friend's house, with a dip in the local swimming pool as well. We were certain our husbands would hit it off and become fast friends, as we already were. They had much in common and so we were confident.

After a wonderful Sunday afternoon, our husbands enjoyed each other as we had suspected, and so we girls began to plan our futures: birthday parties, hiking, camping, fishing and times of fellowship in the Lord.

The following Friday, my friend called to ask us to pray for her husband. Apparently, he had fallen over at work in what appeared to be a seizure and was taken to a local emergency room. The doctors did a CAT scan of his brain and left him on a gurney to await the results. During this waiting period, he proceeded to have another seizure, so they admitted him to the Intensive Care Unit for further testing.

Everyone, including the doctors, expected him to walk out and go home within hours. By the time we left on vacation, the following Wednesday, he continued to have seizures and was still in ICU with an uncertain diagnosis.

Days later, after he finally stopped seizing, they took another CAT scan and what they discovered was a nightmare! The doctors had missed the blood clot that was evident on the first CAT scan and so had misdiagnosed him. The seizures were not seizures at all but rather the

results of a massive brainstem stroke. He was essentially beyond any earthly hope and he died in the hospital under the doctors' care. He left behind a ten-month-old son, a five-year-old daughter, two teenage sons from a previous marriage, and one stunned, traumatized bride.

We were in Hawaii, so we could not be with her for the memorial service. I was so grieved over the situation, I found it hard to even say anything to her, knowing she needed much more than I could offer. I began to pray and ask the Lord what He would have us do to encourage her.

After praying, we decided that we would create a "bouquet" of presents for her with a roses theme. We picked a variety of presents, all with roses on them that would serve as reminders to her that Jesus is the Rose of Sharon and that He is truly her Bridegroom.

We arrived home and arranged to go visit our friend, delivering our bouquet of presents. On the way, I picked up a bouquet of real roses to make the present complete.

When I saw my friend, I was impressed by how well she seemed to be doing as she shared more details of her husband's ordeal and what she had been through. Eventually, we sat down and she began to go through the presents. When she realized there was a definite theme to the present bouquet, she began to cry.

After a few moments passed, she exclaimed, "Jesus really is my husband! You see, when my husband gave me gifts, he always picked a theme and all the presents were based on the theme. I didn't think that would ever happen for me again!" Right before my eyes, I was watching God rejoice over my friend, just as her husband had done.

God's grace knows no bounds. His heart is touched by our pain and our loneliness, and out of His bountiful storehouse of love, He extends Himself to comfort, heal, and rejoice over us. He will never leave us or forsake us, and someday He will come back to take us to dwell with Him in Heaven.

-- Come quickly Lord Jesus!



"PERSEVERANCE"

*Photograph:
Leslie Serna
Charleston, Oregon
1998*

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given him."

James 1:2-5

Exodus

RUTH J. THATCHER ESKELSEN -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

In 1977 on March 17th, I was led by a friend to read most of the book of Romans where it is so clear that we are saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son. I accepted His sacrifice for me personally and was baptised in the Jordan River in Israel during a tour in 1981.

After returning home, I told several people of my baptism and soon received a call from the bishop of our Mormon ward, the place we held church meetings. He asked me what church I was baptized into and I told him, "Into Christ." He said I would have to be excommunicated by a court trial that would be held soon.

During the next week, several men from the ward came by and gave me a letter, stating that my trial would be the following Saturday evening and I should appear. On Saturday I went to the ward house where the trial was held.

I attempted to tell them that Jesus, not a church, was the way to God and eternal life, but I might have saved my breath. They weren't listening to me. They believed they were God's spokesmen on earth.

The world has many ways to make people fear its power. God declares that He has forgiven all sin in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Through the blood Jesus shed on the cross, God is merciful to save mankind--*any* who will accept Him. Men have not been entrusted with the power to save. Only our Creator has accomplished such a miracle.

Wealthy Woman

MARLENE DEPLER -- LONGMONT, COLORADO

I am rich--wondrously wealthy,
a woman of substance,
a woman of means.

I have amassed a great fortune,
accumulated immense treasures.
Abundance abounds all around.

I possess the emerald forests,
sapphire mountains with pearly white
peaks, wide fertile valleys of golden grain,
tapestries of sunrise and sunset.
The soft spring shower belongs to me,
as does winter's first snowfall.

Everything I behold is mine:
from robin's nest to ruby red rose
to the far distant rim of a prairie;
from aspens, gold, to diamonds of frost
to spontaneous smiles of children--
all precious, priceless, cherished!

Galaxies of jewels, glimmering in the night, silvery
moon, miles of silken sandy shores, flora and fauna, family
and friends, rainbow trout, and amethysts on the vine:
these are my assets, large and small.

I am most fortunate.

My kind of treasures cost nothing.
They're simply free for the taking.
All that passes through my senses
truly belongs to me.

No thief can steal or plunder
this wealth in the vault of my soul.

Oh, yes, my possessions are plentiful.

I am rich beyond measure
with exquisite gifts of great beauty.
My heart is filled to overflowing.

So now---let me pause,
and offer a prayer of gratitude.

I Need a Private Time, Mother

PAULEEN DOLLING -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

Wendy's eyes were cast downward as she slowly trudged up to the door. She normally bounced up the path, so I knew she was upset about something. Cute freckles always added an extra special warmth to Wendy, but today she was different. Her long brownish-red bangs hid her hazel eyes.

"Mom," she said softly as she hung up her jacket in the front closet. That was another clue to her feelings. She usually hollered, "Hi!" when she came in and dumped her jacket on the floor near the rocking chair. She normally carried on a nonstop monologue--she's fun to listen to as she shares her day's stories. "Mom," she said again.

"Yes, dear," I said, coming from the kitchen. "What is it?"

"I need to talk to you. Could we have a private time?" She walked into my bedroom and lay down on the bed. I followed her and shut the door. I laid beside her and waited for her to start the conversation.

"Mom," she began. "I don't know what to do. The girls asked me today if I was going to join The Group again this year. They want to know right away because they are all going bowling tomorrow night."

"What did you say?" I asked. She turned on her side, away from me. "I said I would have to talk it over with you. . . . I just keep remembering how rude some of the girls were to me last year, and I don't know if I want to go through that again."

I recalled the hurt she had expressed many times when she felt like she wasn't good enough, when she wasn't chosen for a game, or the time when no one wanted to ride in our car when The Group went on an outing. Those incidents, apparently, were still stinging her heart--and mine.

God's Wisdom Project

"Madge and Jane are joining and they said they wanted me to join, too." Wendy went on, "I really like them and I like to do things with them, so in a way I would like to join again." I could tell she was torn between wanting to belong and knowing deep down that only two girls out of the whole group would treat her well.

"You could always make plans to do something special with just Madge and Jane and not have to worry about joining The Group," I said, trying to give her another option.

"Another thing I was thinking about," she said after flipping back to face me. "I really don't like selling all those cookies!" Her freckled nose crinkled. "If I joined, I would tell them that I don't want to sell cookies."

"That would be all right with me. You know how I feel about those things." After having had three other daughters who were in The Group, I had had it with cookie sales and deliveries! Yes, trying to decipher addresses from a rain-soaked paper takes more than good eyes!

"I really don't know what to do--I want to join and I don't want to join," she said, sitting up on the side of the bed. "What should I do?"

"Honey, I can't tell you what to do. That is something you need to decide for yourself." Wendy's eyes looked up in deep thought.

"I will be confirmed this year and that will mean extra work at religion class. I don't know if I can handle that and The Group on the same day," she said. "If I say I'm not joining, the leader will probably call to find out why. Oh, Mom, I don't know what to do."

"Have you ever heard about laying out a fleece before the Lord?" I questioned.

"No. What's a fleece?" She asked, her interest peaked.

"In the Old Testament, a man named Gideon needed some advice and asked God for an answer (Judges 6:36-40). He put out a fleece, which is the hide of an animal. He said to God, 'If the fleece is wet in the morning and the ground is dry around it, then I will know what to do.' The next morning, the fleece was so wet, he could wring out the water, but the

*"THEN YOUR LIGHT WILL
BREAK FORTH LIKE THE
DAWN, AND YOUR
HEALING WILL QUICKLY
APPEAR; THEN YOUR
RIGHTEOUSNESS WILL GO
BEFORE YOU, AND THE
GLORY OF THE LORD
WILL BE YOUR REAR
GUARD.*

*THEN YOU WILL CALL AND
THE LORD WILL
ANSWER; YOU WILL CRY
FOR HELP, AND HE WILL
SAY: 'HERE AM I.'"
ISAIAH 58:8-9*

ground around it was dry. Still, he was unsure of God's will. He wanted to make sure it was God's answer.

The next night he told God that if the fleece were dry in the morning and the ground around it was wet, then he would be sure the answer was from God. The next morning, the fleece was dry and the ground was wet. He knew then that this was God's confirmation for him. So Wendy, do you want to lay a fleece before the Lord, to see if you should join or not?"

"I guess that would be okay. But what do we do?" Her eyes lit up.

"I don't know for sure, but we'll think of something. Let's sleep on it and talk about it in the morning." I hugged her. "Try not to worry about it now."

The next morning she jumped up the stairs and into the kitchen for breakfast. "Did you think of anything last night, Mom?"

"About what?" My brain was not functioning at that hour. "About The Group." She looked at me, a bit disgusted.

"No, but something will come. Just give it time." Wendy started to pour her cereal. "I forgot to tell you, but my Spanish teacher said we would have a test either Wednesday or Friday this week. I hope it's on Friday because Tuesday is full with religion class and The Group, if I join, and I wouldn't have time to study until late at night."

"That might be a good fleece," I said slowly. "What do you think? If your test is on Wednesday, then that is the Lord's answer that you shouldn't join. If the test will be on Friday, then that's your go-ahead to join." I took the milk carton from the refrigerator and handed it to her.

"That sounds okay with me and I should find out today because it is Tuesday," she replied. "Also, I need to let them know because they will be bowling tonight." She ate her breakfast slowly, stirring her cereal and staring out into space. I was sure her mind was busy digesting our conversation.

The children all left for school. My mind, too, was turning over previous years of "private times," which had started when the oldest

child, the only boy, Justin, began school. He was five years old in May when Wendy, our fifth and youngest child was born in July. By that time, I was feeling bedraggled and frustrated with all the demands of rearing five little ones under the age of five. I felt I needed time alone with each child, which seemed an unlikely possibility. There was always too much activity and too much noise for me to concentrate. It would be hard to try to understand the emotional needs of an individual child without decisive action. It seemed like the only thing I accomplished was providing for their physical needs.

From feeding, bathing, and changing diapers to helping the older ones dress, wash and eat, I managed to do the laundry and get the meals on. Keeping the house neat was a chore. I also felt that I needed to talk to the children on an individual basis. It was all "group work" at that time. The children were cute, trying to help fold clothes or climb up on chairs to wash the dishes. They loved to help bake cookies. There were times when I just prayed for a few minutes without them. I lived with mixed emotions the majority of the time.

Soon after Justin started school, I decided that he and I needed to get away from the confusion. So a little routine began. Once Justin came home from school, collected himself and was ready, he and I went into my bedroom, closed the door and lay on my bed with all his papers, projects, feelings and thoughts of the day. No one was allowed to disturb us during this time. This whole procedure lasted anywhere from 10-20 minutes.

The children knew that their time would come, although sometimes I thought I was too busy or did not even want to listen. The first one home would begin while the others sat on the couch, waiting for their turn. It looked like a confessional scene.

At first, the "private time" was a good way to go over their work and projects. Later, it became more involved as they revealed their deeper feelings, moral dilemmas and decision-making. As they grew, what began as a daily routine became a once or twice-a-week routine. Now they walk by me and say, "I need a private time, Mother." They go into my bedroom. I naturally follow because I'm curious about what is on

their minds. Lately, it is more often I who feel the need to talk to one of them, so I say, "I need a private time with you." I'm sure the one in question is just as curious to find out what is on my mind!

The activity of the house has certainly tripled or even quintupled since the children have all emerged as teenagers and are not as willing to share their innermost feelings and activities with me, but that's okay. I see it as cutting the apron strings. Maybe they are even trying to save some of my nerve endings. Those are times I thank God that I am a blonde--the gray hairs don't show!

The doorbell just rang and my reflection vanishes. I guess the day must begin and the dreaming stop--things to be done, errands to run. I'm glad I opened the door to a friend with a warm heart and an open ear. The day passed quickly and soon it was time for the children to come home from school.

Wendy rushed through the door. "Mom, they are going to call at 4 o'clock to see if I can go bowling. . . I decided I want to go and I want to join The Group after all. I want to go to all the activities and Jane wants me to come, too." Her words were spilling out so fast I could hardly understand. She was full of excitement and anticipation.

"Honey, come into my bedroom." I took her hand and we sat on the side of the bed. "When is your Spanish test this week?"

Her eyes were filling with tears. "I don't care when it is. I want to go bowling!" She crossed her arms together, took a couple of deep breaths and said, "It's tomorrow, but I don't want to do that fleece thing. I want to go bowling. Besides, what do I say when they call? I don't want to tell anybody about a fleece."

"I don't blame you, but you need to stick to the bargain you made. God will not let you down. He has something else planned for you, but you need to obey Him." I felt unsure. She was so excited about going bowling--and who was I to say this was really God's way. I was tempted to give in and say, "Go ahead."

The telephone rang. She looked up at me. "That's probably them now--what do I say?"

"You'll have to say what you think best," I said, trying to keep my feelings out of the statement. She walked out into the kitchen and picked up the receiver. "Hello. . . This is Wendy. . . No, I won't be able to go with you tonight. . . Thank you for calling." She hung up the phone and went downstairs. I closed my eyes and whispered, "Please, Lord, don't let her down."

The girls in The Group questioned her many times during the week about her decision. Some of the more "popular" ones ignored her or asked her if she thought she was too good to join. All these things hurt and were discussed in our private times.

"You know, Mom," she said, "they will probably treat Sally rudely again this year, even though she did join. And no doubt, I would have gotten it, too. I'm glad I don't have to put up with it."

The following week another test was scheduled for Wednesday and we took that as an affirmation from God. The Lord has filled her life with enough that she doesn't miss the added activity. He has answered a mother's prayer.

I am now realizing that those private times with Wendy and the others set the groundwork for our communication. I was unaware of it at the time, though "Soul" was the content of Wendy's private time.

I am so grateful and thankful that each of them has shared their lives with me throughout the years. Now that they are all teenagers, we have passed the small talk communication. I didn't understand or fathom that through the years, a few minutes alone talking with a child could bring such positive results.

I just wondered why the bedspreads wore out so fast.

Count It All Joy

JOAN KRAMER, BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

From our Beth Moore Bible Study on the fruit of the Spirit, *Living Beyond Yourself*, I underlined this quote concerning joy: "God did not leave us on earth to be loners. He wants us to bring joy to one another!"

This statement confirmed a reality God has recently been teaching me. For years I've been following my wild and crazy family to remote and unique places on the earth, and I always ask myself, "Why am I doing this?" My next thought is that "God must be sending me out for a reason, maybe to bless someone."

Every time I go, hoping to find someone to bless, I'm always the one blessed! Our recent trip to Irian Jaya, New Guinea, was no exception. When my husband Barry and I, along with our friends arrived at the airport in Sorong, we were informed that our flight to Kaimona where we were meeting our son, Joel and his wife, Cathy had been changed. We learned that the flight would not be leaving for three days. We were put on a boat at the airport, a mere landing strip in the middle of the sea. and transported to Wai Island. Wai was not on our itinerary and we were wondering what Joel had gotten us into.

However, when the boat finally headed for the jetty of a beautiful paradise island, we knew immediately we were going to enjoy our time on Wai. We four were the only guests on the island. We had the place to ourselves, except for the natives who were there specifically to take care of us.

Our cook was a sweet, shy, young woman named Yolanda who spoke a little English. The second day we were there, Yolanda, timidly approached me and said, "I see you pray. I know you Christian." She was beaming. We became instant friends. She as well as most of the crew there were Christians. We invited them to join us before meals for prayer. They readily accepted the offer.

One evening, Yolanda insisted on using her precious batteries to operate her boombox so we could listen to praise music as we helped her

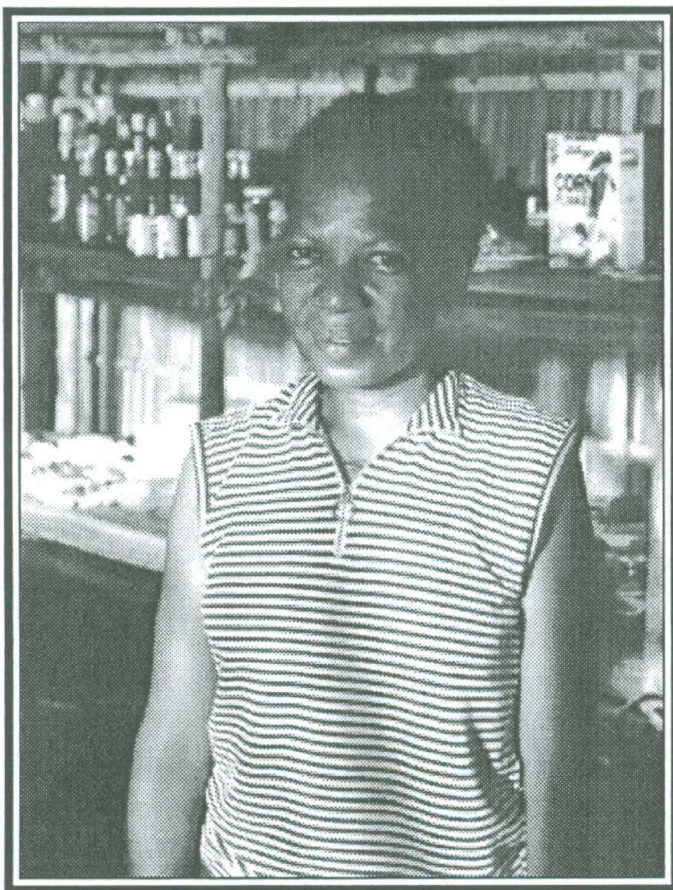
chop veggies for our stir fry. She shared her life and her faith with us. "I read my Bible and say my prayers every night to keep the devil out of my head," she said. One night at dinner we asked her to bless the food, which she did, in her own language. We had a wonderful time fellowshiping with her and the other Christians on the island.

