



MILK AND HONEY FOR THE HUNGRY HEART

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Writers Exchange E-Publishing

PO Box 372

ATHERTON QLD 4883

Distributed Online non-exclusively by Writers Exchange E-Publishing

<http://www.writers-exchange.com/epublishing/>

ISBN 1 876962 81 X

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Devotions

Always On, Always Connected
By
Diana Lesire Brandmeyer

Psalms 16:8 *I know the Lord is always with me.* NIV

Matthew 28:20 *I am with you always even to the end of the age.* NIV

The ads proclaim ‘internet connection always on!’ I dream of this. I can envision how wonderful my life would be if I didn’t have to rely on a dial-up connection. With a cup of hot tea in my hand I would settle into my comfortable rocking, swivel desk chair. My hand would gently push my mouse into position and with a push of my finger my browser would open immediately. I could begin emailing friends, looking for new quilt blocks or recipes to thrill my family within seconds of sitting down. Imagine being able to do this any hour of the day or night. No annoying noise from the computer speakers or the phone trying to connect to my far away provider, no delays, no hang-ups and redial sound would be a distant memory. Life could only improve if I could instantly be connected with someone who cared.

But wait. I’m already there. I’m connected to the fastest line available. All I have to do is say, “Father God, are you there?” No matter if I’m stuck in traffic, unable to sleep at two in the morning, or even in a house full of noisy teenagers. God hears me. We’re connected through His Son, Jesus. Because of Him we can go to our Father anytime or any place.

Today if you haven’t used your ‘always on’ line to your Father I encourage you to do it now. He’s never too busy and He never hangs up.

Father God,

In this world of instant access please keep me focused on You. Send me gentle reminders of your presence with every step I take. Amen.

Baptism as Dye

By

Karen Woods

Recently, I had occasion to dye a garment from white to black. During this process, it came to my mind that the Greek root for the word we translate as baptism, bapto, has the connotation of changing the color of an item as though dipping it in dye.

That's precisely what the Holy Spirit does for us in baptism. The "color" of our souls change. We are no longer separate from Him across the chasm of original and actual Sin, but are incorporated into the Body of Christ which is His Church. The action of the Holy Spirit in Baptism marks us as Christ's own. We are made holy, set apart, for the work of God.

That piece of clothing that I dyed will need to be cared for properly in order for the new black color not to fade. So, it is with our souls. God's gift of sanctifying grace--the color change in the fabric of our souls, if you will--requires us to take action to maintain it. We do that by maintaining and growing in our relationship with Jesus. God's grace, St. Paul reminds us, is sufficient for us.

Let us pray-

Heavenly Father, we thank you that by water and the Holy Spirit you have bestowed on us your servants the forgiveness of sins and have raised us to a new life of grace. Sustain us, O Lord, in your Holy Spirit. Give us inquiring and discerning hearts, the courage to will and to persevere, a spirit to know and love you, and the gift of joy and wonder in all your works. Amen.

Chasing After God
By
Pamela S. Thibodeaux

After reading the best selling book, *God Chasers* by Pastor Tommy Tenney, I wondered...are there any God chasers in the Catholic Church? How about the Baptist or Methodist or Full Gospel churches? I'm not talking about church goers or man pleasers, but God seekers. The Bible says that, "God is no respecter of persons." Why are we? There are seven things God hates, one of which is "one who sows discord among the brethren." Why do we? Why do we judge and criticize those who are not of the same "faith" as we?

Jesus said, "Judge not lest ye be judged." I try to live my life by that Scripture as well as my own personal motto, which is: Don't mock what you don't understand.

Many of us wear W. W. J. D. bracelets or pins and proudly display our bumper stickers, crucifixes and key chains, but how often do we REALLY consider what Jesus would do in our situations? How many of us talk the talk but don't walk the walk? Even Jesus praised the Canaanite woman for her faith. Why can't we praise each other? How many of our church doctrines and church laws--regardless of the denomination--are Scripture based but man enforced without the mercy and forgiveness commanded of us by Christ? Why have we made love and forgiveness a job instead of a joy?

How often do we approach the altar of God with sin in our hearts, minds and lives? How often do we really repent, whether through the Sacrament of Reconciliation or on our face before God? How often do we go to church without really going to God? How often do we seek the approval of man, or seek God's hand and not His face? How often do we really worship Him in Spirit and in Truth, instead of ritual and tradition? How often do we put church over God? How often do we really minister to Jesus? Do we sit at His feet, seek His face, serve Him with our whole hearts or do we become enslaved by what we once loved? How many of our priests and ministers have lost their reverence for God and simply perform rituals?

Some say the Catholic Church is the one TRUE church, started by Jesus, but how often do we Catholics practice what we preach? How often do we fast and pray other than Lent? Do we really hunger and thirst for righteousness? How often do we fast from negativism and feast on the positive? What about you? What about your church?

I AM NOT writing to judge or condemn any religion or denomination, I am writing to encourage ALL religions and denominations to become God Chasers!

So, let us pray.....Father, in the precious holy name of Jesus, we cry out to You. From the bottom of our hearts and the depths of our souls, we repent of our sins and beg for Your mercy. Open the floodgates of heaven, Lord, and rain down Your mercy upon us. Come down from Your throne and dwell among us in Your houses built of stone, but, more importantly Lord, in the houses of our hearts. Open the hearts of Your people and bring about true repentance, true brokenness, true hunger for Your presence. Make us one heart, one mind, one in our desire to be God chasers!

Close to His Heart
By
Lianne Bruynell Lopes

Read: Isaiah 40:10-14

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. Psalm 23:1 (NIV)

Jesus' image as the Good Shepherd has inspired numerous works of art, on canvas, in poetry and other literary works. Though the most well known, Psalm 23 is not the only Biblical mention of Christ as a Shepherd.

Isaiah 40 is a glorious chapter. Chapter 39 ends on a sad note, with the prophet telling King Hezekiah that the very Babylonians he'd taken into his palace and treated as good friends would one day ruthlessly conquer Judah and take her people captive. A depressing thought! But God gave Isaiah a glimpse into the future. Isaiah 40 is the prophecy offering comfort for the people of Jerusalem, that God will have the ultimate victory. God is portrayed as the grand victor king, the Almighty, more powerful than any other in the universe. He gathers the earth as if it were a pile of dust, and weighs its waters in His hands. Yet in the midst of all that glory and grandeur, one quiet little verse stands out. It is completely different, and gives the greatest comfort of all. Verse 11 says, *He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young.* (NIV) Verse 12 then goes back to proclaiming God's glory.

What a comfort to know that as grand as God is, He still has the time and desire to be our Father. He's a loving Shepherd who carries His own close to His heart.

Thank You, Father, for loving me and holding me close to your heart.