On the third day when it was time to go, we sadly left behind a sister in Christ whom God had used to bring us great joy. We at last reached

our final destination, a remote area two and a half hours by boat from Kaimona to the ends of the earth. We were greeted there, at our camp site, by four local men from a nearby primitive village called Lobo. They were introduced to us by name: Alpinos, Lucas, Alfret, and Salmon. Their laughing smiles and hearty handshakes brought us an immediate sense of welcome and joy. It was not surprising to learn that they were Christians.

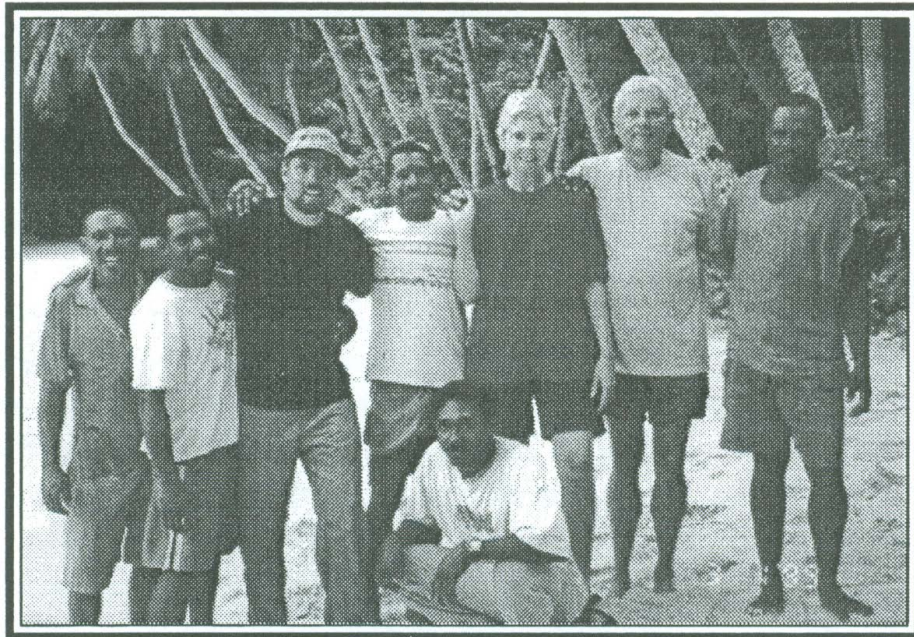
I was reminded of God's Mighty Men at Living Hope Christian Fellowship who, on our last Sunday in Brigham City, had laid hands on Joel and prayed for him as they sent him off on his trip. How amazing then, to arrive at our camp in that far distant land and be greeted by God's Mighty Men of Lobo.

Their "servant hearts" were evident as they began to take care of all our needs. They cooked, cleaned, carried, climbed, and bent over backwards to make our stay the very best. Humility radiated from them as they made us feel that it was an honor to serve us. They had nothing material but would gladly have given their one shirt if we had required it of them. They were gentle, kind, patient, loving each other and us unconditionally. Praise and worship were as natural to them as breathing. Each day, we awakened to the sounds of their voices praising God as the day was dawning.



"YOLANDA"

On one occasion as we were enjoying a kayak paddle through God's beautiful creation, we started to sing, "How Great Thou Art." When we finished, Alpinos stood up in the front of the kayak and lifted his hands high and sang "How Great Thou Art" in his own language. He sang from the bottom of his heart directly to God's heart. God was blessed and so were we.



"THE MIGHTY MEN"

*(left to right standing)
Alfret,
Alpinos, Joel,
Lucas, Joan,
Barry,
Salmon;
(sitting) Arsot*

Alfret was continually pouring over his Bible and was delighted when Cathy and I, with the help of a dictionary, figured out how to read the same verse in our Bibles as he was reading in his. Of all the fruit of the Spirit we were blessed with from these men, the one that stood out the most was their joy. It poured forth from them like a bubbling brook unable to contain itself. They seemed to take as much joy from fellowshiping with us as we did from them. We laughed together, sang together, read God's word together, played together, prayed together--and were very sad together when we had to part.

Both the Christians on Wai and the Christians from Lobo were proof to us that Joy is enhanced by fellowship with other Christians, regardless of color, stature, culture, language, or economic status. When Christians find each other, Joy springs forth--like John leaping in his mother's womb when Mary came with Jesus in her womb. When the Spirit in us recognizes the Spirit in others, there is a leap of Joy!

I know that I can live without seeing the Irian Jaya tropical paradise ever again, but deep down in my soul, I long to experience once again the Joy of fellowship with Yolanda and God's Mighty Men of Lobo.

*"YOUR LOVE HAS GIVEN
ME GREAT JOY AND
ENCOURAGEMENT,
BECAUSE YOU, BROTHERS,
HAVE REFRESHED THE
HEARTS OF THE SAINTS."
PHILEMON 7*

God Means It All For Good

CHARLENE HOWDLE -- INCHON, SOUTH KOREA

Today, August 10, 1999, my daughter, Christy, a Medical Social Worker, begins her new assignment of counseling "birth mothers," moms who have decided to give their babies up for adoption at the time of birth. Christy will be a counselor during birth and then after, for as long as the mother needs assistance. She will help during the mom's time of grief and pain and to get her back on track. Christy just left her two-year long assignment at Kaiser Hospital, where she counseled parents of babies who had severe illnesses, who had died or were going to die.

"CAN YOU THANK ME FOR
TRUSTING YOU WITH THIS
EXPERIENCE, EVEN IF I
NEVER TELL YOU WHY?"

GOD'S MESSAGE TO
HELEN ROSEVIER,
BRITISH MISSIONARY
BRUTALIZED IN THE
CONGO UPRISING

Hydrocephalus was one of the ailments suffered by these tiny infants weighing from one to three pounds. Hydrocephalus is a dreadful disease, resulting from spinal fluid being produced in the brain, usually this fluid goes into the spine, and back, but in the case of hydrocephalus, the tube where the fluid travels has grown together into a solid mass. The brain continues to produce the fluid, and the head of the infant enlarges with the fluid that is being deposited there.

Today, as I was thanking God for Christy, and for the job He has carefully placed her in, my mind goes back to 1967, when Christy herself was born in California at Cedars of Lebanon Hospital.

Christy was a hydrocephalic infant, born in the last stages of this disease. She was already two days old when the doctor came in to check me. I asked him why my baby had not been brought to me, as my roommate's baby was being brought to her on a regular schedule for feeding. My doctor said, "Hasn't the pediatrician talked with you yet?"

I said, "No, she hasn't," and my heart failed within me. Then he said, and I can still hear his words: "Your baby either has a brain tumor or hydrocephalus."

I was very naïve, and unknowledgeable regarding this disease or brain tumors, but both of the terms hit my heart like a knife. My husband, Dick, and I were devastated. Dick was not yet a Christian, and I was far from God.

In those days, mothers stayed in the hospital for three or four days after the birth of their babies. During these days, I spent my time sitting in a wheelchair outside the premie nursery. Christy was in her little incubator, and when the nurse saw me, she would bring the little bed over to the window so that I could watch my beautiful little baby. I cried so much during those days and nights. Dick tried to comfort me, but his heart was broken as well and we cried together.

Although I had accepted Jesus as Lord several years before, I had not lived for Him and really knew very little of Him. As a teenager I had been a runaway, leaving home at the age of 15 because of a very unhappy home life. I eloped with my boyfriend, who left me within a month-- and I was pregnant. My parents did not want me to return home, so I was pretty much on my own. With the help of some distant relatives, I ended up at a girls' home. My baby boy was adopted by a Christian couple who already had two sons. They seemed perfect, and I felt that God was directing my steps and my decision.

During my year at the girls' home, I heard the Gospel of Jesus, and how He loved me. I accepted Him with all my heart. I was 17, but I agonized over the adoption of my son.

Deep pain remained within my heart, but God helped me through it and was always very close and comforting.

As time went on, the pain of losing my little baby boy stayed with me. He had been fourteen months old at the time of his adoption, so I had really bonded with him, but I took comfort in the fact that God had led me to the decision, as my son needed a family.

God s Wisdom Project



"IN HIS HANDS"

Christy (Howdle) Stinson
1999

I met Dick in California when I was twenty-five years old. We married, and he was so wonderful to me. I was quite happy and content, and when we found out that we were going to have a baby, I had been overjoyed. Now what? Why God? I left my tiny Christy at the hospital, never having held her in my arms. Dick and I agonized together because Christy had been diagnosed as a victim of uterine hydrocephalus, and the brain surgery would take place as soon as she weighed five pounds. She was now four pounds (and thirty days old), so tiny in that hospital bed.

One night while Dick was sound asleep, I was so filled with fear of losing my baby that I got up at midnight and called back to Indiana, where the girls' home mission was, where I had accepted the Lord years before. "Remember me, Rev. Hunt?" I asked when he answered. His voice sounded wonderful.

'Why, Charlene, how are you and where are you? It has been so long.'

I told him I was married to a wonderful man and that we had a new baby. "She is very ill. Please pray," I said, through my tears.

He said in his gentle father's voice, "We will pray. We will pray for healing of your little baby. What is her name?"

"Christy Lynn," I said. "Her name is Christy Lynn."

The next day when we made our usual trip to the hospital, the doctor said to us, "Your baby no longer needs surgery because last night the tube in her brain opened and is beginning to drain the fluid away."

Dick and I explained how our friends had been praying for her healing. Our Jewish doctor wrote on the medical report: "No surgery, because of prayers."

Today, when I spoke to Christy on the telephone (long distance because I am presently in Seoul, Korea, and Christy is in southern California), she said, "Mom, tomorrow I start my new job, counseling birth mothers. Please pray for me."

"Yes, my love, I will be praying for you!" I rejoiced.

Does it seem strange to you that during her internship for her Master's in Social Work that she counseled hurting women in a Woman's Shelter and her own mother, years ago, had lived in a girls' shelter? Does it seem strange that she counseled broken-hearted parents who had just been told that their baby had hydrocephalus? Does it seem strange that she is now counseling birth moms, who will give their babies up for adoption and her own mom had experienced the same thing years ago?

I am reminded of something Joseph said to his brothers, which I can say to my enemy:

"You meant to harm me, but God meant it for good."

Genesis 50:20

God means it all for good!

"To the Jews who had believed Him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to My teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'"

John 8:31-32

Assurance-1999

MARY BAKER -- COLORADO SPRINGS, COLORADO

I am 78 years old now. When I was 16, I went to Christian Endeavor camp. The guest evangelist was Dr. Harry Rimmer, one of the outstanding speakers of that day. He spoke lovingly about the escape of the Israelites from Egypt and of God's many miracles done for the Israelites at the time. He described God's miracles for us if we would choose to escape condemnation by accepting Jesus as our Lord. I chose that escape.

But as I stood in the group of those who responded, and followed in a prayer of repentance and acceptance, I watched and wondered, "Why are they so emotional and why am I not?" Since that day I have struggled with that question over and over. Somehow I've never doubted that God meant what He said about my salvation. But even when I was doing that which I believed God was asking me to do, I have wondered, "Did I mean what I said in repentance and acceptance? Where is that assurance I hear people rave about?"

I read a series of excellent books but continued to ask myself, "Did I really mean what I said back then?" God asked me to teach adult Sunday school which we (God and I) did for several months. Then we moved from Montana to Utah, the author of Explorer's Bible Study asked me to be the teaching leader, which we (God and I) did for 18 months. There was one precious day in that class when God was so present that no one wanted to leave. And I still kept asking myself the same question -- until one important day when I asked God to tell me if I really meant what I said back then.

A few months ago, a retired pastor was talking about having doubts. Almost as an afterthought as he walked away, he said, "If the Spirit convicts you, you know you are His. He doesn't talk that way to those who are not His." He *does* convict me. Boy, does He ever! I praise God!

God told me, "Yes, you meant what you said. You're mine!" My only question now is, "How could I have been so dumb for so many years to have kept asking *myself* about this, when I was the wrong one to ask?" I praise God for blessing His people with good teachers through whom He can speak, especially the retired pastor who spoke truth to me.

*A FEW MONTHS AGO, A
DEAR RETIRED PASTOR
WAS TALKING ABOUT
HAVING DOUBTS.
ALMOST AS AN
AFTERTHOUGHT, AS HE
WALKED AWAY HE SAID,
"AND IF THE SPIRIT
CONVICTS YOU, YOU
KNOW YOU ARE HIS.
HE DOESN'T TALK THAT
WAY TO THOSE WHO
ARE NOT HIS."*



Ever Mindful

MARLENE DEPLER – LONGMONT, COLORADO

For my children,
I sometimes fret
and often pray.
For their well-being,
I constantly yearn.
Every aspect of their lives
concerns me.
How I want what's best for them!

*My dear child,
I feel the same way
about you---only more---
for I am your Heavenly Father.*

*I care deeply
about every detail
of your life as well.
Oh, how I want what's best for you!*

How could it be, oh Father,
that You should care about me?

I feel so small
like one grain of sand---
one blade of grass.

How can it be
that You would be
ever mindful of me?

He Will Show Compassion

ERIKA CURRIER -- EPPING, NEW HAMPSHIRE

"But though He cause grief, yet will He show compassion according to the multitude of His tender mercies." Lamentations 3:32

I had always liked that verse and had often applied it to my life. Sometimes my "grief" was my husband's lost job, a very sick child, a broken friendship, a betrayal of trust, or even an unrepairable car! Little did I know to what extent I would one day experience grief.

January 20, 1999 started out as an average day. My husband, Matt had the day off and we had made plans for the day, centered around a routine doctor's visit I had with my obstetrician. I was nine months pregnant and due in three days. At 1:30 p.m. we arrived at the doctor's office. I was hoping it would be my last visit before the baby was born as I was very uncomfortable. Matt chose to wait in the car with our daughter, Brianna, age three, and son Cameron, age eighteen months. I went in for my appointment.

My blood pressure and weight were taken in the office before the doctor came in to listen for the baby's heartbeat and to answer any questions I might have. She came in and I lay down on the table, prepared to listen to my baby's heartbeat. I never heard it. After two or three silent minutes while the doctor tried to find it, she told me to rush down to ultrasound. In a state of shock, I asked someone to get Matt and followed a nurse to the room where ultrasounds were performed. It took me only a second to see that my baby's heart was not beating.

I was left alone in the room. Seconds later, when my husband and children were shown in, I had to tell Matt that our baby was dead. As in a fog, arrangements were made for my mother to get Brianna and Cameron so Matt and I could go to the hospital where labor would be induced and I would deliver my child. I begged the doctor for a Caesarean section or a drug that would put me out completely, but she

*"BUT THOUGH HE CAUSE
GRIEF, YET WILL HE SHOW
COMPASSION ACCORDING
TO THE MULTITUDE OF
HIS TENDER MERCIES. . .
LET US SEARCH AND TRY
OUR WAYS AND TURN
AGAIN TO THE LORD.
LET US LIFT UP OUR
HEART WITH OUR HANDS
UNTO GOD IN THE
HEAVENS."
LAMENTATIONS
3:32; 40-41*

told me that neither option was possible. It was at that point that I finally realized that I was OUT of control and I needed to cry out to the One Who was IN control. I asked God to give me grace to get through what was to come. Claiming Second Corinthians 12:9, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness. . . ,*" I squared my shoulders, held my head up and said, "Let's get it over with."

*"MY GRACE IS SUFFICIENT
FOR YOU, FOR MY
STRENGTH IS MADE
PERFECT IN WEAKNESS."
II COR. 12:9*

I praise the Lord for my husband who often stopped to pray with me and for me and never left my side. Looking back, I realize that God did not just dump a heap of grace on me. He distributed it little by little as I needed it. He did not want me to stop depending on Him for one minute! God lovingly brought me through one "ordeal" at a time: from my water being broken; to getting an IV; to getting an epidural; to hard contractions; to delivery; to holding my lifeless, eight-pound baby boy; to hearing other women in labor and then their babies crying; to leaving the hospital without my baby; to taking down his crib; to putting his clothes away; to the memorial service; to the seemingly endless days and nights of heartache and tears.

God took me all the way through to the present. He never left me or neglected to give me my dose of grace. He showed me in many ways how much He loves me. The kindnesses of my church family and other Christians were the major way He demonstrated His great love.

Even in the darkest night, when I was seemingly alone in my grief,
He placed His loving hand on me, to remind me that I was not
alone.

*"AS FOR GOD, HIS WAY
IS PERFECT."
PSALM 18:30*

The doctors never discovered why my child died in my womb. In all the tests they performed, they found no abnormalities. The Great Physician, however, knows exactly why and His "patient" is learning that He is wiser than she. "*Oh the depth of the riches both of wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out.*" (Romans 11:33). Because "*He has loved me with an everlasting love*" (Jeremiah 31:3), I can trust that His great wisdom is backed by His even greater love. I am so thankful to have a God Who is so wise, loving, perfect, and yes, compassionate.



"HOPE"

*Photograph:
Kathleen Ebeling
Brigham City, Utah
1999*

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave Himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God." Ephesians 5:1-2

The Walk

SARAH OVERTURE -- LONGMONT, COLORADO

The cool breath of evening rustled the leaves high in the trees overhead. The golden sun was sinking low, casting long shadows on the path. Lamech sat on the familiar rock and listened, grateful for a quiet pause in his day. A mother bird was scolding her chicks who were growing weary of the nest and longing to soar for themselves. Squirrels chattered noisily in a game of hide and seek before disappearing farther into the woods. Cattle heading home lowed in the distance. And then footsteps. Slow, deliberate, familiar steps. Lamech rose and greeted his grandfather with a kiss.