Fruit of the Spirit
By
Crystal Laver

Ephesians 5:8-10

For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.

Galatians 5:22-23

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

Matthew 7:16-20

By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

What fruits are you producing? Can others look at you and see the Lord working through you? Can others see Christ in your heart--through your actions and your words? If not, you need to reevaluate your character. A true lover of Christ must persist in living as Him. We can not be Christ, nor will we ever be perfect as Him, but we must cleanse ourselves of sins, temptations or even, as the Bible instructs, thoughts of these natures.

The world of today is steeped in things that would sully our souls. Temptation is around every corner. Only through the power of Christ can we avoid such things. Evaluate your fruit--we all are producing--which way is your fruit leaning? Toward the darkness or the light? Our Father in Heaven,

We pray Father that you would be with us. Turn me from my sin today Lord. Lead me away from the temptation that strays into my path. Allow my spirit to do Your Will Father. Let me produce your fruit, that others may be led to you through me. I pray for your healing hand in the areas of my heart that need to be healed. You know my weaknesses as no other, Lord, strengthen me. Please fill my heart with You, Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. In Jesus name I pray, Amen.

Elevator Praying
By
Kathleen E. Kovach

Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. -Matthew 7:7.

I love to “people-watch”, it’s one of my favorite past-times. When a family member was in the hospital a few years ago, I had long opportunities to observe human behavior in its rawest form--dealing with a set of elevators. I watched for quite some time as people came and went, disappearing behind the mysterious double doors, heading to places unknown, to me. Men, women, children, professional, ordinary, blue-collar, white-collar, no collar, all races... everyone did something quite interesting. They pushed the button. It wasn’t the fact that they pushed the button, it was how they pushed the button that sparked my attention.

Some people pushed the button and then waited patiently for the doors to open. Others pushed the button, waited for approximately two seconds and pushed it again. A couple of people just continued to push the button until the elevator arrived, which irritated me a little. *Push-push-push-push-push-push!* A few were surprised when the doors opened right away, as if that never happened. One person pushed the button on a fly-by to the stairs just to see if the elevator was right there. It wasn’t. Still others would push the button and then tentatively step inside wondering if it were safe to get in.

Okay, so this was an interesting exercise, but what does it have to do with Matthew 7:7? Some people pray and then wait patiently for the answer. Others pray, wait approximately two seconds and pray again. A couple of people continue to pray over and over for the same things, which sometimes irritates me, but that is between them and the Lord. A few are surprised when prayer is answered, as if that never happens. I had to ask myself: Am I the person that prays on the fly-by just in case the answer is right there and when it isn’t, I do what I was going to do anyway? Or am I one of those who pray, and when the answer comes, hesitates because I’m still not sure?

We are commanded to pray and have many examples in the Bible on how to and what to expect. *“And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.”-Ephesians 6:18.* Of course, we are required to be patient and wait for the answer. *Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for Him...-Psalm 27:7a. I waited patiently, for the Lord; He turned to me and heard my cry.-Psalm 130:6.*

We are told to *pray continually*-1 Thessalonians 5:17, but we must also trust that the Lord is taking care of the situation. *Know that the Lord has set apart the godly for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to Him. -Psalm 4:3. In my distress I called to the Lord; I cried to my God for help. From His temple He heard my voice; my cry came before Him, into His ears. -Psalm 18:6.*

Luke reports of a paralytic on a mat. His friends tried to carry him into the house where Jesus was speaking. When they couldn’t get through the crowd, they took him to the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles right in front of Jesus. When the paralytic was healed, he immediately stood up in front of everybody, took up his mat and went home praising God. *Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, ‘We have seen remarkable things today’-Luke 5:17-26.* Jesus had been performing miracles regularly. Yet, they were still amazed.

The story of Abram and Sarai was an example of a fly-by prayer. God had promised Abram that he would be the father of many nations, and his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. When Sarai did not

become pregnant right away, she offered her maidservant, Hagar, to Abram. God answered the prayer in his own time, but by then Ishmael had already been born. Mr. and Mrs. Abram decided to take the stairs instead of waiting for the elevator.

Gideon, after being visited by an angel who told him he would save Israel from the Midianites, felt inferior to the task, his clan was the weakest and he the least in his family. *The Lord answered, "I will be with you, and you will strike down all the Midianites together."* - Judges 6:15-16. Even after a successful mission of tearing down his father's altar to Baal, he still needed proof that it was "safe" to do as the Lord had said. After two tests of the fleece, he finally stepped into his "elevator", and became a mighty warrior for the Lord.

I learned a lot about myself that day, watching all of the people push buttons in their unique ways. But the one thing that remained constant... the doors always opened.

I Corinthians 12:4-7
By
Elizabeth W. Bennefeld

I Corinthians 12:4-7

There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are varieties of service, but the same Lord. There are varieties of activity, but in all of them and in everyone the same God is active. In each of us the Spirit is seen to be at work for some useful purpose.

Gifts and talents are funny things. I tend to discount my own as being ordinary and trivial, and wish that I could be someone else or do something else. Particularly when it appears that the gifts and talents I have are not wanted, and others are demanding that I be or do other than what I am or can do. I read, I listen, I think, and occasionally I write down my thoughts. More rarely still come the occasions for talking.

I don't have the gift of making and administering money, or of hospitality, or the gift of raising or teaching children. I can't even cook! And I have no real interest in pursuing these gifts, even though they were the ones that seemed to have been expected of me, and in the past I have felt diminished because I have not lived up to the expectations of others.

It's taken me a long time to figure out what my gifts of the Spirit are, and longer to become reconciled to the fact that the Lord has deliberately made me as I am for a reason. That he gave me these particular gifts on purpose, to be used for his glory and the upbuilding of the Body of Christ. I can listen, understand, love, refrain from judging, comfort and empower, and, when asked, express my thoughts clearly to others. These are not powerful, active, "doing" gifts, but they are mine in the Holy Spirit, and God reassures me that these gifts, too, are important.

Prayer: Lord God, it's easy to devalue the gifts that I have because they are familiar to me, and to envy others for the ease with which they accomplish tasks I would never even dare to attempt. Please help me to understand the "me" that you have made and to see how I, too, am important to the well-being and wholeness of the Body of Christ. Help me to see myself and others through your eyes. Thank you for the gifts you have given me and for the Body of Christ in which they find their purpose. Amen.

I Peter 2:24
By
Elizabeth W. Bennefeld

I Peter 2:24.

It was Christ's own body that brought our sins to the cross, so that all of us, dead to sin, could live in accord with God's will. By Christ's wounds you are healed.

Love, by its nature, seeks to be possessed by, rather than to possess the beloved. When two people meet who are deeply in love, they "melt into one another's arms." Each seeks to be possessed by the other. They give themselves to one another.