"Ah, you've been waiting," the old man observed with a hint of apology. Lamech only smiled, took his grandfather's arm and the two made their way deeper into the forest. As they walked he was as a boy again, freed from his chores for the moment to join his grandfather on his journey.

His mind retraced the steps they had taken those many years back when often he would imagine that they were on an adventure, exploring new places, meeting new people, facing new dangers. His grandfather would keep walking straight ahead as he was off on side paths poking under rocks, climbing trees, finding the perfect hiding spot. And then there were times when he would walk right beside him, fascinated by the steadfastness of his grandfather. As the old man walked he would look about him, then up into the heavens, smiling all the while. His eyes would rest on Lamech, the same smile glowing, penetrating his heart.

These walks were the essence of serenity for Lamech, far from the monotony of tending the flocks, far from the sweaty, dirty work of laboring in the fields, far from the chaos of brothers and sisters always in a swarm of need. His mother frowned on his slipping away to be with his grandfather, but his father seemed to understand. "Let him go," he would say. "He needs the break. It's better he goes with Father than with some of the boys his age."

His mother would not argue, but she made it clear that she felt walking with an old man when there was so much work to be done was nothing but foolishness. "Crazy old man; likely will be crazy boy, too."

"Not crazy," the father would correct. "My father walks with the Lord."

"Hhmmph," his mother would snort, and the discussion would end. And so, on the days when the work could be finished a bit early, Lamech would run for the woods and wait on the old rock, watching and listening for the step of his grandfather. Such days were fewer now, with flocks and fields of his own to care for. The demands were never ceasing, but sometimes he would go join his grandfather even though there was much left to be done. The walk always refreshed him so that he could return to his work with renewed vigor.

His grandfather walked more slowly now, Lamech noticed. Though not young, he was far from the age most men lived to. "Want to rest?" he asked.

The grandfather shook his head. "No, Son. Walking--this is resting." And so the silent walk continued until the old man spoke again.

"It's been a while since you joined me," he said, concern rather than accusation marking his voice.

"So much to do this time of year," Lamech responded. "I'm taking on more of Father's share each year. I have to pull myself away to come, but the work can wait."

The grandfather smiled and nodded. "Even for me, old man that I am, there is much to do. I also pull myself away. Wasn't always so, though. Time was when I would work from the moment the sun came up until the darkness was too thick to see my hand in front of me. Yes, I understand about work."

Lamech had heard his grandfather's story many times, yet it never failed to inspire him. When he was 65 years old, quite young compared to most of the men and only half of Lamech's current age, he had his first son, Lamech's father. Holding that small bundle somehow changed this

*AND SO, ON THE DAYS
WHEN THE WORK COULD
BE FINISHED A BIT EARLY,
LAMECH WOULD RUN FOR
THE WOODS AND WAIT ON
THE OLD ROCK, WATCHING
AND LISTENING FOR THE
STEP OF HIS
GRANDFATHER.*

man. Planting a few extra rows of wheat seemed far less significant than rearing a child. And he became painfully aware that he could not possibly begin to raise this helpless baby in this wicked world alone.

And so he prayed. He prayed while he held tiny Methuselah. He prayed while he worked in the fields. He prayed while he led sheep to pasture. He prayed when he left the fields while there was still plenty of daylight to return home to his son. These talks with God brought him nearer to heaven, nearer to the Father's heart. And often as he approached his home, his son would come running to meet him and the two would walk together the rest of the way.

Over time, his son met him farther and farther out, and their walks together became longer. Eventually, Methuselah stopped coming, his own responsibilities growing as his father's decreased, but Lamech, Methuselah's first son, soon took his place, and the tradition continued.

"But work," said the grandfather, "work can be a walk, too, and even rest. It's the heart that makes the walk."

They walked in silence, leaves crackling under their feet, the shadows dancing on the path. "The sheep?" his grandfather asked at last. "How are the sheep?"

"Four new lambs last night," Lamech replied. "Eight more ewes due to deliver any time. Should be a good flock. One, I'm keeping my eye on, but the rest are looking strong."

The old man nodded. "Good provision for a family," he said, glancing sideways at his grandson. Lamech caught the playful twinkle, but only shook his head.

"And the crops?"

"Still too soon to tell. The winds are strong; the sun is hot. It's hard to say."

Again the old man nodded. "Too soon for you to tell, not too soon for the Lord. He knows."

Lamech sighed contentedly, his grandfather's faith strengthening his

own. "You always bring me back, Grandfather," Lamech said. "Out there in the hot sun I think of the earth, but here in the cool shade with you, I remember the Lord. I should come more often."

"You come when you can. Your responsibilities are great. I know that. God knows that. Perhaps when you are an old man like me you will be freed from your labors long enough to indulge in these walks as well. But know this-- one can walk with God even while digging out weeds or tending to a sick sheep. These evening walks--well, they are just a chance to act out what happens in the heart."

Lamech nodded. He knew well what his grandfather was saying.

Often, in the fields, he would find his heart turned to the Creator, seeking blessing on the seeds he was planting, confessing his sin as he pulled out the weeds which grew as vivid reminders of the punishment for sin.

And in tracking down a stray sheep, he was often reminded of his grandfather's faith that pulled back his straying thoughts . . . thoughts that wandered across the river to other cultures, other gods, other ways of life. Still, he missed the frequency of these evening walks he had once enjoyed nearly every day. Somehow being with his grandfather pulled him closer to the Lord, a step or two closer to heaven, perhaps.

The following day Lamech stayed close to his flock, waiting for the ewes to give birth. He wondered what it would be like to wait for the birth of his own child, but that day seemed far away. His concerns for the ewes were well founded. In his years of farming he had seen everything, but it never made it any easier. The suffering of an animal wrenched his heart, causing him to curse the curse and his own sin that perpetuated it. His efforts saved the lamb, but he was unable to save the ewe.

Lamech cradled the tiny lamb in his arms, knowing it was foolish to try to keep it alive. With no mother it didn't stand a chance. "Too soft-hearted," his mother had often told him. "Must be stronger to live in this

cursed world." He felt the strength of the curse as he gently dried the fragile body. Tears filled his eyes, and he tried to brush them away on his shoulder. "Foolish, yes," he scolded. He set about the task of finding a nursing ewe who would accept this orphaned lamb, praying fervently for a mother who would share his tenderness. Finally, late in the afternoon, another ewe delivered her lamb, and Lamech slipped the orphan next to her. If she noticed, she didn't object.

The evening shadows lengthened, and Lamech longed for his grandfather. He wished that for a moment he could be that carefree boy skipping alongside his grandfather again. But he knew his wishing was in vain. He was left alone to butcher the ewe and to tend to the lambs. And it was alone that he walked to the familiar rock to listen for the familiar step the next day.

Lamech waited on the cool rock until long after sunset, but his grandfather never came. What should have been fear that crept into his heart was instead a soothing peace. He retraced the steps his grandfather would have taken, but found nothing. His grandmother was standing at the door watching the path, her face paling upon seeing Lamech alone.

"He didn't come today," Lamech told her gently. "Nor did I see him anywhere along the path."

"He left as usual," she said, reaching out to Lamech for support. "Just like every day."

"I'll get my brothers to help look," he told her. She nodded stiffly, as though already aware of what they would find. The search lasted through the night and all of the next day. Finally, the brothers gathered back to make their report. Lamech sat beside his grandmother, holding her hand, hoping to give her some sense of strength. The others all seemed dumbfounded, perplexed that they had not been able to find even a trace of the old man. "Looked everywhere we could think of," one said. "Could have fallen in a hole somewhere," said another. "Possibility of animals," remembered another.

But Lamech knew it was none of those things. He cleared his voice and spoke clearly and calmly. "He walked with God," he said. "And I

suppose that on his walk yesterday afternoon, God just opened up the door to heaven and let him walk right in."

The brothers looked at one another in silence. It seemed incredible, but they knew better than to offer correction at such a time. Lamech's explanation seemed to satisfy both himself and his grandmother, so they left it at that.

It was many years later when Lamech held his tiny son in his arms, cradling him firmly as though protecting him from some yet unseen pain. "Noah," he said. "His name is Noah, for he will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed."

And as young Noah gazed into his father's eyes, Lamech whispered, "I have much to tell you. So much for you to learn. But if you learn and practice this one thing, the rest will follow. It's what your great grandfather Enoch taught me, and if there is only one thing I can teach you, this is it: Walk with God, my son. Walk with God."

"WHEN LAMECH HAD LIVED 182 YEARS, HE HAD A SON. HE NAMED HIM NOAH AND SAID, 'HE WILL COMFORT US IN THE LABOR AND PAINFUL TOIL OF OUR HANDS CAUSED BY THE GROUND THE LORD HAS CURSED.'"
GENESIS 5:28-29

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." Genesis 6:9

"When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech." Genesis 5:21-25

Love Me

BOBBIE JO ENGLAND -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

Recently, my daughter, Bryce, showed me something about God that has changed my view of Him in a tremendous way. She's two, and so far, she only knows two things about God: He made her and He loves her very much. If you ask her, she'll yell it to the heavens. She has just started talking and we've been trying to teach her to say "I love you." When I ask her to say it, she always replies, "love me" and runs off to do her thing. For awhile, it was annoying to teach her that other people are referred to not as "me" but as "you."

The other day, we were sitting in the living room and she was attempting to teach her sister a lesson or two--not in a very nice way, either-- and I had to do that bad mommy-thing and tell her "No." After the initial kicking and screaming tantrum, she turned into a limp rag doll and cried her heart out on my shoulder. All I could make out of her hysterical gibberish were two unforgettable words: "Love me." Could a mother ever feel as bad as I did at that moment?

After I shed a few tears of my own, I reassured her that even though I have to say "no" once in awhile, I still love her all the time. Later that night while doing my Bible study, I started thinking about that episode and concluded that my two-year-old daughter was a genius. I got down on my knees, right on the cold linoleum floor, and raised my hands to my Father in prayer.

"Love me, God, when I'm bad, when I'm not what You expect of me, when I turn from You for the comforts of the earthly life. Love me, Father, when I talk badly about You, even though I know You're hearing me. Love me when I don't read Your Word but instead skim over it just to get the answer. Love me when I can't be there for You because I'm not even there for me; for being too stubborn to ask for Your help, even though I know that You're the only one left. But most of all, love me, Father for being me."

Getting up off shaky knees and wiping tears from my eyes, I knew that my Father would always love me just for being me because He made me the way I am.

suppose that on his walk yesterday afternoon, God just opened up the door to heaven and let him walk right in."

The brothers looked at one another in silence. It seemed incredible, but they knew better than to offer correction at such a time. Lamech's explanation seemed to satisfy both himself and his grandmother, so they left it at that.

It was many years later when Lamech held his tiny son in his arms, cradling him firmly as though protecting him from some yet unseen pain. "Noah," he said. "His name is Noah, for he will comfort us in the labor and painful toil of our hands caused by the ground the Lord has cursed."

And as young Noah gazed into his father's eyes, Lamech whispered, "I have much to tell you. So much for you to learn. But if you learn and practice this one thing, the rest will follow. It's what your great grandfather Enoch taught me, and if there is only one thing I can teach you, this is it: Walk with God, my son. Walk with God."

"WHEN LAMECH HAD LIVED 182 YEARS, HE HAD A SON. HE NAMED HIM NOAH AND SAID, 'HE WILL COMFORT US IN THE LABOR AND PAINFUL TOIL OF OUR HANDS CAUSED BY THE GROUND THE LORD HAS CURSED.'"
GENESIS 5:28-29

"Noah was a righteous man, blameless among the people of his time, and he walked with God." Genesis 6:9

"When Enoch had lived 65 years, he became the father of Methuselah. And after he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. Altogether, Enoch lived 365 years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him away. When Methuselah had lived 187 years, he became the father of Lamech." Genesis 5:21-25

With All Diligence

KATHY HUFF -- ESCONDIDO, CALIFORNIA

She arrived in a big slick car, dressed to perfection, exuding confidence, an expert in her field. We had asked her, a realtor, to appraise the family ranch and property we were considering buying from my husband's parents' estate.

The San Diego, 900-square-foot country house is nestled inside a two-acre plot with grass, trees, garden and gully. Four squat outbuildings and two storage sheds complete the scene. "No heat in the house but a fireplace? You couldn't get a mortgage without a heating system," she said as she walked through the home. How suddenly tiny, simple and humble it seemed through the eyes of this stranger.

The devil got a foothold. She left and with her my peace and contentment. I began to compare the house with the kind she must live in or others of our successful friends. "Surely, we shouldn't go into debt for such an unimpressive home. Yes, the grounds are beautiful, but, oh, so much work to maintain," I said as I began casting about for a way to convince my husband, Jim, we should sell the family ranch and use our share to buy a nicer home.

Recently, our pastor spoke about the rich young ruler who couldn't give up his possessions to follow Jesus. I realized that I had a similar heart problem about the estate. I wanted all we could get and all we could buy!

That day I laid it all down and humbled myself, praying, "Lord, if You want us to sell everything and give it away, I'm willing. Forgive me for letting the god of materialism steal my joy."

Right away the sense of peace and contentment returned. Once again, I was focused on what really mattered, that is, living for the praise of His glory. Also, I had the renewed conviction of the importance of being alert to my thought life, to guard it with all diligence.

*"GUARD YOUR HEART
WITH ALL DILIGENCE, FOR
FROM IT FLOW THE
SPRINGS OF LIFE."
PROVERBS 4:23*



"SELF-PORTRAIT"

*Photograph:
Diane Kulkarni
Brigham City, Utah*

Dog Days

DIANE KULKARNI -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

Wanted:

One good-natured sheep dog
with endurance and boundless
energy to hustle and hassle strays,
herd the majority, seek out the lost.

Must obey orders.

Must be teachable and eager to perform.

Must care for sheep of all ages and temperaments.

Benefits:

Close working relationship with
the Shepherd.

Lifelong room and board, all medical expenses;
and occasionally, on migration days,
a windy ride in
the Shepherd's truck.

When Words Fail

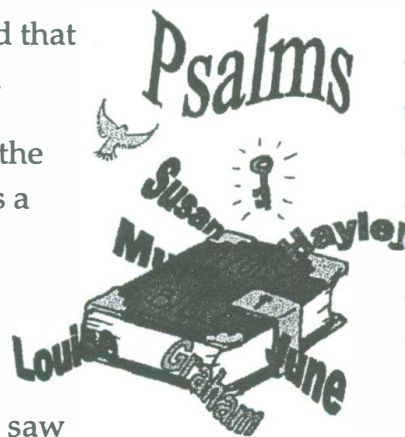
SUE UNDERHILL--STOCKPORT, ENGLAND

"...THE STAMMERING
TONGUE WILL BE FLUENT
AND CLEAR."
ISAIAH 32:4

I sat red faced, hearing the spiteful sniggers of my so-called school friends who thought my crippling stammer amusing, something which could be volley-balled as they mimicked my throaty sounds and the distorted expression on my face. The words were there at the end of my tongue, but what should have flowed with grace through my lips spluttered helplessly like water through a blocked up drain.

My prayers to God can be like this. I have seasons which see me fighting the frustrations of my repetitive bungling and painstaking efforts to God. I'm not on my own. I read Moses too had a problem with words, "I have never been eloquent--I am slow in speech and tongue" (Ex 4:10). But what a difference when that tied tongue was released by God. It is recorded that Moses became, "powerful in speech" (Acts 7:22).

When my twin sister, June, went through the wilderness of a nervous breakdown, there was a period when I felt I was being sucked into the venomous abyss with her. My prayers were merely snatching from the shelves what I could get from God. I couldn't see June, or even God, in this horrendous nightmare. All I saw was me losing my grip, which was scary. At the end of my tether, I complained to a friend how difficult my praying had become for me.



She introduced me to a new way of praying, "Why don't you pray through the psalms? As you read, insert your feelings into the psalm and then let his words become your prayers." Jesus said it this way, "Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for my yoke is easy." (Matt 11:29,30).

Taking my first step forward, because this is what I was feeling at the time, I chose Psalm 143, David's prayer in the middle of his depression. Here is an abbreviated extract from my journal:

"I'm down here, Lord! Answer me if you can hear me. Don't be angry with me. I was chased by fear and doubt. They knocked me to the ground and forced me to live in this tomb of darkness. I am losing all hope of June ever getting better. I am paralysed with fear of losing her to the hungry jaws of death! But you are greater, for you tell me, He that is in me is greater than he that is in the world. I remember, when you snapped the chains of my phobia, how you released Louise from her pain. I reach out for you now. I thirst for you as parched land thirsts for rain to bring June out of this depression, to sever the choking chains that cut deep in her mind."

From this, God led me to fast and pray with a friend. God's answer came through Isaiah 43 and 45, for both of us. Here again is a brief extract from my journal taken from the *Life Application Bible*.

"The Lord, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel says: For your sakes I will send an invading army against June's sickness that will walk in almost unscathed. The boasts of destruction will turn their cries to fear. I am the one who opened the way of the waters, broke the chain of your fears and released your pain--but forget all that--it is nothing compared to what I am going to do. See I have already begun! Don't you see it?"

I will make a road through the wilderness for my people to go home. God shall empower his right hand and He shall crush the strength of mighty kings. I will go before June and level the drugs, and smash down the gates of fear and iron bars of defeat.

And I will give June the treasures hidden in the darkness, secret riches; and you (Susan) will know that I am doing this. I will strengthen you, Susan and send you out to victory. . . ."

I felt so excited by my revelation from God that I scribbled somersaults of praise through the pages in my journal. In the margin of my Bible I had carefully written God's promise when first given to me, along with the date.

Today, there is another date alongside with the words, "Fulfilled!"

underscored several times. This is a big "Wow" for me as I remember in detail those difficult years when we were snatched from the mouth of Satan and brought under the duvet with God.

I find linking God in prayer this way good for me because it gives back what Satan has robbed from me, "*...his tongue was loosened and he began to speak plainly*" (Mark 7:35). As well as this, I am being taught the right way to pray.

For instance, David was quite open to God in what he was feeling. "*I am forgotten by them as though I were dead; I have become like broken pottery*" (Psalm 31:12). Once this is off his chest, he then focuses on what God is for Him: "*How great is your goodness, for which you have stored up for those who fear you-who take refuge in you*" (Psalm 31:19).

Then comes the shout of praise when the psalmist remembers what God has been for him in the past. "*Praise be to the Lord, for he showed his wonderful love to me when I was in a besieged city*" (Psalm 31:21).

Surely this is what God wants of me, to step into the shoes of those who have gone this way before and to come through praising God.

Getting into God's Word is like slipping into a perfumed bath of pearly bubbles. Surely, to be immersed in the tranquil God-waters, and have the soapsuds of victory sliding over bare skin will see me dripping helplessly, pooling God's Word into the hidden crevices of unbelief.

Blessings from Loma Linda

ILENE GERMER -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

One Sunday afternoon late in November of 1998, my husband, Buzz and I had just returned from church to find a message from our doctor on our answering machine. Our worst fears were confirmed. Buzz had been diagnosed with prostate cancer.

We met with the doctor the following week to see what the prognosis and options were. Because the cancer had been detected in the early stages through a PSA test, the prognosis was very encouraging. The treatments, however, were frightening. Most of them involving serious side effects.

The cancer was slow-growing which gave Buzz the luxury of thoroughly investigating all his options. He decided the best treatment for him was a relatively new procedure called Proton Beam Radiation. The closest facility to provide this treatment was Loma Linda University Hospital in Loma Linda, California. The treatment would take two months, beginning on March 3, 1999.

I think it must be human nature to try to visualize what things will be like when going to a new place. When we go on vacation to a place we've never visited, I like to imagine what the weather will be like, what we'll be doing, etc.

These are some of my expectations of what it was going to be like for us during our two months in Loma Linda.

1. I thought the weather would be warm and we would spend hours around the pool, basking in the sun. I also planned to work on my golf game and packed my clubs. I wanted to return thinner, with a great tan.
2. I imagined leisurely hours just sitting around reading my Bible and growing spiritually by leaps and bounds.

*"BE STRONG AND
COURAGEOUS. DO NOT
BE AFRAID OR TERRIFIED
. . . FOR THE LORD
YOUR GOD GOES WITH
YOU; HE WILL NEVER
LEAVE YOU NOR
FORSAKE YOU."
DEUT. 31:6*

3. I envisioned Buzz and me finding a great church and worshipping there every Sunday.

4. I thought Buzz and I would perhaps have deep theological conversations. I knew God would do something "big."

Now this is some of what really happened:

1. The weather was very cold. We took all the wrong clothes, and we spent only a couple of days by the pool. We didn't play any golf.
2. I didn't have leisure time, and there were little interruptions that prevented serious Bible study. I can still hear Buzz say, "Isn't it time for a feeding?" We did enjoy each other, riding bikes, talking, laughing a lot and visiting new places on the weekends.
3. Buzz and I went to church only once, on Easter Sunday and it was a "disaster."
4. We did have some meaningful conversations about life and how everything changes from the time you hear the "C" word.

We can never know what it's going to be like when we venture into new territory, and especially guess what God is up to. In Henry Blackaby's study *Experiencing God*, he challenges us "to find out where the Master is--then that is where you need to be. Find out what the Master is doing--then that is what you need to be doing.

Jesus said, "If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also. If anyone serves Me, him My Father will honor."

John 12:26

I know that this side of heaven, I will never know all that God was doing for us in Loma Linda, but some things He clearly revealed to me are worth sharing.

On two separate occasions, I clearly heard God say, "I will never leave or forsake you." He knew I needed a Christian woman to talk to and He gave me Velva. Her husband, Don, is Buzz's friend who had undergone the same treatment two years before. They live in Redlands, which is close to Loma Linda.

The first week we were there, we met Don and Velva for dinner and one of the first things she said to me was, "I've just returned from a woman's conference and it was fabulous! Have you ever heard of a teacher named Beth Moore? For the last 18 months, we ladies at Living Hope in Brigham City had been studying through several of Beth Moore's studies. We'd also attended a seminar with her the previous summer and felt like we were family.

You may have experienced being away from home and when you meet another believer, there is that instant bond--we love the same Jesus! From then on, we met Don and Velva every Thursday night for dinner. The guys would talk shop and we girls would talk about Jesus, our Anointing Oil!

When Buzz went in for his first treatment, they allowed me to go into the room with him. I heard music in the background. It was praise music! When Buzz was finished with his treatment, I asked him if he'd heard the music and he said, "No! I was concentrating on staying still." I knew the music had been for me, an encouragement, like God was saying, "Beloved, I am with you and Buzz." I never heard praise music again after that.

Our spiritual feeding didn't come in the form of church. Once again, God had a much better plan. We went to visit friends, Larry and Diana Lang, who had formerly lived in Brigham City and were then living near Loma Linda in Temecula. Diana had always been an active Christian but Larry had not been.

They invited Buzz and me to spend the night. What a blessing! All Larry could do was talk about Jesus and how He had blessed their lives. They had just opened a beautiful new hotel, and when Buzz complimented Larry on how well it turned out, Larry gave the credit to

*YOU MAY HAVE
EXPERIENCED BEING AWAY
FROM HOME AND WHEN
YOU MEET ANOTHER
BELIEVER, THERE IS THAT
INSTANT BOND--WE LOVE
THE SAME JESUS!*

God. Later, when a mutual friend asked how Larry Lang was doing, Buzz said, "Well, you wouldn't believe it. His life is totally changed." The friend asked as he rolled his eyes, "Oh no. He didn't get religious, did he?"

Buzz said, "No, I wouldn't use the term 'religious.' He is God-fearing. But don't worry, he's still a lot of fun." The most powerful sermon ever preached could not have surpassed the change we saw in Larry's life.

The relationship between Buzz and me has never been stronger. Isn't it ironic that we have to come to terms with the fact that we may lose someone before we really value every day with him? Our time together was precious. Several times towards the end of our stay, we both commented that we wouldn't trade those two months for anything. Our two daughters, Kim and Katie, were able to come on separate occasions to spend time with us. I know God did some powerful work, bonding them with their dad.

I am sure that what I've realized is but a taste of what God did in the spiritual realm for the Germer family during our two months in Loma Linda. I cannot thank God for cancer. He didn't cause Buzz to get it. It's a wicked disease, a result of living in a fallen, sinful world.

But I praise and thank God for how He used cancer to change our lives. We look at life so differently now. Things mean little; people and relationships are priceless, and God is God. Who can know Him? I can tell you, I know Him better than before we left for treatment. He has taken me to a deeper level of intimacy, of trust and faith which I could have gained no other way.

It Only Happens To Other People

KATHLEEN EBELING -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

I can taste blood. It's running down into my mouth. I sit shaking . . . How could this happen to me? It only happens to other people. I find myself running and screaming, "Help. . . help! I've been kidnapped!"

Coming from a small town in Utah, I thought my life needed more excitement in a big city. So when I was 22, I moved to Los Angeles, settled into an apartment and got involved with an Elvis fan club. One night, the fan club gathered at a pizza place to eat pizza and watch Elvis' movie, *Spinout*.

During the movie, rain started to fall outside. It had come down enough to cause large pools of water. From the look of the sky, there wasn't going to be a break in the weather. I didn't think about the car or having trouble on the way home. I was only dreaming about Elvis as I left the group and drove away.

I passed through a couple of puddles in the road. Then all of a sudden I faced a massive lake of water, so I plowed right through it. The car choked, sputtered, and came to a halt. I knew from experience that the engine had gotten wet. "Boy! Not now, please," I moaned.

When I looked in the rearview mirror, I saw a highway patrol car. The patrolman came to my door and asked if he could push me off the road into a parking lot. Bumper to bumper, he pushed my car off the road. I thanked him for helping me and he went on his way.

My frustration level was rising. Then I had a really bright idea. "Why not dry off the distributor and the plugs?" I knew that would help to start the car faster than waiting for it to dry on its own. I took a rag out of the trunk, raised the hood, and proceeded to take the wires off the cap to dry

*"IN HIS HEART A MAN PLANS HIS COURSE, BUT THE LORD DETERMINES HIS STEPS."
PROVERBS 16:8B*

everything. Yes, standing in the rain. I put them back together, but not knowing that they had to be put back in a certain way so that the spark plugs would fire, I just randomly put the wires on any plug. Naturally, then, I couldn't get the car started.

Seeing a telephone booth across the street, I decided to go call for help. While I was on the phone, a car pulled up in front of the booth. I thought someone wanted to use the phone after me. I looked up to see a man with a nylon stocking over his head standing in front of the phone booth door. My first thought was, "This has got to be a joke!"

He forced open the door, grabbed my arm, and pulled me out. He put a knife, which looked like a brightly polished silver dagger, to my throat and said, "Come with me or you're dead!"

In shock, I began walking with him. Then I snapped--I had the strength that I needed to get away and run. In breaking free, I got cut by his knife. As I ran, I yelled, "Help! Call the police!" I didn't make it very far before he overtook me. He hit me again and again while dragging me to his car. I didn't realize how hurt I was since I was in the fight-for-my-life mode.

He threw me into the passenger side front seat. I wanted to escape while he ran to the driver's side to jump in. As I looked for the door's handle to get away from him, all I could see was a hole where it should have been. He had removed it! Apparently he had planned this kidnapping. He must have abducted others before me.

I huddled in the seat as he drove away, furiously gripping the steering wheel and gritting his teeth. I suddenly remembered something that I had been told about being raped, so I said to him, "I will do anything that you say."

"It doesn't matter--you are dead!" he said, coldly. My mind was racing. I pled with God, "Please help me!"

As my mind cleared, I saw that the window crank was left on the door. I knew what I had to do. I had to keep him talking while I slowly rolled down the window. I watched his stockinged face as he flashed pure

hatred, saying, "You're dead . . . you are dead." If I couldn't escape, I knew that I was going to die by this madman's hand.

He stopped for a red light. This was the time to make a break for it. I suddenly thrust my arm out the window, grabbed the door's handle from the outside and jumped out. I ran to the car stopped next to us. I threw open the car door, yelling, "Help me! help me! I am being kidnapped!"

Blood poured down my face. The driver quickly gave me a pillowcase to stop the bleeding. Then the madman in the car peeled off, turning the corner and was gone.

God gave me the wits to get away from insanity. He saved me from death at the hands of a madman. And I thought this could only happen to other people. Now I know that I have never been the same after what happened. I chose to live life to the fullest, to always thank God that I have more life to live.

*"HIS FAITHFULNESS WILL
BE YOUR SHIELD AND
RAMPART. YOU WILL NOT
FEAR THE TERROR OF
NIGHT, NOR THE ARROW
THAT FLIES BY DAY NOR
THE PESTILENCE THAT
STALKS IN DARKNESS."
PSALM 91:4-6*

"Unless the LORD had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, 'My foot is slipping,' Your love, O LORD, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought joy to my soul."

Psalm 94:17-19

Forty Dollar Bills

GINGER WORK -- GRANGEVILLE, IDAHO

Forty dollars does not seem like much. It may buy the family a dinner at a restaurant, or a couple of bags of groceries, or a pair of shoes, or some theater tickets. But for Vicki, each one of those dollar bills was priceless.

Vicki, my 21-year-old daughter, was headed for the biggest adventure of her life: going overseas on a short-term missionary trip to Macau with the Evangelical Free Church Mission. As part of the requirements, she had to raise over \$9,000, an undertaking which was both challenging and discouraging.

She hated asking people for money, so early on in her speaking schedule, Vicki determined to minister to the people and leave it to the Lord to bring in the money.

There were times when she despaired of ever having the support she needed to leave for the mission field. Time and again, she was cast upon the promises of God, and she hung on hard with all the faith she could muster.

Then, suddenly, she was on her way! The Lord provided 87 percent of her support, and her mission director said she could purchase the tickets and set the date! How her heart raced with fear and excitement as the day approached for her departure.

We made our last trip to Lewiston to purchase some of the things she would need in Macau. She didn't buy much because she isn't a big spender and she watches her money closely. But somehow she miscalculated the amount she had in the bank, and when we returned home, I heard a howl of despair from her room.

"I've only got 98 cents left in the bank!" she cried, shaking her head.

"How could that have happened?" I asked, thinking surely she had added up the figures wrong.

hatred, saying, "You're dead . . . you are dead." If I couldn't escape, I knew that I was going to die by this madman's hand.

He stopped for a red light. This was the time to make a break for it. I suddenly thrust my arm out the window, grabbed the door's handle from the outside and jumped out. I ran to the car stopped next to us. I threw open the car door, yelling, "Help me! help me! I am being kidnapped!"

Blood poured down my face. The driver quickly gave me a pillowcase to stop the bleeding. Then the madman in the car peeled off, turning the corner and was gone.

God gave me the wits to get away from insanity. He saved me from death at the hands of a madman. And I thought this could only happen to other people. Now I know that I have never been the same after what happened. I chose to live life to the fullest, to always thank God that I have more life to live.

*"HIS FAITHFULNESS WILL
BE YOUR SHIELD AND
RAMPART. YOU WILL NOT
FEAR THE TERROR OF
NIGHT, NOR THE ARROW
THAT FLIES BY DAY NOR
THE PESTILENCE THAT
STALKS IN DARKNESS."
PSALM 91:4-6*

"Unless the LORD had given me help, I would soon have dwelt in the silence of death. When I said, 'My foot is slipping,' Your love, O LORD, supported me. When anxiety was great within me, Your consolation brought joy to my soul."

Psalm 94:17-19

"I don't know," she sighed. "But I don't think I'm going. I can't travel on 98 cents!"

"The Lord is going to provide," I said with more conviction than I felt. "He's brought in almost \$9,000--do you think it's hard for Him to bring in the rest?" She just shook her head and folded up her checkbook.

Our church had already given Vicki a going-away party after worship service, so I was mildly surprised when I saw preparations of food and flowers during our ladies group meeting. We were rolling bandages that evening, and Vicki and her friend, Kim, joined us. Vicki was to leave in three days. Another party? But why?

Sure enough, the ladies gathered around a table laden with yummy treats and decorated with spring flowers. I presented Vicki with a photo album I had put together of our church family and pictures of home.

Then Lois, one of the older ladies, brought out a special bouquet of pussy willows and other flowers. Carefully tied to the pussy willow boughs were dollar bills! "This is to help you on your way," Lois said with a hug.

Vicki was speechless. Carefully, she snipped each dollar bill and at home we counted 36 of them. She smoothed each dollar and we marveled that Lois had thought to do this for her -- just when she needed the money so much!

Two more dollar bills appeared at our house a day later. Someone found them on the ground outside the church. We marveled again at how the Lord had allowed them to stay put, even though there was a wind that evening.

The day Vicki left, Lois called, saying she found two more dollars near her driveway. She insisted that Vicki take these with her, too. That made 40 dollar bills. But we still didn't know the story behind them.

God's Wisdom Project

Lois had been looking for some colorful postcards to put on the photo album I was giving Vicki, and her search led her into her attic where she dug into some drawers. There she found some money. *Where had it come from?* She had to sit back and remember.

About 25 years before, she had been traveling with her children by train from New Jersey to Idaho. Her mother sent her some money for the trip. Lois smiled as she picked up the dollar bills and smoothed them out. Some looked worn and tattered. "That's because," she told me later, "I had carried them in my shoes. I didn't want a lot of money in my purse in case it got stolen. I even had to take some of them to the bank to get new ones."

The discovery of her cache of long-forgotten dollar bills, just at the time when she was thinking of helping Vicki on her way to the mission field, triggered an idea in Lois' mind. Why not make a money tree and cover it with dollar bills?

Acting on her idea, Lois soon had the pussy willows and she tied each of the dollar bills onto the "tree." Other ladies in the church pitched in and soon Vicki was blessed with the love and care which was represented in the gift.

Before Vicki left, God gave her the "above" and "exceedingly abundantly": a gift from a couple in our church to help her in her travels. Now she carried over \$100. How she laughed and rejoiced in God's goodness. It was too much of a temptation for me not to say, "I told you so!"

As it turned out, it was good that she had extra money as she not only had to reach Macau but also live on it for some weeks until her first mission check arrived.

God works in mysterious ways. Who would have thought that some dollar bills which traveled across the country 25 years before in a lady's shoe would end up helping my daughter get to the mission field?

You can't tell me that God doesn't have a sense of humor.

The Power of United Prayer

WENDY MOFFITT--BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

"Again I tell you, if two of you join your voices on earth to pray for anything whatever, it shall be granted you by my Father in heaven. Where two or three are gathered in My name, there am I in their midst."
Matthew 19:19-20 *New American Bible*

This was Jesus' promise and He is faithful!

From May 28-June 29 of this year, my four-month-old son, Brady, had ear infections. He had taken four different antibiotics which did not clear up the infection. The doctor and I decided that tubes would be the answer, so we immediately scheduled him for surgery two days later. All we needed was a pre-authorization from the insurance company.

That night the nurse called to say that the insurance company denied coverage for the operation. They would need further documentation before it could be approved. I was devastated. With little sleep during the month, I was physically and mentally exhausted. . .worn out. I wanted completion.

I had organized the timing of my appointment and the details so well, so what happened? What's the problem? The problem was my focus--I had my eyes on the circumstance and not on Jesus. However, God had glory in mind.

The next day, June 29, I began attending a Bible study, *Living Beyond Yourself* by Beth Moore. We started with prayer requests and immediately, I spoke mine with tears of exhaustion. The group prayed together for all the requests. I knew that only God could do the impossible. *"For with man it is impossible, but not for God. With God all things are possible"* (Mark 10:27).

My question was: Could God do the impossible in my life? My study revealed how God, Abba, is all-knowing. He knows what is best for me, and His timing is different than mine.