"Take me! I'm yours!" What a letdown, if the intended responds with a shrug of the shoulders and saunters away. Or, worse yet, says, "If you really love me, what I'd like more than anything else is a new house" or "That's nice, but I'm busy, right now. Can you wait until Sunday morning?"

Jesus willingly suffered and died, carrying my sins to the cross and liberating me forever from the penalties of sin and death. He set me free to live "in accord with God's will," that is, for righteousness. Jesus suffered and died in my place to give me this gift . . . that I don't really want. Or, would I want it, if I truly understood what it is like? Is righteousness worth my also suffering to try to attain it? To find out, I think I'm going to have to spend a lot more time with the One who loves us.

Prayer: Dear Heavenly Father, please forgive me for my indifference and for my sometimes deliberate ignorance of your gifts to me. Please help me to become willing to seek righteousness, to love and be loved by you. Amen.

Garage Sale
By
Christine Duncan

Matthew 6:5-13

I caught sight of a garage sale the other day as I was driving down the road. I'm pretty much of a garage sale fanatic--as are a lot of people with limited budgets and a couple of growing kids--so I craned my neck to see better. The problem was, I still couldn't see the way I wanted to. The sale remained just tantalizingly out of sight. So I slowed down a bit, and twisted around in my seat to see better. In my excitement at the possible bargains, I forgot what I was doing, so the car started to drift in the direction of my turned head, right into the next lane of traffic. It took the quick loud beep of the car in that lane next to me to bring my attention back where it was supposed to be--on the road with my car full of kids, riding into danger. The awful thing was the garage sale turned out to be nothing special. It was full of glassware and collectibles that I couldn't even have in the house with my rowdy bunch. But it had caught my eye. I had to wonder later, when I got through shaking over the incident, how many times in my life have I rubbernecked past a temptation like this--not really wanting it in my house, but unable to resist looking or even touching? What a blessing it is that there is a system in place for people's souls, much like the traffic system that saved my life. There is the beeping horn of the Christian friend in fellowship, the stop signs and directional signals posted by the Bible, the flashing yellow light of a well-timed Sunday sermon to help get us back to the right way. Thank You, Lord that You know the road and Your people who travel on it so well.

Grabbing Time To Pray

By

RubyLee Schneider

Ephesians 6:18 *And pray in the spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests.* (NIV)

You wait in lines. I wait in lines. Almost everyday in every situation we must wait. We stand in line at the grocery store, to get on a bus, even to cross a busy street. Other times we are put on hold or have medical appointments.

Like you, this waiting got to me. I frowned and fidgeted and thought less than Christian thoughts. My vivid imagination came up with delicious ways to eliminate all those in front of me. Can't we go any faster? I've been waiting forever. C'mon, let's get a move on.

One day, for no good reason, I watched the clock and timed the various waits. Thirty-two and a half precious minutes I stood in lines or waited on the phone! The following week our Bible study teacher challenged us to pray an extra half-hour a day. Where would I find...but hold everything.

Why not use the time I spend waiting to praise God for His Being and thank Him for all His gifts? Or I can use this time to pray for those around me, for my next task, for my children or any other need.

Talking with the Lord makes waiting a lot easier than getting angry with whomever or whatever is causing the delay. This "found time" can be put to work for the glory of God.

Lessons Learned in Wisdom

By

Christine Duncan

James 1:1-8

I have a confession to make. I avoided the book of James for quite a while. I really could not understand how I could count trials joy. And Heaven knew, I never prayed for patience. I knew how the Lord taught patience--by giving more problems for me to deal with, and I had enough, thank you very much. There were plenty of other virtues I needed to focus on and other books of the Bible to learn from. My friends would tease me about it when the subject came up in Bible study. But I stayed stubbornly away. But one morning, the Lord led me back to James and the verse that leapt out at me that day was such a comfort, I memorized it then and there. *"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him."*

Really? It was that easy? When I didn't know how to deal with my fractious teenager, I could ask for wisdom? When I didn't know which way to turn, all I had to do was pray? Wow! What a wondrous God we have. I've turned to that verse, and leaned on that promise, countless times since. Needless to say, after that, I did study the book of James. Although I can't say all the lessons were as pleasant, I do know that all of them were needed. That is the wonderful thing about Bible study. I believe that the Lord saves these lessons for us until we are ready to learn them. Nowadays, I'm apt to quote from James, with a bit of a wry grin, as my Bible study friends laugh. Thank you Lord for taking the time to teach me what I need to know about You.

Life is a Mist
By
Lianne Bruynell Lopes

James 4:13, 14

Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.

My husband and I are missionaries in Brazil. For two and a half years he ministered as the chaplain/counselor at an outpatient home for AIDS patients. In counseling these hurting people, my husband heard many odd statements. But he was sure insanity had set in for one woman, infected with the disease by her unfaithful husband, when she claimed she was thankful she had AIDS. Huh? Thankful for a death sentence like AIDS?

“For years I wandered far from God,” she said. “But God was good to me when He allowed me to have this disease. He gave me a second chance, for through this I have turned back to Him. I don’t take any second of any day for granted. Life has a whole new meaning for me.”

AIDS is a sure death sentence for any who are infected with it. But who is to say how long any of us have to live? Life is like mist. Here in the morning, but gone with the rising of the sun.

I learned a valuable lesson from this simple, basically uneducated lady. Too often I find myself complaining about petty things in my life. If that woman could be content with a renewed relationship with God because of something so devastating as AIDS, then I certainly have no reason to complain. In fact, God has blessed me richly and it is a sin to take it for granted.

Rejoice, for this is the Day the Lord has made. If you are reading this, then He has given this day to you. Make it count. You never know if you’ll be around tomorrow.

My Hiding Place
By
Christine Duncan

Psalm 32:7-8

You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance. I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.

Have you ever gotten up out of bed with a song in your head--and your heart? I have. Sometimes, in the middle of some very hard times, I've woken up with a song of the Lord's victory or of His care for me. Frankly, I was puzzled even as I was comforted by the song.

Where did that come from? Many of the songs I woke to were songs I hadn't thought of or sung in years. It wasn't until I came on this verse that I realized that God had given me the songs, in a very direct answer to my prayers. He "surrounded" me with "songs of deliverance" He "instructed" me "in the way" I should go.

Lord, I am so grateful that You know me so well, know how I feel and what I'm going through. Thank You Father, for Your care for me.