"As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9). I began writing a prayer to God to help me trust Him and remove my doubts that the infection would not reoccur. "Your Father knows what you need before you ask Him" (Matthew 6:8).

He reassured me with two reports of Brady's ears being completely clear, one on July 5 and the second on August 5. God is in control! *"Abba, (O Father) You have the power to do all things" (Mark 14:36). He knows the big picture. I am thankful for all that He has given me.*

God not only accomplished the greater glory. He made sure that this answer to prayer was void of all other explanations.

It was not humanly possible to cure the infection without an operation. He also waited until many surrounded us who may put their faith in Him--not only those attending the Bible study, but also those reading this story today.

Beth Moore said, "If you believe Him, He will show you His glory. Guaranteed!"

Devotion on JOY

WENDY MOFFITT -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

I prayed that God would take care of me and give me a devotion for our Bible study on the fruit of the Spirit that would please Him. Almond Joy? I asked. Yes, God said to me in the middle of the night. That will be your devotion.

Below is a chart I put together with God's inspiration on Joy, the second character quality of the fruit of the Spirit. The Greek word for joy is *chara* and Scripture highlights five reasons for *chara*. This is a very brief summary and does not get to the deep meaning of our Lord's joy (All My Joy). The full study gives an in-depth look. So grab yourself an Almond Joy and enjoy!

JOY -- Chara

5 Key Sources of Joy	Almond Joy	All My Joy
Celebrate	Ingredients written on the wrapper	Our names written in heaven
Hidden	Uncover/discover one almond treasure in every bite	Uncover/discover God, one perfect treasure in every circumstance
Abiding	Will remain an Almond Joy--will not become a Mounds	Remain in Christ. He will give you true eternal Joy
Restoration	Two bars packaged as one	Be one with Him
Autonomous	Enjoy one bar, share the other	Enjoy Christ, share Him with each other

Listening for God to Speak

LESLIE REYNOLDS -- SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

*"HE WHO BELONGS TO
GOD HEARS WHAT
GOD SAYS."
JOHN 8:47A*

Since arriving in San Francisco at the turn of the year, we have been occupied with helping my uncle after my aunt's death. Sometimes it feels like "fleshly" work. Because I cannot always see God's purpose in it, I have wondered if I was hearing God's direction for my life.

We were having a seemingly endless garage sale, lasting over months. During this time, John and I decided to put some of our Biblical research books out for sale. One day, a Chinese woman, Hannah, came by, and she wanted to know why we were getting rid of the books. I told her we had many such books and that these were of a duplicate nature--we thought someone else might get better use of them.

She told me she was a Christian and the wife of a pastor whose name was Moses; they were starting a new church. However, they were facing a language barrier with the people. Because they were from Hong Kong, they speak limited English while the American-born Chinese speak only English. So they were looking for books in English for their church library. We decided to donate our books to them. This began our relationship.

We were also selling lots of costume jewelry in this garage sale. The money collected from it was specifically "mine" to do with as I pleased. John had expressed a desire for a new wedding ring, and I offered to use the jewelry money for that.

In the meantime, Moses and Hannah called me, asking if I had a resource for free English tracts that they could pass out. I did some minimal research and gave them a telephone number.

Meanwhile, John and I began to look for a ring, but he didn't find anything of interest. He changed his mind and the money was "mine"

again. I thought about Moses and Hannah but dismissed the thought since they could get free tracts. We had been planning a vacation to Hawaii to visit Kirstin, our daughter and her family, so naturally, my thoughts turned to spending the money there.

On Father's Day, we took John out for a meal and then we went to the beach to walk along the ocean. It was a spectacular day, and I was privately praising the Lord. Never having had a father, I decided that since it was Father's Day, I would love to hear a word from God, my Heavenly Father. So I asked Him to speak to me.

I told the kids that God was going to speak to me and that I would know when He spoke. They ran around picking up rocks and shells and brought them to me to see if they were the word I sought. I said, "No, it will be really special and I will know exactly when He speaks." As we were about to go home, the kids had collected quite a load of shells and rocks. I told them I was sorry I had not brought a sack for them to put their treasures in.

With that, Michael pulled one out of his pocket, along with the dry bread that was in it. We always carry bread to feed the birds at the ocean or in the park. His bread was really hard, so Michael decided to throw it out so that he could use the bag. When he threw the bread out into the surf, I knew God had spoken to me!

I raced home to look up the Scripture passage in Ecclesiastes 11:1-2: *"Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again. Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land."*

I looked up the word "cast" in my *Strong's Hebrew Dictionary* and found it to mean "to send away for!" I quickly called the number I had given Moses and Hannah for free tracts and discovered that they no longer provided tracts for free. Moses and Hannah had none. I knew then that I was to use the jewelry money to buy the tracts. I sent away for three thousand, dividing them between the four ministries with whom I was in contact.

God's Wisdom Project

When I went to deliver to Moses and Hannah their portion of the tracts, I discovered that they had been feeling discouraged in their ministry. They simply glowed when I explained how God had them on His mind on Father's Day!

That experience, and the firsthand knowledge that He is such an attentive, loving Father continues to fill me inwardly with pure joy. God spoke to me, and I heard Him. This then is grace, that I am His and He is mine. What a Dad!

Ladies, We Are So Blessed!

CHARLENE HOWDLE -- INCHON, SOUTH KOREA

"You've GOT to hear his voice," the woman said, "you will NOT be able to resist this little guy." She was a breeder of Persian cats in Scottsdale, Arizona, where we lived at the time. I had purchased one of her Persians, and she had called to persuade me to buy a little white one, who was already four months old, the only kitten the mother had.

"I can't afford another one," I said, weakening.

"You can pay on time!" she said.

Okay, I would take a look. One look was fatal. My daughter, Stephanie and I brought the little thing home where all of us fell in love with him. His meow was deep and long, and he was such a sweetie that I named him "Sweetie Pie," much to the objections of my daughters and husband. I just couldn't help it.

Time passed so quickly-- the girls went off to college and soon, they finished college, returning home to live and look for jobs. We lived in Orange County, California at that time. Sweetie Pie was really a member of our family by then. The kids loved him, especially Stephanie, a true animal person who majored in Biology/Wildlife Management.

When she walked in the door I would hear the door slam, and then Stephanie calling, "Sweeeeeetieeeeeeee!" He would come running and she would sweep him up and kiss, kiss, kiss him and then swing around in a circle, I always wondered if he was dizzy when she set him down.

I believe that I loved him the most though. One morning I noticed that he was really sick, so I rushed him to the vet who took a blood test. He called me on the phone that evening. "You need to get your family all together and tell Sweetie Pie goodbye," he said. "He is in kidney failure and we cannot wait even one more day or he will suffer too much."

Stephanie was working as a paleontologist that year, quite close to

home in Orange County. She was unearthing a whale fossil. It was the talk of the town. The team of paleos worked very late in the day, every day, so it was dark when Stephanie came in. I was sitting in my chaise lounge in my bedroom, alone in the dark with Sweetie on my lap. No lights were on in the house. Steph heard me crying and came directly into my room. "Steph, my heart is breaking. I cannot stand this, I love this little thing—so please pray, Steph."

*SHE BEGAN TO SPEAK,
"GOD, MY MOTHER IS
NOT READY IN HER HEART
TO GIVE UP SWEETIE. I
AM ASKING IN THE NAME
OF YOUR SON, JESUS
CHRIST, THAT YOU TOUCH
THIS LITTLE ANIMAL'S
BODY, AND RESTORE HIM
TO HEALTH."*

She knelt down on her knees at my feet, placing one hand on my arm and the other hand on his little furry head. She began to speak, "God, my mother is not ready in her heart to give up Sweetie. I am asking in the name of your Son, Jesus Christ, that you touch this little animal's body, and restore him to health, at least until my mom can accept it in her heart. God, this is your little animal, and unless you have a reason for taking him away from us at this time, please hear my prayer and have mercy on my mom and me, but especially my mom, God. Thank you Father, Amen."

"Well, I think we should get another opinion, Mom," she said, and the next day she drove us to a new vet. You know what I am going to say now, don't you? You guessed it. For the next three months, that cat ran, that cat jumped, that cat had fun. One day I was washing dishes and looked out the window in front of the sink, and under my favorite rose bush, Sweetie crouched, watching the birds, totally enjoying his new health.

I said, "God, thank you!" The new vet said on the phone, "Now I want you to know that he is still in kidney failure, but for now, he is really feeling great—quite wonderful, really. You will know when it is his time, and you need to call me quickly so that he will not suffer."

What a great three months he had. One day as I was on my chaise lounge, reading, I looked at Sweetie Pie, and I knew it was his time. I called my husband at work and gathered that white ball of fur, (purring soooooo loud in my arms) and Dick and I took him to the vet. Although I cried a lot, I was ready then to let him go. After all, this was God's property, not mine.

You probably think this is a story about a cat. You are right. You probably also think this is a story about God's tender mercy, God's power, God's love and you are right again.

But the real beauty of this story is Stephanie, my daughter, my friend. God revealed something to me that day that I shall never forget. Each one of the children whom God gives to us comes as a gift package, unique in every way, because He designed each one, and He put into them exactly what He will be needing in their lives to be used in the plan He has for them.

That evening as she prayed, I had a tiny look into the package that God had sent me in Stephanie. You know what I saw? I saw powerful faith, a tender heart towards God and also towards the animal kingdom that He loves, the same tender heart He probably gave to Adam and to Noah. Both men had been trusted by Him to take care of His animals. I saw in Stephanie strength and tons of love, and the other thing I noticed was the fear of God. Wow! And just think, I was allowed only a peek.

Jesus, thank you for this precious girl. I am so totally glad that you chose me to be her mother. How humble I feel, God.

Why not ask God to let you take a tiny peek into your children's hearts? You will begin to see those kids (of His) through His eyes, and I'm sure you'll agree with me that we mothers are so blessed!

Walking Away

GEORGIA HEROD -- HYRUM, UTAH

How long I had been standing, watching out my kitchen window, I'm not sure. I'd been washing the breakfast dishes, but now my hands merely dangled in the warm suds as tears flowed gently down my cheeks.

We lived kitty-cornered from the elementary school, and I could watch my blond-haired son walk to his kindergarten room. For the ten days school had been in session, I had crossed the street with him. But today he had said, "I can do it myself, Mom." After questioning him, I finally agreed to let him make the trek alone.

With lunch sack in hand, he bravely walked out the door, down the steps, and through the gate, stopping to look both ways before crossing the street. On the other side, he turned proudly and waved, knowing I'd be watching. Quickly, he did an about-face and walked onto the school yard.

As I stared after him, my husband arrived home. Having seen our son turn and wave, he lingered in the driveway, watching him also. I was observing the whole scene through the window--and suddenly, my smile of pride disappeared as I began to weep. My husband walked into the kitchen. We embraced, both crying, silently sharing the poignancy of the moment. But why the tears?

I continued to reflect on the morning and came to understand the sadness: our son's walking away was symbolic of his journey into the world.

For a little over five years, his environment had been filled with love, laughter, warmth, security and safety, surrounded by those who wanted his best. Mom and Dad had been there to protect him, to pick him up when he fell, to encourage him when he was hesitant, to comfort when he was afraid.

The greater world he was entering would not offer those hedges. That

world demands that boys become tough, thick-skinned, rational, ambitious, and driven.

His walk meant the beginning of losing innocence, tenderness, sensitivity, playfulness, and the freedom of being a child. We were grieving those losses.

That short trip across the street was also the beginning of his walk out of my world. All children are born into the mother's world, but as girls become women, they remain in that realm as they move through maturation. However, boys must leave the female world in order to become men.

When our son was ten, I began to notice the steps he was taking away from me. If he had a choice, he would no longer run errands or go grocery shopping with me. His haircuts and dental appointments were no longer on my calendar, but on Dad's.

The moment Dad was out the door, like a shadow, our son was right behind him. They'd putter in the garage, tromp around Smith and Edwards, wash the dishes, work in the yard, yell for the Dallas Cowboys, read the Bible and pray, set up a tent in the backyard for a spur-of-the-moment campout, or wrestle on the living room floor.

When he was twelve, our family traveled to New Zealand. When my daughter and I wanted to visit Christchurch Botanical Garden, my son preferred to remain with Dad and stroll through the cobblestone streets. As they walked, they talked about Christ's second coming and streets of gold. A week or so later, we girls stayed in the car as the guys wandered through a military museum.

During those times with Dad, our son was developing character and adopting values. He learned the blessing of a servant heart as he helped Dad vacuum the dining hall after church dinners and shovel snow and mow lawns for widows in the neighborhood. He learned integrity is worth more than a few cents wrongly received as he went with Dad back to a clerk who had given too much change. Accompanying Dad on errands, he observed each man and woman given dignity and honor, no matter their station in life. He saw Dad practice what he preached when he stopped to help strangers on the highway, even when he was late or on

his way to a meeting. Together they wondered at a glorious sunset and praised God for myriad stars in a midnight sky. He was also learning how to stand up for his convictions, even when it was not the popular thing to do.

"HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH. THESE COMMANDMENTS THAT I GIVE YOU TODAY ARE TO BE UPON YOUR HEARTS. IMPRESS THEM ON YOUR CHILDREN. TALK ABOUT THEM WHEN YOU SIT AT HOME AND WHEN YOU WALK ALONG THE ROAD, WHEN YOU LIE DOWN AND WHEN YOU GET UP."
DEUTERONOMY 6:4-7

While he was separating himself from his mother's world, he'd go to Dad for advice and counsel, but he'd still come to me when he was hurting.

Often only in private would he allow any show of affection, but then one day when he was 17, he hugged me, tousled my hair, and said "I love you," even with his friends around. What had caused the change? He was reconnecting with me, but in a very different way.

American society doesn't have a distinctive rite of passage for young men. We do mark certain events as significant in the maturing process: getting a driver's license, graduating from high school, signing up for Selective Service, or casting a vote. Some would even say a boy's a man when he buys his first drink or when he loses his virginity. But just when does a boy become a man?

Our son's been away for the summer, staying with grandparents, working hard in a warehouse, saving money for his first car. We've talked often on the phone. His voice has deepened; his laughter, quickened. He's even written a letter, one of those which parents think they'll never receive, expressing love and gratitude and acknowledging the heartache he's sometimes caused. Upon graduating from high school, he asserted he wasn't ready for college; he planned to work for a year.

But during these past couple of months, without any input from parents, he's changed his mind. In a few days, I'll stand and watch as he drives off to college, another new, exciting stage of life. And once again the tears will fall, tears of loss, but primarily tears of joy and pride, because he's journeying into manhood with inner strength and a tender heart.

Hold on to the Promise

ALICIA MURPHY -- MANTUA, UTAH

When I first heard about the book of which this message is a part, I thought, "What a wonderful idea!" It is so encouraging to me to hear about another person's relationship with our Lord and Savior. Everyone who is a believer has a personal story to tell. They are all different, yet they are all the same: Christ calling us out of the darkness of sin into the dazzling light of His forgiveness, grace and mercy! What a joyous occasion this is for everyone who accepts the free gift of salvation He offers!

I accepted this gift a little over five years ago. My life hasn't been the same since. Sure, I have experienced many hardships and troubles in the last few years: bankruptcy, flood damage, and physical illness, to name a few. But the joy of knowing Him, of knowing that He is there for me, makes it all the easier to get through times of trouble.

I live with a peace of mind and heart that I would not have without His promise to calm my fears and to reassure me that when the hard time is over, I will be better for it, and He will be glorified. He is slowly but surely purifying my heart, and when the resurrection day comes, I will be as gold.

At this time in my walk with my Savior, I am returning from the wilderness. My soul has been in turmoil and I felt little peace. I believe this happened to me because I hadn't been focusing on Christ and I needed to be taught a lesson. Who better to teach me than God?

Four and a half years ago, God gave me a song and the message is still valid today as it will be forever. The words to this song helped to sustain me through turmoil and wandering, because even while I was adrift on a troubled sea, Christ came walking across the water to be by my side. I give all the glory to Him and praise Him for this valuable lesson: HE IS ALWAYS WITH US!

I pray that the following words will be a light to any who are experiencing a time of trouble or loneliness. Remember, they are from Him.

*"BLESSED BE THE
LORD, BECAUSE HE
HATH HEARD THE VOICE
OF MY SUPPLICATIONS.
THE LORD IS MY
STRENGTH AND MY
SHIELD; MY HEART
TRUSTED IN HIM, AND I
AM HELPED; THEREFORE,
MY HEART GREATLY
REJOICETH; AND WITH MY
SONG WILL I PRAISE
HIM!"
PSALM 28:6-7*



The Promise

ALICIA MURPHY – MANTUA, UTAH

When your life is in confusion
When you don't know where to turn,
If you can't seem to find the answer
Here's something you should learn:
Hold on to the Promise.

At those times when you "can't go on"
You just don't feel you care,
If you can't seem to find the answer
Here's something you should share:
Hold on to the Promise.

If your day is full of sorrow
And your troubles seem too many,
If you can't seem to find the answer
Here's advice, better than any:
Hold on to the Promise.

If you think you "just can't make it,"
You are in the pit of despair,
Hold on to the Promise:
Our Lord and Savior will be there!

Copyright 1995 Alicia Murphy

Lost on the Sea of Cortez

DARLENE EBELING – BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

February 25th started like an ordinary day. It was a little breezy in La Paz, Baja California, but that didn't bother us. That's the way the *El Nino* weather had been recently. Bob, his sister Eileen, and I were going to Los Islotis Island, about 27 miles from La Paz and a two-hour boat ride on the Sea of Cortez.

The boat was 48 feet and towed a *panga*, a smaller 15-foot boat. The water was very rough all the way out. As the sea spray drenched us, we hung on to our bench seats with both hands so we wouldn't be bounced off. Los Islotis Island is a sea lion colony where you can scuba and free dive, and in my case, snorkel. I'm not much of a swimmer. The past two years when Bob and I snorkeled, we had a great time. The water had been smooth and still. My first time putting on the face mask and breathing through the snorkel was scary. It took me a little time to put my face in the water and find out that I could breathe through my mouth with the snorkel and get air.