Not So Quiet Time
By
Christine Duncan

Psalm 5

I used to do my devotions at night, but all too often I would find myself falling asleep over my Bible, if I opened it at all. I knew I needed the time reading the Word and praying so I changed my “quiet time” to the morning. Still I often find myself with the Bible propped in back of my cereal bowl, a curling iron in one hand, a spoon in the other, fending off my husband’s and youngest son’s attempts at conversation as I try to take in at least a short verse. It was in the middle of just such a morning that I came across this (verse 2), a song I learned long ago. *My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto thee, and will look up.*

That morning the clatter of the breakfast table faded, as I looked up, in guilt and shame and saw the sun rise outside my window. The Lord had given me a beautiful new day. And I didn’t even have time for a minute alone with Him.

Lord, forgive me, I don’t always give You the time I should. You are so much busier than I and yet You make time for me. Thank you.

Psalm 37:3,4
By
Lauralee Bliss

Psalm 37:3,4

Trust in the Lord and do good.

Dwell in the land and feed on His faithfulness.

Delight yourself in the Lord,

And He will give you the desires of your heart.

Ever feel like your life is on a treadmill? You put out so much energy into running the race, but you sense you aren't getting anywhere. In those times, we really must wait on the Lord to move us to the next level with Him. He knows when we are ready and He is never early or late. In the meantime, even if you feel like your life is on a treadmill, keep dwelling in the place you are at. Put a song on your lips and a prayer in your heart. Feed your life with the Word. Before long God will open the doors wide to new possibilities, and you will have developed the spiritual strength to meet the next challenge.

Revelations 2:13
By
Elizabeth W. Bennefeld

Revelations 2:13

I know where you are living, where Satan's throne is. Yet you are holding fast to my name, and you did not deny your faith in me even in the days of Antipas my witness, my faithful one, who was killed among you, where Satan lives.

I want to be liked, and being a steadfast Christian quite often isn't acceptable to the people around me. As a writer, active in many groups on the Internet, I'm in daily contact with people of other faiths and people who profess to have none at all. Many of them equate Christianity with persecution. Others are so obsessed with being tolerant or politically correct that they declare, "There is no one true way." They seem to believe that there are many roads that lead to salvation, and whichever one a person chooses is right for that individual. Taking a different stand is not popular, and disagreement is often assumed to be condemnation. How can I hold fast to the name of Jesus in such an environment? By being trustworthy. By loving others as Jesus loves me.

Dear Heavenly Father, In a world that's so quick to take offense, it's difficult to say, "Jesus is 'the way, the truth, and the life,'" and stick to it. Please overshadow me with your Spirit and fill me with your love, so that I can hold fast to the name of Jesus and love others as he first loved me. Help me not to be ashamed of you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Strongholds
By
Lianne Bruynell Lopes

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation, Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the Stronghold of my life, of whom shall I be afraid? (Psalm 27:1)

On a trip to the UK in 1998, my friends and I visited Edinburgh, Scotland. I was impressed, upon seeing Edinburgh Castle, at how high up it stood, on a base of hard, steep rock. Now that would have been hard to take in ancient times before war planes could drop bombs from overhead, I thought. That was the whole purpose of castles, or fortresses in ancient times, to keep the people inside safe, and the enemy and danger out.

David knew this concept well. He was a man of war, and had his own castles and fortresses. In his confidence that God would keep him safe even in times of trouble, he likened God's protection to this type of stronghold. With God as the stronghold of his life, David depended on God for the very strength to get him through every aspect of his life. So he was confident, even in times of trouble, he would be safe. This image is furthered in verse 5, "...set me high upon a rock." That rock is God. Not only is God an impregnable fortress, He is also the very rock the fortress stands upon. Rocks in nature, such as the one Edinburgh Castle sits upon, can crumble under the right circumstances. God will always stand firm. Always!

We too can have this absolute trust in God for He will never let us down. In fact, if we put our trust in Him as David did, He will set us "high upon a rock." His rock. Himself. And nothing can harm us with God as our rock.

Thanksgiving
By
Christine Duncan

Matthew 6:25-34

A sentence on a church billboard caught my eye. “If you have nothing to be thankful for then you have a short memory.” It reminded me of something that happened when my children were little. That particular year had been a hard one anyway. I had two toddlers to raise on my own, because my ex-husband had left the state. My eighteen-month-old son had been ill for what seemed like the whole year. His doctors couldn’t seem to discover why. The bills were mounting and then my ex-husband stopped paying child support. My job couldn’t cover the gap and welfare would not. Winter was coming. My children had outgrown all their clothes and needed new warm ones and I didn’t even have enough money to pay for our rent, food and utilities for the month. I had hopes of a better job coming up soon, but I needed money now.

Frantically, I tried to find ways to fill the disparity. But I didn’t tell anyone what was going on, not even my family who lived a long way from us in Colorado. But I did pray. And prayed and prayed. I couldn’t sleep for all my worrying, so I rationalized I might as well. Sometimes I would rage at the Lord, not something I would recommend. “Father, how can I feed my children on this money let alone get them the warm clothes they need? You blew it! You are going to let my babies starve and do nothing!”

Finally in despair, I gave the whole thing to the Lord. “Here, God!” I stormed. “It’s Yours. I can’t do it and I am so tired of trying. You feed us this month. You keep my children warm because I know that I can’t.”

I was paging through the Bible as I prayed, and He led me to the book of Matthew. *Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on... For your heavenly Father knows that need all these things.*

After I read the verses, a peace came to me and I was able to sleep. The Lord had heard and He would provide. A few days later, a friend who volunteered for the church’s food closet called me. The church had taken on too many perishables and she was worried they would go to waste. Could I use them? Could I! And in church that Sunday, a woman in my Sunday school whom I hardly knew, came to me--Remember, I’d told no one, not even my own family--she had noticed me with my children in church and realized that her own children were not much older. Would I be offended, she asked, if she gave me a bag of clothing her own children had outgrown?

Offended? I was thrown back on my knees, thanking the Lord. The Lord has answered many of my prayers sometimes, I’m sure, before I even knew His hand was in it. But this time, I knew the Lord had been our provider and our help in time of need. And I remember and am thankful.

The Perfect Hero
By
Lianne Bruynell Lopes

Read: Numbers 25:6-13

Phinehas son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron, the priest, has turned my anger away from the Israelites; for he was as zealous as I am for my honor among them, so that in my zeal I did not put an end to them. (Numbers 25:11, NIV)

As a fiction writer, I'm always looking for a good strong male hero. We see many handsome guys with lots of muscles on TV. But I like my heroes to have a little more depth. In reading Numbers 25, I found the perfect hero. There is no description of his physical appearance, only a beautiful account of his love and devotion to Jehovah.

Phinehas, a Levite priest, and Aaron's grandson, remained steadfast in his faith when all about him his own people were falling into idolatry. Even after seeing God's numerous miracles during the Exodus from Egypt, many Hebrews still could not resist temptation to look elsewhere. Because of this, God had sent a plague, and many Hebrews were dying. One stubborn, or rather, hardened, individual went a step further. He brought a Midianite priestess into the Hebrew assembly and in front of everyone began having sexual relations with her. This was a common religious practice among the pagans, and it is possible this Hebrew wanted the Children of Israel to use this same lewdness to worship Jehovah. While the others stood around, shocked at such open rebellion, Phinehas reacted. In his fervor for his God, he grabbed a spear (or possibly a knife, maybe even the same one he used to kill sacrificial animals) and thrust it through the couple, killing them instantly. His action may seem drastic to us today, but it saved the Children of Israel. God stopped the plague because of Phinehas' cleansing act. It was also at this point God confirmed forever the priesthood on the Levites.

Phinehas. Now there's a man who was not afraid of commitment! What about you? Are you zealous for God's honor, as Phinehas was?

Uh...
By
Crystal Laver

Matthew 28:18-20

Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Matthew 9:37-38

Then he said to his disciples, "The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.

Luke 10:3

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves

We have a responsibility to Christ to share the good word. Often times, when the Lord is working through us, we have an urge to speak to someone about Him. Some of the time, we ignore that urge in fear. What if the Lord was trying to use you to make an unbeliever aware. Not all seeds are produced while you are there to watch. Some just need planting. In Acts 10:2 the Lord uses Cornelius as an example. Cornelius wasn't a believer in Christ, but he was actively seeking the Lord. The Lord rewarded him by sending Peter to tell Cornelius about Christ.

The Lord may be using you simply by example. This life is short; eternity will stretch out forever. Don't you want to see your brothers and sisters there with you? Are not we, Gentiles, grafted into Christ's family through Him? In former times, we would not have been allowed into the Temple to worship the Lord. But God sent Christ to tear down the barriers, to allow all to become His chosen.

Next time you feel the urge, act upon it. Don't be afraid of becoming labeled. After all, there are worse things than being called a 'Bible-thumper'.

Dear Lord,

I ask that you guide me today. Help me to not fear spreading your word. Work through me, Father, to share You to others. Allow others to see You in me. Use me to further Your will and kingdom. Father, let me hear You when you speak to me.

Amen

Poems

A Divine Pattern
By
Monique Nicole Fox

God is the model
that shapes my life
eliminating all worries, trials, tribulations and strife

God is the pattern
that fabrics my soul
healing heartaches and heartbreaks; filling the hearts' hole

God is the guide
that shows me the way
holding my hand each and every day

God is the diagram
that maps out my future, present and past
being the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the start and the last

God is the design
that is yours, everyone's and mine

God is the example
we all should follow
Care for a sample?

A Spiritual Soap Opera

By

Monique Nicole Fox

Life's day and night
Is like a soap opera
As The World Turns
God is the Guiding Light
For you to see
For you to find the Almighty
A saga; a series; an episode of divinity

A Spiritual Surge
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Lord, I feel such a surge of gratitude
KNOWING
that your spirit is within me
God, I feel your intensity, your current, your presence
GROWING
Lord, I feel an electrical excitement
FLOWING
Thru my life with force and strength
SOWING
Lord, I feel your voltage, your jolting, your thrusting motion
because it's
SHOWING in my smile and my enthusiasm, I'm
GLOWING

A Valuable Employee

By

Monique Nicole Fox

God is an active employee of my life
working on my day shift
working on my night shift
working around the clock
shifting & working miracles
creating & engineering blessings
nursing & healing the sick
fighting & defeating evil
teaching & schooling his followers
watering & putting out fires
what a valuable employee; a wondrous hire

All That I Am
By
Monique Nicole Fox

All that I am
All that I have
All that I do
I owe to You

All that I am
All that I write
is Your gift
You motivate and inspire me
You give me a spiritual lift

All that I am
All that I love
Is radiated to everyone
From God above

Answered Prayers

*By
Judy Miller*

I walked out into the fields
to seek some comfort away,
from all the trials and agonies
that had been mine for days.

As I walked along, the first
of warm sprinkles started down,
they seemed to melt away the chains
of the hurts that had me bound.

The tears on my face were joined
with those first drops of rain,
then God was there beside me
to listen to my pain.

I told him how I felt
the bruises and the scars,
I spared no words, I was blunt
I asked, "Do you really answer prayers?"

The words came into my head
"You're not ready, the answer is no,
all things work toward a goal of good
one day my answer will be go!"

In other words, the time isn't right
God is that what you are saying?
"Yes, my child, that is correct
let me call the shots, but—keep on praying?"

Perhaps it's not in the getting
what you thought that you needed,
but being smart enough to see
that what you have should be heeded.

When will I ever learn that
God knows what is best for me!
When will I ever give Him control
and let my soul fly free?

Live each day as it comes
find enjoyment in what it has,
let tomorrow lie unworried,
let the past be passed!

Asset Allocation
By
Monique Nicole Fox

All of my heart, soul, faith and trust are put into a God Fund
a long term investment with no risks and is number one

It never loses value
It never takes a dip
It never goes into the negative
It never depreciates

It always pays off
It always provides a wealth
of love, life, peace, and good health

It always provides a dividend
It is the best asset allocation
That will last for eternity and 'til my life's end
I am financially secure. Amen!

Bank of God
By
Monique Nicole Fox

The Bank of God is an establishment
for receiving thanks and praises

The Bank of God is an establishment
for keeping peace, love, and unity

The Bank of God is an establishment
for issuing angels; regulatory representatives

The Bank of God is an establishment
for lending a helping hand; guidance; direction

God examines, verifies, approves or rejects my daily transactions
God's commandments, ordinances are my overdraft protections
I make sure I keep my life, my account in good standing, good condition

My account has been open for several years
And only can be closed by God and my loved ones will shed their tears

Being Me
By
Rita Hestand

I don't like me very much
On me everything's the same
I wish that God would touch
My heart that always feels so lame!

But my mom says that I'm unique
That God made us different one and all
I guess I'd look funny if I was petite
For with little feet I'd surely fall!

Brown skin, brown eyes, brown hair,
So ordinarily tall
I wish that I was fair,
And that he'd made me small!

Perhaps there's a reason that I'm this way
That no one looks exactly like me
For I am different I must say
But you be you and I'll be me!

Bridging the Gap
By
Monique Nicole Fox

a thing that provides contact
PRAYER
a thing that provides connection
PRAYER
a thing that provides transition
PRAYER
a thing that provides a way across
PRAYER
a thing that provides a tie to Jesus who died on the cross
PRAYER
a thing that provides a link between
you and God
me and God
PRAYER is the bridge from us to a heavenly serene

Comparisons

*By
Judy Miller*

God never promised a perfect life, I wouldn't want it to be.
If there were no imperfectness, I'd have nothing with which to compare.