I even had a baby sea lion play with me. He swam around my arms and turned on his back to let me scratch his tummy. This went on for a while. What a privilege! Not only was the water clear so that I could see schools of many beautiful, colored fish, Bob brought me a starfish so that I could see one up close.

This time, however, when the anchor was put down, it had to be set several times because the current pulled it out. We ended up being very close to the island and the noisy sea lions. We put on our wet suits. Bob also used a weight belt so that he could do a little diving. Eileen stayed on board as a watcher.

I put on my mask and snorkel, then went down the ladder into the water. There wasn't any time to adjust my gear as another diver followed me down. My head went under the water, the mask didn't leak to my

relief. I noticed that this time, I didn't feel at ease or comfortable and there wasn't much I could see underwater. Bob pointed to the island and away I went. A few minutes later, Bob was yelling that I was getting too close to the waves which would dash me against the rocks. So I turned around to follow him. He took a couple of pictures of me under the water, and then he took off.

It wasn't very long before he vanished. The water wasn't clear at all. I didn't realize it then, but I was already being pulled out to sea by the current. The boat was getting smaller, and I didn't know if I could make it that far.

My face went back under the water. I thought I was going in the right direction, but the next time I looked, the boat was gone, even the island had vanished from sight. It was just me and waves hitting my face. Then it hit me. I was lost on the Sea of Cortez. Beneath me, the water was black and deep. My breathing got faster, then the salt water got into my snorkel and I couldn't blow it out. I swallowed a few mouthfuls, struggling to get the snorkel back into my mouth. The sea was rough.

Knowing there wasn't anyone who would hear me, I still yelled "Help! Help!" because that's what you do in a situation like that. I did get help. God heard me. He helped me compose myself. He put me back together again. A thought passed through my mind. *Wouldn't it be funny if I drowned floating on top of the water?* I knew that wouldn't happen because God was with me and Bob would find me sometime when he realized I was missing.

I must have been turned around because I saw the island. I didn't realize it but seeing it gave me hope, something to aim for as I swam. I took some strokes and found myself going sideways. The island never got any bigger, but I was sure trying to get to it. How very small I felt in this great sea all by myself. It was terrifying!

"IF I RISE ON THE WINGS OF
THE DAWN, IF I SETTLE ON THE
FAR SIDE OF THE SEA, EVEN
THERE YOUR HAND WILL GUIDE
ME, YOUR RIGHT HAND WILL
HOLD ME FAST."
PSALM 139:9,10

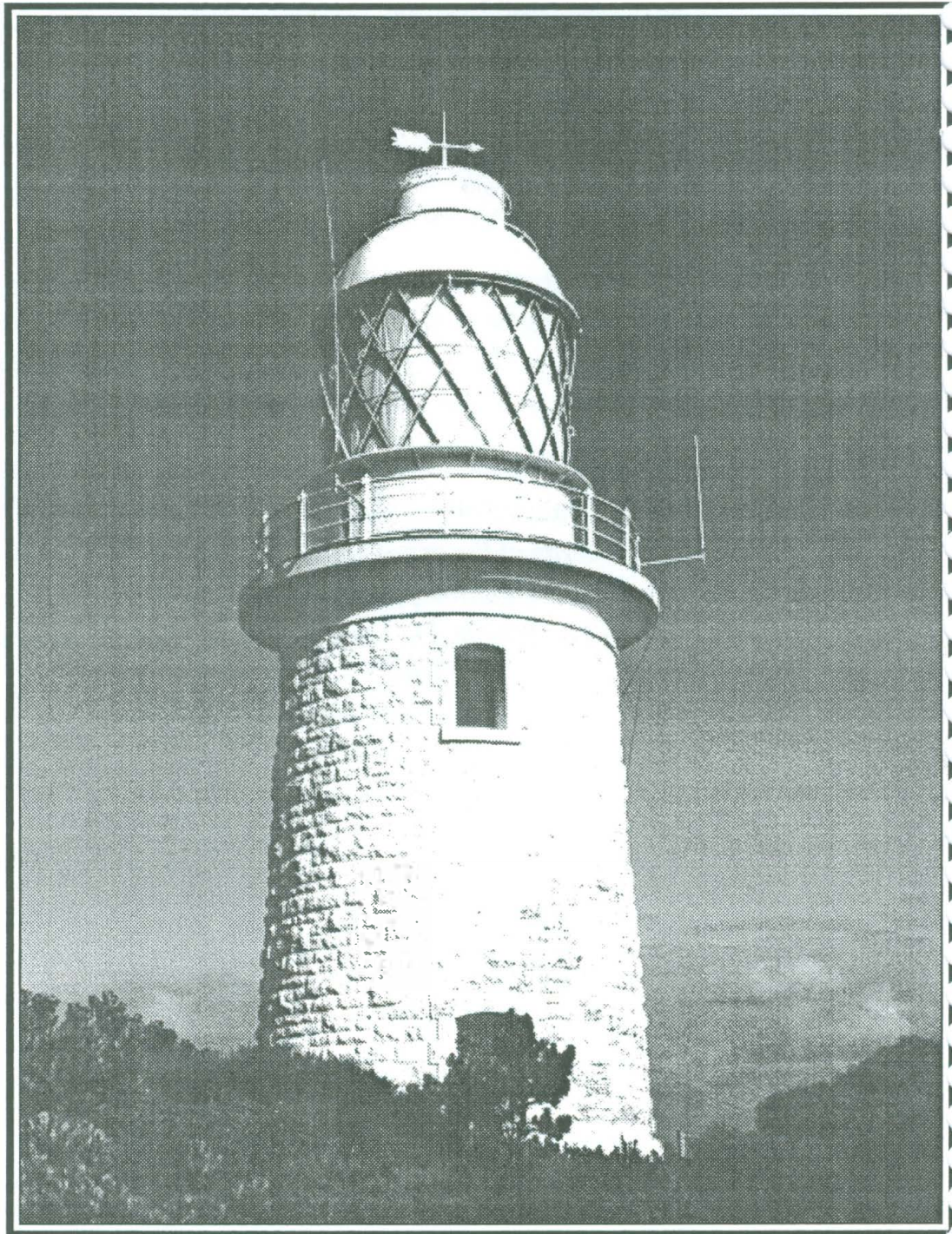
The next day we heard that the current had been 7¹/₂ knots or over eight miles per hour. All of a sudden, the *panga* appeared out of nowhere and I saw Bob smiling down at me. I was going to climb up the ladder, but the boatman insisted on lifting me in over the side, head first with my hands in front of me walking like a wheel barrow. I looked so funny, I laughed and laughed. Then everyone knew I was all right.

Bob said that when he first found me, I looked like a small beach ball floating on the water. Thanks be to God and to my very worried husband for searching and finding me. The next day working in my Bible study, I read David's Song of Praise in II Samuel 22: 5-7 and made it my own:

"The waves of death swirled about me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me. The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress, I called out to the LORD; I called out to my God. From His temple, He heard my voice; my cry came to His ears."

"THE BEACON"

*Photograph:
Darlene Ebeling
Cape Naturalist
Lighthouse
1993*



*"My soul finds rest in God alone; my salvation comes from Him.
He alone is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will
never be shaken."*

Psalm 62:1-2

The Airplane Ride

SUE BROOKS -- MANTUA, UTAH

As my plane approached the runway for a landing, I saw flashing lights of several ambulances, fire trucks and police cars come in to view. They lined the adjacent runway for a long distance. I wondered if a plane was having trouble and the emergency vehicles were waiting, "just in case."

I spoke these thoughts to the man next to me who agreed that he was thinking the same thing. I said a quick prayer for whatever was going on and was extremely grateful that my flight from Salt Lake City had been so smooth and uneventful. Flying is great as long as the weather is nice and the plane glides along without bumps, jolts or any rockin' n' rollin.' The next and last segment of my flight was only an hour and a half away, arriving in Rochester, New York, at 10:30 p.m. I had 30 minutes to hustle to the departure gate, to be on my way . . . a "piece of cake!"

Weaving in and out and around all the people, I looked back on this long day and about my life lately, how it was a blur, with rushing and hurrying to get here and there. I just wanted to see my husband, Bill, who was in Rochester on business. He had suffered a heart attack in his hotel room the night before.

This particular hospital was one of the very best he could be in. People had told me this on the telephone throughout the night. More importantly, I knew that the LORD was in control and that my immediate family and my church family were continually praying for him. I knew all of these things, but did Bill? I wanted to be there with him so he didn't feel alone and so that I could see for myself that he was being taken care of by the hospital staff.

My thoughts came back to the immediate as I arrived at the departure gate, ready to board the plane and take off, only to discover that the flight had been delayed. I sat down to wait, and an older couple began talking

with me. They were curious about where I had come from and why I was going to Rochester. So I started from the beginning. . . .

Yesterday, four of our daughters and I began a trip, driving up to Oregon to see another daughter, Jenn, our son in-law, and their children. We were all excited to be going and looked forward to spending time with family. First, we stopped in Boise, Idaho, to visit my sister, a well-loved aunt to the girls. We planned to spend the night, then continue on to Oregon the next morning. We had just walked in to her home after dinner when Jenn called from Oregon to say that Bill had just had a heart attack. She told me that she had talked with him earlier in the day and he hadn't mentioned not feeling well, but she sensed something wasn't right. He told her he'd been trying to reach me on my cellular phone but hadn't been successful. She struggled with this feeling but didn't want to call and interrupt his work. Finally, her uneasiness prompted her to call Bill to make sure he was all right. That's when he told her he was having a heart attack. She called the hotel front desk and told them what was happening and to call for an ambulance right way. Then she called me. God had rescued Bill through Jenn!

After finding out what she knew, I called his hotel room and talked to the hotel manager who acted as a go-between, relaying information from the paramedic to me about what they were doing. Bill was able to speak to me for a brief moment. The hotel manager reassured me that the hospital was the best and that they were only five minutes or less away from it.

What a helpless feeling I had, being so far away! All through the night, one of Bill's colleagues stayed at the hospital and kept me updated by telephone. His nurse also talked with me. As I thought back on all the circumstances of the day, I saw how God had provided each of us with what we needed. How perfect His timing had been!

The next morning, the girls and I headed back to Utah so that I could catch an afternoon flight to New York. We made the travel arrangements

on the cellular phone as we were driving. It was going to be tight as we had a four-hour drive to our home in Mantua, then another hour to the airport in Salt Lake. We finally arrived home with just enough time for me to practically "dump" the girls in the driveway and rush to barely catch the flight. After maneuvering through all the road construction and suffering the delays, I arrived at the airport with my nerves about shot. What a trip!

Again, the LORD provided. Not only was there an empty parking place close to the entrance, there was an empty luggage cart right in front of it. Throwing my bags onto the cart, I ran into the building, to the check-in where all of the lines were very long and time was so short. It was the last flight of the day to Rochester. As the minutes ticked away, I was feeling more desperate and had to fight the urge to break down and yell at everyone: "I can't miss this flight! My husband is in the hospital across the country and I just drove 450 miles to make it. Please let me through!"

Finally, it was my turn and I picked up my ticket, ran back upstairs and reached the gate just as people were boarding. "Now here I am," I concluded, thanking God again for His perfect timing! This caring couple were so sympathetic, I wanted to hug them.

We continued to talk about our families, watch people, and wonder when and if we would be able to board the plane. The gate area was crowded. An hour and a half later, we were called to begin boarding. I said good-bye to "my couple," since we were sitting in different areas of the plane. Walking swiftly down the ramp, I noticed two things. First, it was not only pouring rain outside, the water was running down the inside of the ramp in small streams. This was *not* a good thing. Second, in front of me, a woman walked with great difficulty, yet determination. I couldn't get around her, even though I was in a hurry and a little impatient. The thought struck me, "*Why are you in a hurry? You won't get there any faster, and this plane isn't going anywhere until everyone behind you*

gets on, so calm down!"

I slowed down and fell in behind the woman, now curious about her health problems. From what I could see, she looked close to my age. On the plane, we moved down the aisle until she sat down in her seat. I kept going toward the back to find a magazine before looking for my assigned seat by the window. Coming back next to my row, I saw that this same woman was seated next to me on the aisle. She had to stand up so that I could move past her. We smiled politely at one another, her big blue eyes were calm and kind. She sat down and continued a conversation with a woman across the aisle. I leaned back to relax, catching parts of the conversation but thinking that this would probably be a quiet flight, maybe a good time to catch some sleep.

When the LORD is working, things never happen as we think they will. After the last passenger had boarded the plane and sat down, I saw that the flight was only half-full. The familiar push-back from the gate didn't happen and we sat there waiting--again. Eventually, the captain's voice came to us from over the intercom, telling us that soon we would be cleared for takeoff. Thirty minutes later, we pushed back from the gate, waiting another 30 minutes in line before taking off. I looked out the window to see planes converging from every side to line up in single file. It reminded me of a big sports event where the fans crowd anxiously at the door to get into the stadium for the best seats.

The woman next to me seemed to have finished her conversation. She began talking with me. She introduced herself as Carol and told me she was flying home to Rochester after a trip to San Francisco. One of the first persons she mentioned was God, so I asked her if she was a Christian. "Yes, I am," she replied.

"So am I," I said, a little excited.

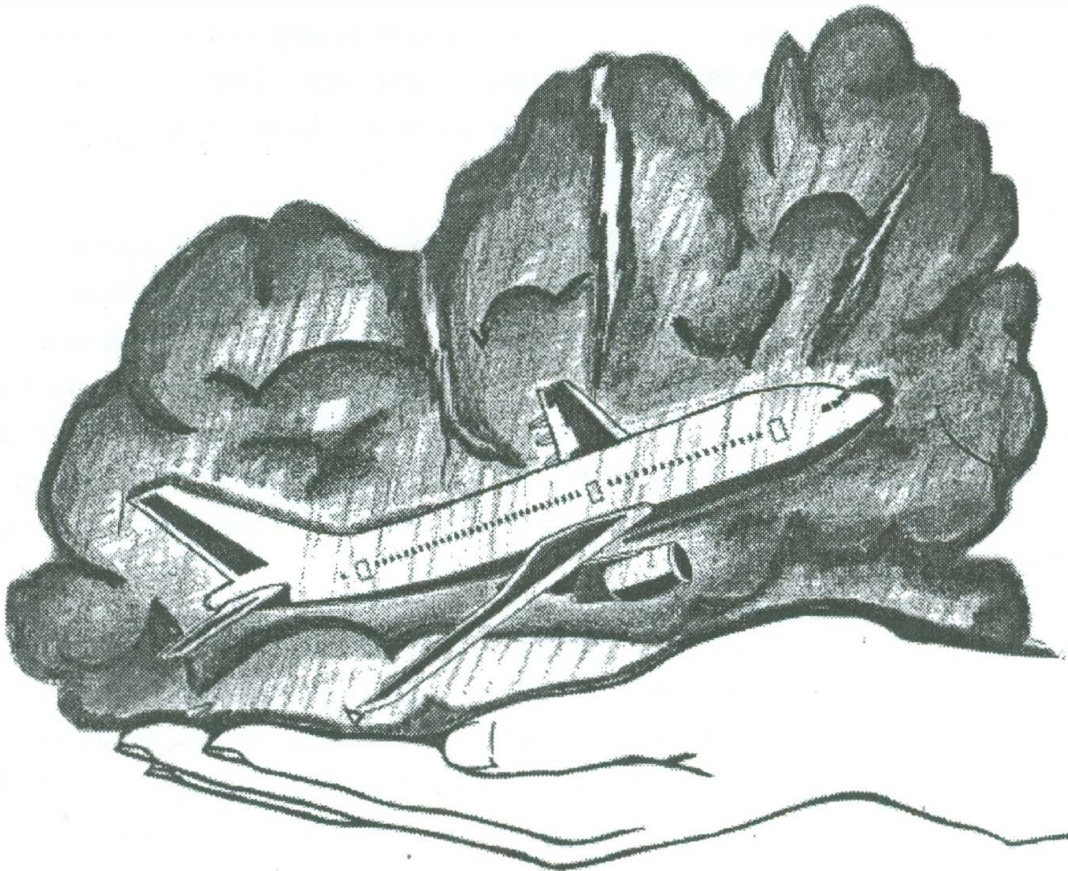
"I know," she said, matter-of-factly.

"You do?" I asked. She just smiled at me. I was too dumbfounded to ask *how* she knew. We suddenly had lots to talk about: the Lord, our families, our church families, health issues, etc. She told me that she had

severe allergies to many things and arthritis that was very painful and crippling. I told her about Bill and found out that her mother was in the same hospital and until the day before, had been on the same floor, in the same unit. The doctors had moved her up a floor to a more critical care unit. Carol said she would be going to the hospital in the morning to see her mom and that she'd come down to visit us also.

Finally, it was our turn to taxi for takeoff. I was relieved to be going, but not for long. The plane had barely begun to climb when the captain spoke to us again over the intercom, instructing us to stay in our seats with seatbelts fastened, flight attendants included. That was all I needed to hear. I would rather have disembarked to walk the distance. We were flying into severe thunderstorms and the air would probably become extremely rough.

That alone was enough to put terror into my heart, but then the plane began bouncing up and down and jerking from side to side with lightning bolts shooting through the air right by the windows. Thunder



*"CARRIED IN THE PALM
OF HIS HAND"*

*Drawing:
Sue Brooks
Mantua, Utah
1998*

wouldn't suffer any longer. One of the last things she and her mother had talked about was about how she and I met, how God had put us together. I told her how she had touched my life and that I'd never forget her.

In the process of writing this story, I saw how much more the LORD had blessed and taught me than I had even understood before. He has shown me that I'm not in control of everything, but that He is, and that I can totally trust Him to be faithful to provide what is needed, down to the smallest detail. He has shown me how His timing is perfect and that in the midst of the darkest times, He is the One Who remains with me. I know that He uses trials to show me Who He is and to bring me closer to Himself.