There can be no renewal of spring, without winter's cold sleep.
As there can be no growth, without life's pain.

If I suffered no illnesses, I would not appreciate health.
If I never felt want, I wouldn't be glad for what I have.

If I had not witnessed death, I would not find life precious.
If I never were afraid, I would not recognize my strengths.

If I never knew loneliness, I would not treasure my friends.
If I had not known rejection, I would not know that love is a treasure.

If I had never suffered, I would never have grown.
Thank you Dear Lord, for all things in my life.

Thank you for your help to gain growth through struggles,
And let me never take life's good things for granted.

Dear Mr. President
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Dear Mr. President
I am a citizen that is not pleased
Cause on the back of a dollar bill
Is "In God We Trust"
So why has prayer in school ceased

If "In God We Trust"
Why are we at war
Instead of putting our problems in God's hands
So don't you think that we should disarm and disband
And let our trust in God rule the land

If "In God We Trust"
Why not let God combat terrorism and sin
Open the door so salvation can come in

If "In God We Trust"
Then why not get on your knees and pray
At school, at work, at home, and at time of play
Asking God to bless America each and every day

So Mr. President
Can you please clear up my perplexion and confusion
about "In God We Trust"
By healing our country's illnesses with a God injection or fusion
You will find that this is a heavenly solution
Sincerely Monique Nicole Fox, God's Poetic Team For Spiritual Resolution

Diet Time!
By
Monique Nicole Fox

It is diet time!
A time to slim down those burdens weighing you down
It is diet time!
A time to get rid of those extra pounds
It is diet time!
A time to cut out Satan and sin on every ground
It is diet time!
A time to get rid of the dead beats hanging around
It is diet time!
A time to pick up a smile and get rid of that frown
It is diet time!
A time to cut out the pity parties at home and all over town
It is diet time!
A time to get rid of negative people and those that put down
It is diet time!
A time to work out your life with God all year round

Divine Detergent
By
Monique Nicole Fox

God purifies the mind, body and soul
God cleans, God cleanses
Like the detergent TIDE
Repent your sins you feel inside

God forgives and washes away our transgressions
God makes the dirt go away
God removes the stains
Like the detergent GAIN

God helps the wrinkles in our life
God makes them cuddle up fresh
Like SNUGGLE with color protection
Let God be your detergent; let God be your selection

Exercise Time!
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Lift up your prayer
To God who is here, there and everywhere

Lift up your soul
To God who makes our lives whole

Lift up your voice in song and praise
Look to God 'til your dying days

Lift up your supplication
To God with joy and elation

Lift up God's statutes and commandments
If you have been backsliding: repent

Lift up your heart
Live a righteous life, be good, and be smart

Lift up your head
And give thanks for your blessings and daily bread

Lift up your hands toward God's oracle
And don't let Satan and sin be an obstacle

Fab Fresh, God Fresh

By

Monique Nicole Fox

Pour God's love, understanding, wisdom and forgiveness
on your stain or spot
Rub it into the fabric of your life
It doesn't matter whether the water is cold or hot
Just let God relieve your troubles, grief, and stress
Let God clean up whatever is a mess
Set the wash cycle on GOD not permanent press
Time to make fresh start
Peace and happiness be unto you and God bless

From Within

By

Rita Hestand

Looking From Within
Creation was merely the beginning
of His fantastic deed.
From there He kept on sending,
A wealth of fruitful seeds.

And when He opened the heavens above,
so the earth below could stand,
He spread the welcome of His love
to the animals, plants and man.

His son He gave to save us all,
from wickedness and sin,
So even we can hear His call
when looking from within!

The Gift
By
Sue Butler

A gift--
Unexpected, undesired, untouched
A tiny hand
Reaching out to anyone for the taking
A lowly cry
Beckoning all to hear
A state of innocence
So pure, so humble, so needy.

--A gift? For me?
You didn't have to do that. But I'm glad you did.
When can I unwrap it?
Can I guess what it is?
Come quickly. I'll be waiting.

A gift--
Anticipated, announced, angelic
A tiny village
Uniting all to claim ancestral ties
A lowly stable
Providing comfort for a weary couple
A state of rest
Offering peace for the expectant one.

--Sorry, I missed you.
I'm anxious to open your present.
I love guessing the contents.
Can't you give me a hint?
When can I expect you?

The gift--
Unadorned, undeserved, unopened
A nail-pierced hand
Reaching out to all who will receive
A mute cry
Encompassing the pain, suffering, and humiliation,
Undeserved and unappreciated
A state of unconditional acceptance
So giving, so loving, so divine.

Gifts From God
By
Monique Nicole Fox

I am surrounded by loving and supporting friends and family
a gift from God

I am surrounded by motivated coworkers and positivity
a gift from God

I am surrounded by happy smiles and gaiety
a gift from God

I am surrounded by nature's beauty
a gift from God

I am surrounded by angels protecting me
a gift from God

I am surrounded by talented Poets and their poetry
a gift from God

I am surrounded by God's many wondrous gifts
That provide a welcomed spiritual lift

God Knoweth
By
Monique Nicole Fox

God knoweth
your hearts
whether it is good and pure
whether it is righteous
whether it is filled with love and kindness

God knoweth
your hearts
whether he is praised and glorified
whether he is in your life, a significant part
whether he is teaching you, guiding you and making you smart
or has left his grace and did depart

God knoweth
more than you may think or believe
loveth, comforteth more than you can conceive
Open your hearts, be ready to receive

God's Grace

*By
Judy Miller*

Some people say they're born again,
I always say, "I'm renewed."
For growing up in a Christian home
With God's presence I was imbued.

When I was twelve, I saw Jesus,
With outstretched hands, in the sky.
Some would call it a cloud formation
Others, a trick of the eye.

But as the years progressed,
I went on about my life.
I felt that God had left me,
And in His place, trouble and strife.

I rarely called upon Him,
When I was fully-grown.
I thought that I could make it,
Entirely on my own.

I thought He couldn't love me,
Unless I was perfect for Him.
I knew I had failed so many times,
I felt His presence was only a whim.

Then one day, I remember it well,
April fourteenth, nineteen eighty-three.
When a dear friend told me of God's grace,
And my mind was opened to see.

I fell on my knees at His altar,
Knowing He had always been near.
It was I, not He, who had turned away,
And been absent all those years.

I felt God's love pour over me,
His presence I did view.
I felt radiant, clean and shiny,
I felt—renewed.

God Time
By
Monique Nicole Fox

The Godtime Cable Station
is better than Showtime or Lifetime
or CBS, ABC and NBC
'cause it is a station run by the Almighty.

Plus it is broadcast worldwide
with messages from the divine inside
where there is much love and good news reside.

Plus it is aired 7 days a week
and 12 months a year
with loyal and faithful subscribers so dear.

By staying tuned to this station
each and every day,
You can live in the light of God
and walk in a righteous pathway.
So don't change the channel!
Don't go away!

Grace Is Mine
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Grace is mine
through my spiritual heritage
as a child of God, the divine

Grace is mine
through my father
as a daughter of all mankind

Grace is mine
through my adoption and my destiny
as a creation of the Almighty

Grace Upon Grace
By
Monique Nicole Fox

I give thanks to God
for every gift of grace
for my full figured body and a pretty face
for dealing me a poetic skill; a high card; an Ace
for blessing me with a job, clothes and living space
for creating the human race
My joy, my happiness to God I trace
Unconditional love I wholeheartingly embrace

Guilty
By
Monique Nicole Fox

God is around thee
Guilty
God is within thee
Guilty
God is beside thee
Guilty
Guilty of following God's statutes and commandments
Guilty of reading and embracing the bible
Guilty of believing angels exist
Guilty of knowing a higher power is in the midst
Guilty I confess and deserve to be punished or given blame
Guilty of loving God, a consuming fire, a consuming flame

Heavenly Accounting
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Debit Satan and sin
Credit God's glory is where you begin

Debit cheating and adultery
Credit monogamy and honesty

Debit deceit and lies
Credit the Lord 'til the day you die

Debit wizards, witches and false worship
Credit the Bible's teachings, it's divine scholarship

Debit things that lead you astray
Credit God's commandments that you obey

Debit false friends and those that betray
Credit God's goodness that you portray

Debit hate, violence and bigotry
Credit peace, love and unity

Debit grief and sorrow
Credit God's love and hope for tomorrow

Debit and credit your life for tranquility
Debit and credit your life for prosperity

I Care
By
Monique Nicole Fox

I care
I care about my loved ones
I care about my friends
I care about the world finding peace and making amends
I care
I care about my home
I care about my job
I care about the terrorist attacks that make the USA sob
I care
I care about the world
I care about the environment
I care about God's wrath that among us;
that has been sent
It's time to shape up; confess our sins; time to repent

I Imagine
By
Monique Nicole Fox

I imagine a world
of equality and minds just
or is it a dream; a nightmare; a total bust

I imagine a world
of understanding
or is this an impossible dream worth disbanding

I imagine a world
of unity and love
with acts of kindness
or going that extra mile over and above

I imagine a world
of peace and tranquillity
that is murder free, rape free, drug free and terrorism free
Then I think, Oh silly me!
Cause not everyone has God in their life
An existence without the Almighty

I Owe It All To You
By
Judy Miller

For all the lonely days,
You were there, Dear Lord.

For the times I turned away,
You stayed near, Dear Lord.

For the nights I cried in pain,
You wept too, Dear Lord.

For the questions I asked,
You answered, Dear Lord.

For the times I was afraid,
You calmed, Dear Lord.

For the strength I needed,
You supplied, Dear Lord.

For the day I begged forgiveness,
You forgave, Dear Lord.

For all I have or ever will,
I owe to you, Dear Lord.

I've Been Blessed
By
Monique Nicole Fox

I may never have a million dollars in the bank
But I have been blessed with a decent government job with a GS-12 rank

I may never be skinny or have a tight body
I may never be considered a babe or a hottie
But I've been blessed with brains for I made magna cum laude

I may never be a mother
I may never bare a child
But I've been blessed with sharing my life and joys with others
With just a mere smile

I may never be the first woman President
I may never live in the White House
But I've been blessed with a roof over my head; a resident

I may never be a runway, billboard or magazine model
I may never be on the cover of Essence, Jet or Ebony
But I've been blessed with a talent like poetry
Where I can spread the good news about God the Almighty

There are lots of things that I may never be
But my blessings from God are continuous and abundantly

In Debt
By
Monique Nicole Fox

I owe God my life and livelihood
I am responsible for knowing right from wrong, bad from good

I am obligated to serve and pray
I have to return to him my soul and spirit someday
I have to give back my poetic gift some kinda way
I am bound by his covenant, his way
It is my duty to follow his commandments; I must obey

I have to pay him back with my love
I am indebted to God above

I am in debt to the Lord for my existence
I am liable for my sins: repentance
A bad credit report, a bad earthly report has a damning consequence
Therefore, I stay in good grace because I will one day want a heavenly residence
For what I owe God is my expense
For what I owe God is very immense

Investment
By
Monique Nicole Fox

I put time and effort into the business of the Lord
I put in my heart and soul; everything I could and couldn't afford
I put in praise, belief, and understanding toward
Obtaining deliverance and acceptance
And having good health, food, shelter and clothing
Cause I am investing in my soul
Cause this is my profitable spiritual goal

Let Go, Let God
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Let go of hurt, pain, and grief
Let God be your comfort, your relief

Let go of war, terrorism and violence
Let God be your protector and defense

Let go of bigotry, prejudice and hate
Let God's love and kindness set you straight

Let go of your worries and concern
Let God be your comforter and relief that you yearn

Let go of your headaches, tension and stress
Let God calm you and clean up your daily mess

Let go of negativity
Let God be your positivity

Let go of your frown
Let God turn your frown upside down

Let go of those things that give you trouble
Let God inflate your life and be your helium, your air, your balloon, your bubble

Let go of impurities of drugs, cigarettes, pork or swine
Let God be your filter for all things divine

Let go of lies, cheating, stealing, and sin
Let God open new doors for you to come in

Let go by taking a deep cleansing breath and release
Let God be your holy officer, your spiritual police

Let go and let God
And his angels be your glorious squad
Remember to give thanks and praise; accolade

Let it Rest!
By
Monique Nicole Fox

No use in arguing with those who have no clue
or trying to make them understand your point of view.
So let it rest!

No use in turning lively discussions into a heated one
or turning road rage into murder with a gun.
So let it rest!

No use in exchanging hurtful words or insults
or letting your blood pressure skyrocket as a result!
So let it rest!

No use in stressing yourself out
or walking around mad or in a pout.
So let it rest!

No use in worrying what others think about you
or what they say.
Just continue walking and living in a spiritual way.
So let it rest!

No use in trying to be
what others want you to be
for the only one you have to prove anything to is God the Almighty
So let it rest!

In God's hands are our problems and pests.
God knows and does what is best.
So in God, let it rest!

Life Changes

By
Judy Miller

When life is content
Each sunny day we save.
And even when it's not
We don't want to "make waves".

We'd rather stay in a situation
That's half--not whole.
Than to take the steps needed
To change to a life that is full.

Change is painful, to be sure
We want things to always remain.
In change there is an end
Afterwards, nothing is the same.