Most of all, I have felt His great love that no words can describe. Each time I experience how He works so personally in my life, I have to stand back in awe.

In this and the other trials that come along, I've come to know and accept the fact that life is just like my plane ride-- sometimes it goes smoothly with blue skies all around and at other times it becomes dark, stormy and frightening. No matter how old or wise I become, this fact won't change: there will never be a point where I can say that I've "arrived," or that it's smooth flying from here on out.

The one thing I do know without a doubt is that the God Who is the great I AM will be with me, no matter what. Now that's exciting!

"MOREOVER, LET US ALSO BE FULL OF JOY NOW! LET US EXULT AND TRIUMPH IN OUR TROUBLES AND REJOICE IN OUR SUFFERINGS, KNOWING THAT THE PRESSURE AND AFFLICTION AND HARDSHIP PRODUCE PATIENT AND UNSWERVING ENDURANCE. AND ENDURANCE DEVELOPS MATURITY OF CHARACTER -- THAT IS, APPROVED FAITH AND TRIED INTEGRITY. AND CHARACTER [OF THAT SORT] PRODUCES [THE HABIT OF] JOYFUL AND CONFIDENT HOPE OF ETERNAL SALVATION."

ROMANS 5:3-5
THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE

The Composition of My Heart

MYRA MARTIN -- LAYTON, UTAH

After I sang for Living Hope's Women's Fellowship in March, my friend suggested I share with you how I am capable of singing and writing when the song in my heart seems so soft, yet the silent words of my heart cry with pain.

Allow me to take you on a journey when my joy was full in the Lord, but when I was so challenged with grief and pain that all I could do was to stay on my face before the Lord. Further steps in that journey brought healing and joy! I must say that all things work for the glory of the Lord, if we become totally dependent on Him.

I have been devastated in ministry. The Lord painted in my heart at a very young age that I would be in the ministry as a missionary, because of the great example of missionaries in the past. As a young child I fulfilled my calling by caring for neighbors that were senior adults. I cheered them up and helped in all the ways a young child could.

Later, as a teenager I heard a specific call that I would marry a preacher because I had that "heart for ministry." Yes, I married a man who became a great preacher and leader. Fulfilled in the role of being a pastor's wife, I loved the place of ministry and the contact with so many.

But after sixteen years of heartfelt prayer and giving to so many people, the door was suddenly closed on our role as ministers. My heart sank as I was devastated, my very existence numbed.

When a small group of people cast evil upon our ministry, we were forced out of a church and told not to come back. These accusers had no love; and my heart began to hurt. I had no song in my heart. *God, what are You doing?*

wouldn't suffer any longer. One of the last things she and her mother had talked about was about how she and I met, how God had put us together. I told her how she had touched my life and that I'd never forget her.

In the process of writing this story, I saw how much more the LORD had blessed and taught me than I had even understood before. He has shown me that I'm not in control of everything, but that He is, and that I can totally trust Him to be faithful to provide what is needed, down to the smallest detail. He has shown me how His timing is perfect and that in the midst of the darkest times, He is the One Who remains with me. I know that He uses trials to show me Who He is and to bring me closer to Himself.

Most of all, I have felt His great love that no words can describe. Each time I experience how He works so personally in my life, I have to stand back in awe.

In this and the other trials that come along, I've come to know and accept the fact that life is just like my plane ride-- sometimes it goes smoothly with blue skies all around and at other times it becomes dark, stormy and frightening. No matter how old or wise I become, this fact won't change: there will never be a point where I can say that I've "arrived," or that it's smooth flying from here on out.

The one thing I do know without a doubt is that the God Who is the great I AM will be with me, no matter what. Now that's exciting!

"MOREOVER, LET US ALSO BE FULL OF JOY NOW! LET US EXULT AND TRIUMPH IN OUR TROUBLES AND REJOICE IN OUR SUFFERINGS, KNOWING THAT THE PRESSURE AND AFFLICTION AND HARDSHIP PRODUCE PATIENT AND UNSWERVING ENDURANCE. AND ENDURANCE DEVELOPS MATURITY OF CHARACTER -- THAT IS, APPROVED FAITH AND TRIED INTEGRITY. AND CHARACTER [OF THAT SORT] PRODUCES [THE HABIT OF] JOYFUL AND CONFIDENT HOPE OF ETERNAL SALVATION."

**ROMANS 5:3-5
THE AMPLIFIED BIBLE**

We had been at that particular church less than a year. Many people joined that church and most of them were new Christians. How does one manage a forced termination in the midst of a spiritual revival? The congregation came to me as a pastor's wife to tell me my husband/pastor was a spiritual man, but they did not want us there. Oh, pain!!!

Where do we go. . . . God, what are you doing? Put a song in my heart and help me to stand.

You must understand that a large majority of people in that church loved us. This was the ploy of the enemy and five people were used to carry out Satan's mission to remove us from the work of the Lord. It was a "spiritual battle," a campaign raised against a godly man so that the old leadership could reign in power, not the Lord Jesus. A few were more interested in their own desires, instead of the Great Commission. The vision of ministry we shared was truly focused on the hearts of men, the salvation of many and the equipping of the saints so that they could minister to others.

As you can see, the church made a mistake by calling us to "their" church because we were genuine about the work of the Lord. We could not follow what men desired. We had to follow God. Therefore, the door closed painfully as we were pushed away from people who needed to hear the Word.

After the shock and rejection, one day I turned to my husband as we wept and said, "Don't just stand there, pray something!" God began to work through the agony of our situation, causing a light of hope to burn in us as a family and for me, in the depths of my heart!

Pain, it comes in many ways! Rejection, illness, bitterness, loneliness, fear, self-pity, the list goes on. We all have a choice when pain strikes the very depths of our souls. We can run away from God or we can run to God. I have learned that God's arms are always open. He is always there for us when we don't think we can take another step.

*THE VISION OF MINISTRY
WE SHARED WAS TRULY
FOCUSED ON THE HEARTS
OF MEN, THE SALVATION
OF MANY AND THE
EQUIPPING OF THE SAINTS
SO THAT THEY COULD
MINISTER TO OTHERS.*

Though this journey has many more details, I will only say that the Lord opened a door very quickly and provided for all our needs. We had a choice to become very angry and bitter and give up the calling the Lord had on our lives or we could pray and seek other godly friends to help us walk through the pain. We chose not to go through the difficult times alone. We called upon the Name of the Lord and allowed our friends to walk with us as well. There were times when I could not pray, when I couldn't hear my favorite songs, or even think about the words to sing them. *Oh Lord*, was all my heart cried out. God provided the resources and the strength to run the race set before me.

I love the Lord with all my heart and soul, mind and strength. My existence depends on Him. I had to wipe the dust off my feet and go to a new place of ministry, a place set aside by God to continue touching lives. I had to take up my cross and follow after Him daily.

Here I am, with a song in my heart and images of our Lord's love to share with you. I do not consider myself a writer, or a poet! I consider myself a disciple, sitting with my pen and pad, allowing God to pour out through me the words He has for me. Sometimes there are many words; sometimes "a word."

Writing is a healing process, providing a time when I can express on paper my personal life situations. Since everyone has difficult times, allow me to encourage you to get a journal-- or just a pad of paper--and write your heart thoughts. You will see God begin to bring a healing process into your life. Writing in a journal is very helpful when you feel you cannot trust after someone hurts your heart. I have learned that God will make a way, when there seems to be no way.

He's turned my mourning into joy and He has lifted my sorrow. Because of that, I must share my heart with you; I must give you the hope in Jesus. He will bring back the song in your heart and give the victories you so desperately need. In a little while we will be with the Father; we are born to die, but we all die to live with Him.

Suggestions for writing when life is painful:

- 1) Drive to the park. Don't forget your paper and pen. Write your true feelings, pain, questions, and ask God to help you write.
- 2) Keep a pad of paper and a pen by your bedside. If God speaks in the middle of the night, urging you to write, do it. The thought will be lost the next morning.
- 3) Eventually, share your writing, and discuss with a trusted friend. This brings healing and understanding. Our pain is not meant to be kept hidden. We need each other.
- 4) If you are like me, you like privacy and time to reread what you have written; so make sure you save what you have written to read later. You will be surprised at your change of heart and how God has carried you through the healing process.
- 5) If you find you enjoy writing, start a journal. We have examples of the importance of words all around us. You have the capacity to bless many with the words you speak and write.

*"IF ANYONE IS THIRSTY,
LET HIM COME TO ME
AND DRINK. WHOEVER
BELIEVES IN ME, AS THE
SCRIPTURE HAS SAID,
STREAMS OF LIVING
WATER WILL FLOW FROM
WITHIN HIM."
JOHN 7:38*

I encourage you to allow God to show you through His blessings how to walk out of your pain. Writing has been a tool for my well being, especially when there is no other way to overcome the depths of "the agony of pain." Healing comes! He is our Living Water.

The Father's Gift

JENNIFER DAVIS -- ALBANY, OREGON

On May 9th of last year, I decided to paint a previously purchased wooden box. As I was picking the color, I realized I had picked one that did not suit my decor or me. Somehow I knew that I was making this box as a gift from God for an unknown (to me) woman.

I decorated the box with a prayer in my heart that it would bless the woman and that I would know without a doubt which woman to give it to. Above all, I prayed that God would be glorified.

God chose Psalm 46:1-3 for His box:

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea. Though the waters thereof roar and be troubled, though the mountains shake with the swelling thereof."

I also enclosed a small card on which I wrote "Happy Mother's Day! Love, and God Bless in Christ Jesus." I put the box into my bag and went to church, fully expecting to relinquish it there. All through the service, I was waiting for God to reveal this woman to me; I kept praying that I would know her (upon seeing her), that I would present His gift in the manner He intended, and that the whole thing would glorify Him.

As we were leaving church, I felt a little concerned. Had I missed hearing God's voice? Was this woman not going to know of God's great love for her that day because I hadn't listened? No, if I was too deaf to hear Him, He would surely have selected another vessel.

We decided to take a drive and explore some new town. We headed west; however, God orchestrated events that turned us in the opposite direction. We ended up at a park we had never visited. In spite of the cool weather and rain, we found a table on which we would eat our lunch. We noticed an old station wagon stop near a trash can. A man got

out to sift through the garbage. My children said this was "disgusting." Geoff told them that the man was probably looking for aluminum cans to sell. "They're probably hungry and don't have any money," he said. "It's a perfectly honest way to make money." The children agreed and seemed to be pondering what it would feel like not to have food or money.

The station wagon pulled up to the restrooms. A woman and two children got out and went inside. When they came out, they also went through the trash can. God prompted me take great notice of the woman. I remembered God's box in the car.

So I asked Geoff for the keys and trotted over to retrieve the box. At the same time, God placed on my heart this woman's monetary need, and I put my last \$20 inside the box. I brought it back to my family and put it on the table, telling Geoff what God had prompted me to do, relating how everywhere we had been that day I had been watching for her.

I looked around for the station wagon, only to find it heading toward the exit! "Oh, Lord," I prayed, "if this is the woman, then You will bring her back." I waited and watched them turn back into the park. "Thank you, Lord! I now know with perfect clarity that this is the woman meant to receive Your box." With box in hand, I headed to where the station wagon had parked. My son walked with me. "Mom, you had a choice, but you let the Lord make it for you. . . . I'm gulping," he said. He too was nervous. I'm sure he knew that every step toward the station wagon was a step further out of my comfort zone.

I prayed, "Please give me the words to say. Quiet my heart. HELP ME!" As we approached, the man started up the station wagon and began to back away. Momentarily, I was ready to give up. But my hand shot up in a motion for them to stop. They did, so I had to follow through. I walked up to the driver's side window.

Handing the box to the woman in the passenger's seat, I said, "I made this for you last night. I don't know you and I've never been here in this park, but there is One Who does know you. There's something inside for you."

*"WHOEVER HAS MY
COMMANDS AND OBEYS
THEM, HE IS THE ONE WHO
LOVES ME. HE WHO LOVES
ME WILL BE LOVED BY MY
FATHER, AND I TOO WILL
LOVE HIM AND SHOW
MYSELF TO HIM."
JOHN 14:21*

God's Wisdom Project

Every eye in that car was upon me, but no one said a word. The woman uttered something like "Okay," and I left them with God's blessings. I don't know if that woman already knows the Lord or if God planted a seed. I may never know in *this* lifetime the reason for the box, but I know God is faithful and merciful, and that He loves this woman with a love I cannot comprehend. I am blessed to have been His vessel. All things are done by Him, and for Him, our Creator, Sustainer, and Consummator.

Trusting

RANDI HUNSAKER -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

Hannah, my three-and-a-half-year-old granddaughter, and I were sitting on the couch in my living room reading stories on a quiet Sunday afternoon when we heard a loud "thud" on the sliding glass door in the dining room.

The bird feeder hangs on a branch of the cherry tree just off the deck outside the dining room door. Too many birds have hit the glass throughout the summer. We arrived at the screendoor in time to see a little female house finch still spinning on the deck from the impact of her collision with the glass.

Stunned, the bird allowed me to pick her up and cradle her in the palm of my hand. She was unsteady and her eyes were only slits. We descended the deck stairs to the backyard and a small bench where we decided to sit and wait for her recovery. When Hannah reached out to touch the bird, I warned, "Be careful, Sweetie, this little bird doesn't know us very well yet."

Instantly, my darling granddaughter leaned over, face to face with the dazed creature and said in a soft, comforting tone, "It's okay, little birdie. This is H. Grandma and I'm Hannah Caddoway (Callaway)." How she delighted my soul with her literal response and loving spirit! I was prompted to suggest that we pray for the little bird. So together, we asked Jesus to bless and heal her.

We sat--waiting. Hannah told me she had prayed for her daddy the night before, but he was still sick. But her new baby brother, Cole, got better after they had prayed for him. As we pondered together the mysterious ways of God, the little bird suddenly flew out of my hand to a limb of the Sunburst Locust tree above our heads. Our hearts rejoicing, Hannah spontaneously burst out, "PRAISE DA YORD!"

Yes, indeed. Praise the Lord!

*"JESUS CALLED THE CHILDREN TO HIM AND SAID, 'LET THE LITTLE CHILDREN COME TO ME, AND DO NOT HINDER THEM, FOR THE KINGDOM OF GOD BELONGS TO SUCH AS THESE. I TELL YOU THE TRUTH, ANYONE WHO WILL NOT RECEIVE THE KINGDOM OF GOD LIKE A LITTLE CHILD WILL NEVER ENTER IT.'"
LUKE 18:16, 17*

"MIGHTY EUCALYPTUS"

*Photograph:
Darlene Ebeling
San Simeon, California
1998*



"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners, or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on His law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers."

Psalm 1: 1-3

Take Time to Be Grateful

SPRING HEFLIN--BRANDON, MISSISSIPPI

Several months ago on the *Oprah Winfrey Show*, Oprah began to discuss her success with keeping a Gratitude Journal. She said that at the end of each day she would write down at least one thing she was grateful for that had occurred that day. At first she said it was a chore to think of something, especially on uneventful or particularly lousy days, but eventually she began to look forward to that ten minutes when she could reflect on the little triumphs of the day.

She shared letters from listeners who had also kept a Gratitude Journal and how much better and more positive their days seemed to go when they forced themselves to look at those things for which they were truly grateful—even in the midst of disease, sickness, poverty, and vanished dreams. Oprah shared their thanksgiving praises. I am always emotional at tear-jerking stories on *Oprah* but this one really got me to start thinking about what I was thankful for.

Mother's Day was two weeks away, so I decided to start my journal with a handwritten letter of reasons I was thankful for my mother. The more I wrote, the more memories came up of the wonderful times with my mother. I decided to make her a Gratitude Book. I went to a local shop that sells materials for scrapbooking and picked out several colorful pages with decorations on them and bought some clear plastic sleeves to put the pages in.

I began my Gratitude Book with a letter to my mother about why I was doing this after having seen the idea on the *Oprah* show. I told her that I hadn't told her enough how grateful I am for her, so on this Mother's Day she would have it in writing.

Each page revealed a certain topic and with that topic, a story of gratitude. For example, I picked a page with the American flag on it to

"LET THE PEACE OF
CHRIST RULE IN YOUR
HEARTS, SINCE AS
MEMBERS OF ONE BODY
YOU WERE CALLED TO
PEACE.
AND BE THANKFUL."
COLOSSIANS 3:15

God's Wisdom Project

talk about my mother's patriotism. I recalled an occasion when she discussed with me and my sister the freedom we have in America because of all the men and women who had fought for it.

I discussed other topics, such as cooking, shopping, sewing, school activities, boyfriends, even how she took care of us when our house burned down. I thought I could not fill more than two pages, but the book quickly became twelve pages.

*"GIVE THANKS TO THE
LORD,
CALL ON HIS NAME,
MAKE KNOWN AMONG THE
NATIONS WHAT
HE HAS DONE."
II SAMUEL 16:8*

I kept the last page to talk about her strong faith in God. On each page I included a different quote from the Bible about being thankful. There are so many references. It is interesting that we as a nation have chosen only one day a year to offer thanksgiving.

I challenge you as this new year, 2000, begins, to start a Gratitude Journal of your own. You can select a blank book available in bookstores, inspired by Oprah's show, which divides the year into days. Each day includes a verse or a quote about thankfulness. If you don't want to get that fancy, why not try a blank notebook in which you can add your own verses and personal entries? Mother's Day and Father's Day are just around the corner. You would have the book full by then--and you'll be amazed at how differently you look at each day that God has given!

". . . whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable--if anything is excellent or praiseworthy--think about such things."

Philippians 4:8

Choosing to Obey

STACY BROOKS -- MANTUA, UTAH

"No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

Hebrews 12:11

After graduating from high school, I joined the Army in March of 1997. I was unsure of what I wanted to do with my life and decided that joining the Army would allow me to travel around the world while deciding. I did my basic training at Ft. McClellan in Alabama.

Boot camp consisted of 16 weeks: physical training; military customs and courtesies; basic rifle marksmanship; the use of hand grenades; familiarization with U. S. weapons, individual protective measures for nuclear, biological, and chemical defense; first aid; field hygiene and sanitation; individual tactical training techniques; defensive training, and confidence courses; and marching. Someone estimated we marched approximately 150 miles during those 16 weeks.

I learned a lot during basic training, but the most important lesson was probably the hardest: discipline.

The Army's main objective during boot camp is to make sure that each soldier learns what discipline is, why it's important, and how to use it. A soldier's discipline is very important because it teaches him or her to obey without asking why or hesitating. It helps the group come together as one in order to overcome the obstacles we encounter.

Discipline also helps us to master our fears and be confident in each other and our ability to use our weapons. In basic training, when a Drill Sergeant tells you to do something, you do it without hesitating or asking why. The Drill Sergeant knows what is best for us and we learn the hard

way that if we try to do things our own way, we suffer the consequences.

During one of our training exercises where our mission was to secure a building that may have been infiltrated by the enemy, our Drill Sergeants instructed us in "the way" they wanted to accomplish this mission. We were divided into teams of six, given weapons and shown step-by-step how to follow the instructions. After a full day of learning how to climb in the second-story windows, stay in formations, work as a team and keep our presence unknown to the enemy, we were ready for the final test: actually doing what we had been taught.

I SEE A STRONG PARALLEL BETWEEN THIS EVENT AND WHAT WE AS CHRISTIANS ARE CALLED UPON TO DO BY GOD. WE NEED TO START LISTENING TO AND TRUSTING HIM SO THAT WHEN HE TELLS US TO DO SOMETHING, WE DO IT WITHOUT HESITATION OR ASKING WHY.

We were well aware that one team member's disobedience to "the way" could result in death for the entire team. After successfully securing each room in the huge building, we came to the last room. The tail-end man is supposed to stay at the door to watch for any enemies we may have overlooked and to protect us from being attacked from behind. Our tail-end man failed to obey the instruction he was given and left his post. As a result, the entire team was "killed" by the enemy.

I see a strong parallel between this event and what we as Christians are called upon to do by God. We need to start listening to and trusting Him so that when He tells us to do something, we do it without hesitation or asking why. His instructions may not be what we want to do, but God knows what is best for us, and if we obey Him we won't suffer the consequences of disobedience.

For example, I thought that going out of state to college was what I was "supposed" to do, but I hadn't asked God what *His* will for me was; therefore, it didn't turn out as I had planned.

The Bible describes the fiery darts of the enemy and warns us to be prepared by having on the whole armor of God. Like a soldier's equipment and weapons, our spiritual armor must not fail when it is tested. God has given us many "weapons" so that we may fight in His Army. We need to become aware of these weapons, learn how to use them, and be confident in them. We also need to come together as a team to help each other through the battles we encounter. In order for us to do this, we must give up many things, including our freedom to make

important decisions in our lives.

In the Army, soldiers give up every freedom they have, including the little things many of us take for granted, such as driving a car, listening to music, spending time alone, taking a walk, or even talking to someone on the telephone whenever we want. Our lives as soldiers belong to our Drill Sergeants, who make every decision for us. Whether we follow their direction or not is completely up to us--although I wouldn't advise going against their direction!

During basic training, we were shown a certain way to hold our cups, thinking our Drill Sergeants were just looking for another way to have control over us. Even after many hours of "tough love," none of us took this very seriously--until we found out that they wanted us to carry them that way because it was the same way we were supposed to carry our hand grenades.

God has much more power over us than any Drill Sergeant could ever have, so why is it that so many of us go against His directions? Could it be a lack of discipline?

*"THEN THE LORD SAID
TO MOSES, 'I WILL RAIN
DOWN BREAD FROM
HEAVEN FOR YOU. THE
PEOPLE ARE TO GO OUT
EACH DAY AND GATHER
ENOUGH FOR THAT DAY.
IN THIS WAY I WILL TEST
THEM AND SEE WHETHER
THEY WILL FOLLOW MY
INSTRUCTIONS.'"
EXODUS 16:4*

Surrendered Clay

DIANE KULKARNI -- BRIGHAM CITY, UTAH

One winter night in 1995, when my youngest daughter, Anjali, was making a special project for her Ceramics class at Box Elder High School, I went along to watch. I even tried to make something at the wheel. But my pot --if you'd call it that--was embarrassing.

*"I WENT DOWN TO THE
POTTER'S HOUSE, AND
THERE HE WAS MAKING
SOMETHING ON THE
WHEEL. BUT THE VESSEL
THAT HE WAS MAKING OF
CLAY WAS SPOILED IN THE
HAND OF THE POTTER; SO
HE REMADE IT INTO
ANOTHER VESSEL, AS IT
PLEASED THE POTTER TO
MAKE ..."
JEREMIAH 18: 3-6*

Two young men, Willie and Dustin, intent at their work on the wheel, caught my eye because of the beautiful objects spinning before them. They made the process seem so effortless, as if *anyone* could create. (But having just tried it, I knew better).

Just then a magnificent pot on Willie's wheel grew top-heavy and collapsed into a messy lump. Cries of despair came from those watching, but Willie didn't toss the clay aside. He took the lump to a nearby table and began kneading it and folding it and beating it onto the table top. He added water, smoothed it, and kneaded some more. I watched him warming the clay, feeling for the perfect consistency. When he was satisfied with the receptivity of the clay, he carried the lump back to the wheel, sat down at the stool behind it, and centered the clay on the wheel.

Watching Willie, I envisioned myself as the clay in the hands of Jesus, the Master Potter: warm and pliable, ready now for whatever the potter desires to make. He starts the wheel spinning again and keeps his foot moving to maintain the speed, as he presses me down with wet hands. My substance spreads out and gradually up as his hands urge my walls to follow his fingers. I nearly jump into the design as a response to his guiding fingertips.

Perhaps my finished shape is in the potter's mind before he begins. I don't see a blueprint. But He is pleased with the creation process, eager, yet so patient for me to become an object of beauty. I am the same lump that flew out of shape and collapsed useless a few minutes ago. Now I am in concert with the potter's creative mind. He could have discarded me and taken fresh clay from the bin, but for some unknown reason, he chose to reshape me.

In a matter of minutes, I am standing tall and beautiful. The potter checks me for faults, irregularities. He trims the excess, smooths my rough edges and slows the wheel down. Other students walk over to comment on his creation.

"Unusual," one guy says. "Right on!" another cheers with a thumbs-up sign. "Best you've ever done!" the teacher comments and puts a mark in his grade book.

I am glowing with pride as the potter lifts me and carefully puts his initials on my base. "This is one of a kind, a collector's rare find," he says. And then he places me on a pallet and carries me into another room where it is dark and quiet. I relax and wonder what the next step will be. This potter seems to know just what to do, so I shouldn't worry--should I?

The next morning before the sun has even risen, the potter unlocks the door to the room where I am waiting. He walks around me, comes up close, peers inside, smiles. And then he leaves the room and goes outside. I hear him working near the kiln.

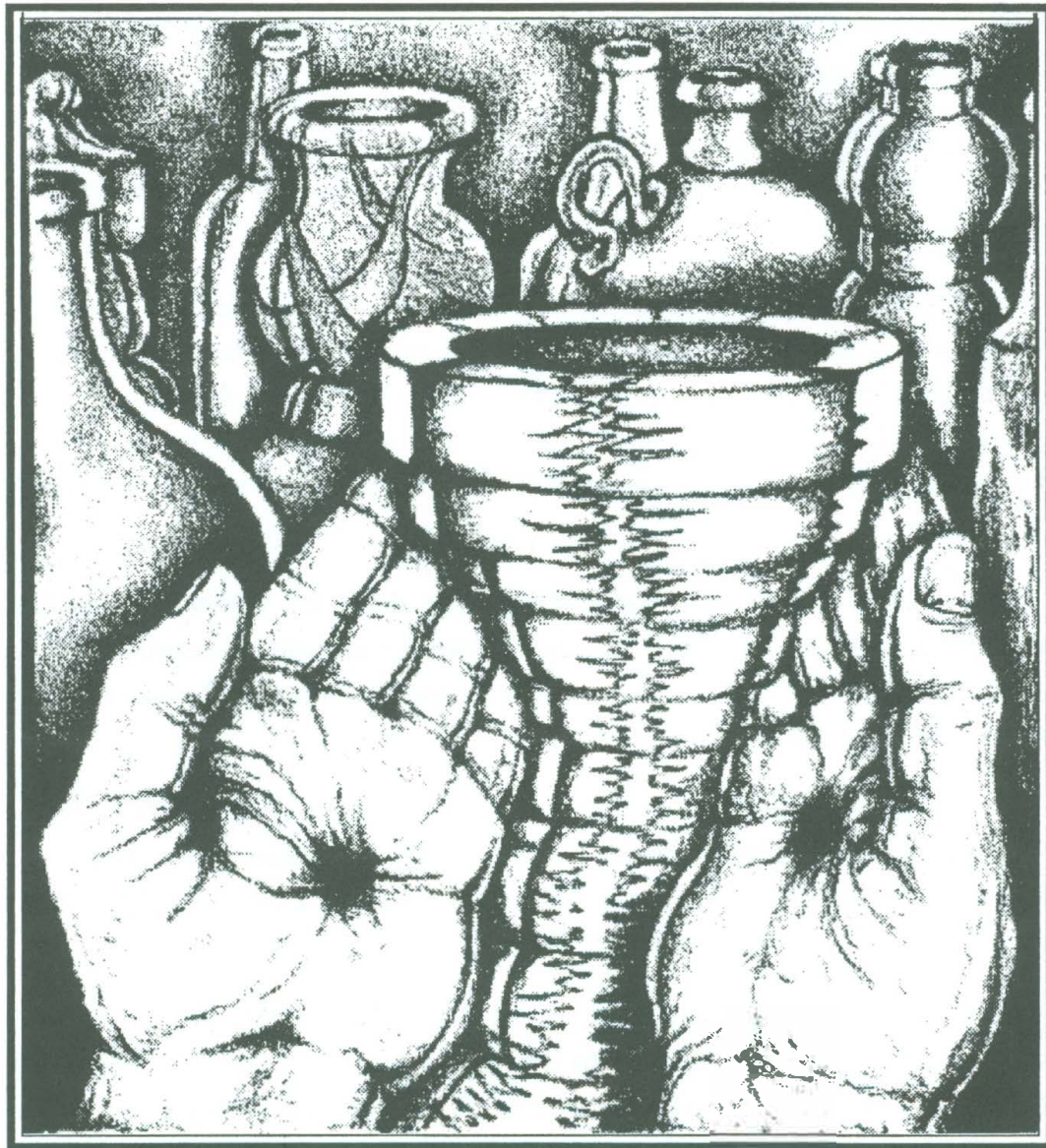
After a short time, he comes back inside and picks up my pallet. He carries me out to the kiln which I see holds white-hot fire. Now wait! This is not the same as being molded by the master's kind hands. And just when I thought I was ready to be of service, too!

"Is there a way to get around this part?" I ask him, but he doesn't hear me. He's intent on getting me into the kiln in one piece. This is where I'd like to jump off and run, but I know I will be destroyed if I try that. I'm too soft.

There's only one thing to do and that's to yield to the potter, to go along with him. "Perhaps there's *another* way to become a vessel set aside for the rich and famous?" I quip. (Sometimes a sense of humor helps when fears are overwhelming). The potter puts my pallet, with me on it, into the furnace and carefully shuts the door.

*"CENTERED ON HIS
WHEEL"*

*Drawing:
Jeff Hunsaker
Brigham City, Utah
1996*



I am alone. The flames surround me and I am sweating. The old story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego comes to mind. "I will be brave," I tell myself and anyone else listening, "to obey the potter's will and the fire he has prepared for me."
I release my hold on everything.

Amazingly, I feel my weaknesses firming up, and it occurs to me that by complying with the potter's design, being sealed by his mark, and blasted by his fire, that soon I'll be ready for anything!

Author's Note:

About seven months later, on 1 July, 1996, the Master Potter decided to remake me. He put me in the fire of mastectomy surgery and showed me how to trust in the darkness of fear and uncertainty. The surgery surprisingly cured the breast cancer which threatened my life. I emerged a new person, touched by the Great Physician and acquainted with the joy of surrender.

Writing this meditation on the Jeremiah 18 passage, prompted by the object lesson in my daughter's ceramics class, has been a blessing because in the writing, God revealed His way of surrender and I was privileged to examine it. I didn't know it at the time, but I would soon enter my own trial by fire and put His teaching into practice.

As I look back at prior journal entries, letters to friends, insights God gave me from Bible studies, conversations with friends, reactions to movies, and object lessons from nature, I have discovered how thoroughly and tenderly God prepared me for the experience and its continuing impact on my life.

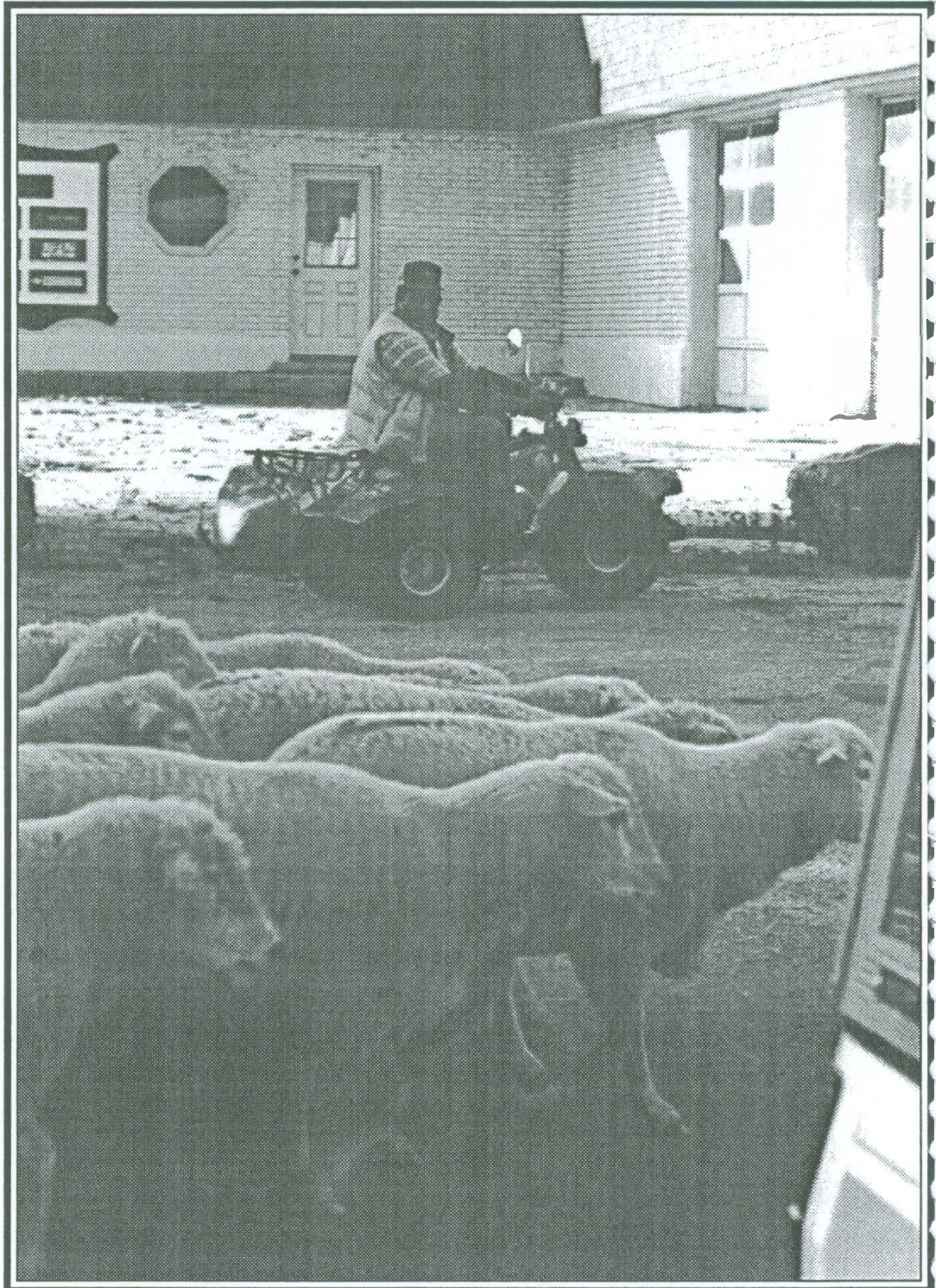
"BECAUSE DIANE LOVES ME," SAYS THE LORD, "I WILL RESCUE HER; I WILL PROTECT HER, FOR SHE ACKNOWLEDGES MY NAME. SHE WILL CALL UPON ME, AND I WILL ANSWER HER; I WILL BE WITH HER IN TROUBLE, I WILL DELIVER HER AND HONOR HER. WITH LONG LIFE WILL I SATISFY HER AND SHOW HER MY SALVATION."
PSALM 91: 14-16

Add your piece to *God's Wisdom Project*

I Remember When. . .

"My SHEEP HEAR My VOICE"

*Photograph:
Diane Kulkarni
Brigham City, Utah
1983*




*"My sheep listen to My voice; I know them, and they follow Me.
I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish;
no one can snatch them out of my hand."*

John 10:27-28

*"In repentance and rest is your salvation, in quietness and trust is your strength. . . .
the LORD longs to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion.
For the LORD is a God of justice. Blessed are all who wait for Him."
Isaiah 30:15 and 18*

God's Wisdom Project



"My purpose is
that they may
be encouraged
in heart
and united in love,

so that they may have the full riches
of complete understanding,
in order that they may know
the mystery of God,
namely, Christ,
in whom are hidden all the

treasures
of
wisdom
and
knowledge."

Colossians 2:2-3