Sometimes change is forced upon us
That change may be the hardest.
But it occurs—it happens
No matter how much we protest.

Other times we know
A change we must start.
It too is difficult, but right
We know that in our heart.

"It takes guts to leave the ruts,"
Is a phrase I've often heard.
And when it came time for me to change
That phrase became my watch word.

Change closes the door on one thing,
On the way our life has been.
But Dear hearts—it opens too
To a newness we've never seen.

All through life there is change
As we live and grow.
But God remains steadfast
Even when times are low.

God never changes
He is there to help us through.
With His strength to guide us
His steadfast grace so true.

He'll hold our hand and comfort
Take us securely past all strife.
Through each door of change
We must enter, in our life.

Life's Phone
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Life's phone
Where you dial GOD
Pressing the button's of the commandments
Reaching heavenly heights Hanging up on Satan and sin
Speaking tongue
Communicating Christendom
Where you constantly atone
In the church - the Lord's earthly home

The bible is the 411
The devil is the 911

Come judgment day you will have to pay your bill
Phoning the Savior is a real thrill

Pick up the receiver
If you are a believer

Lifting Weights
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Come to God
all that are weary
and burdened with life's weights
let God lift you from dire straits

Come to God
all that are overwhelmed
and stressed
let God lift you from the entire mess

Come to God
all that are in need of guidance
and help
let God lift you out of that circumstance

Come to God
all that are confused
and in turmoil
let God lift you out of the muddy waters, filth and quick sands soil

Come to God
all that are run down
and tired
let God save you before you drown
You will find Him the best weight lifter in town

Look To Him
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Look to Him
He is the sun

Look to Him
He is the moon

Look to Him
He is a rainbow

Look to Him
He is the clouds

Look to Him
He is the sky

Look to Him
He is earth's horizon

Look to Him
And see he is radiant, brilliant effulgent, resplendent, and refulgent

Look to Him
For joy and enchantment

Look, Listen, Know
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Look around
God's life is everywhere
Like the sunlight that dances across the leaves of trees
Like honey and bumble bees
Like the birth of a baby, a teen, and an adult; a person grows
Like the angel going from heaven to earth; something wonderful flows

Listen up
God's life is everywhere
Like the whisper of the wind
Like the cry of a baby
Like the laughter of kids in the park at play
Like sports fans shouting "hurray"

Know
God's life is everywhere
Within you, within me
Beside you, inside thee
An awesome God, Almighty

Look, listen, and know
That you are not only precious to God
You are one with God
And God loves you so

Master Peace
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Master I know you want peace
There should be peace
Your children here on earth are at war
doing violent things
which need to cease
My worries and concerns I put in your hands
They are in your lap; I henceforth release

Master of love and peace
show us light at the end of the tunnel
show us your wisdom, knowledge and expertise
help us through this time of tribulation please

My Mother's Hands
By
Muncy G. Chapman

Knotty, gnarled, splotched,
Like coffee spilled on pale leather gloves.
Blue streaks wander
Like aimless rivers on a worn and ancient map.

Soft, tender, creased,
Like wrinkled pages from a favorite book.
Gentle, caring,
Transformed into beauty by the miracle of love.

No More Division!
By
Monique Nicole Fox

We need to breakdown
the dividing wall
of hate, violence and enmity

No more division!

We need to breakdown
the separating wall
of religion, culture and ethnicity

No more division!

We need to breakdown
the dividing wall
of war, terrorism and Anthrax insanity

No more division!

We need to add
some peace, good will and tranquility

No more division!

We need to add
some love, wisdom, and righteousness from God The Almighty
some faith and trust in God The Reconciler of humanity

Prisoner Of The Lord

By

Monique Nicole Fox

I am restrained by God within me,
beside me and around me I am kept in line and orderly

I am confined by God's commandments, ordinances and laws
I am forever in God's clutches, in God's hands, in God's paws

I am in God's custody for life
Now as a single woman and later on as someone's wife

I am imprisoned by my daily faith and praise
For the rest of my earthly days

Romeo & Juliet
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Romeo! Romeo!
Where art thou Romeo?

Juliet this is me God.
Why are you calling out for Romeo
When I am always right here?
You should be calling out to me in song and prayer
I will always hear you cause I am everywhere
I will always give you tender loving care

Juliet my dear
I am the one you should love
Focus your affection and attention on me the Almighty in heaven above

Juliet my sweet
I am the one that should sweep you off of your feet
I am the one who should make your heart go pitter patter and beat beat

Juliet mi amor
I am the one you should be searching for
Focus all that you have on me now and forever more

So Calm Down!
By
Monique Nicole Fox

No need to fuss or fight
or get yourself all uptight
cause God is like medicine
and will make you feel alright.
So calm down!

No need to consume yourself with grief
or rob yourself of sleep like a thief
cause God can lift your turmoil
and will give you heavenly relief.
So calm down!

No need to be sad, mope or frown
or let people bring your mood down
cause God's love everywhere
and the best inspiration in town.
So calm down!

No need to complain and think negative
or let depression cultivate and live
cause God has an abundance of light
and positivity to give.
So calm down!

No need to cheat, lie or steal
or commit suicide with an overdose of pills
cause God is the guidance you need
and can cure your life's sins and ills.
So calm down!

No need to dwell on what you haven't done
or races you haven't won
and unmapped goals
cause God has your life under control.
So calm down!

Stay On The Line
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Ring, ring
Hello, it's me God my dear
Hi, God, my father, I am here
Well I'm calling to make sure you stay on my line
or my wrath you should fear
I'm hoping that you will pay your bill, your debt, tithe
cause you are in arrear
My child, I hope you are listening
attentive with each ear
My child, I hope I'm making myself crystal clear
Stay on my line; make it your career
Hold on now!! Don't you disappear!!!

Thanks God
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Thanks God
for the moon that illuminates at night

Thanks God
for the sun that radiates with light

Thanks God
for the stars that twinkle bright

Thanks God
for food when I'm hungry and have an appetite

Thanks God
for your wisdom, guidance and spiritual insight

Thanks God
for my family and friends and making sure they are safe and alright

Thanks God
for the gift of poetry and being able to write

Thanks God
for everything; You are dynamite

The Direction I Choose

By

Monique Nicole Fox

The direction I choose to follow is up
for the LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup

The direction I choose to follow is north
will all my trust, faith and love
unto you I bring forth

The direction I choose to follow is
a positive one

The direction I choose to follow is right
and good in the sight
of the Lord
by promoting peace, harmony and accord

The direction I choose to follow is
heaven bound
that is why I keep God within me,
beside me that is why I must have God around

The Operator
By
Monique Nicole Fox

I dial the operator
1-800-OUR-LORD I punch

I need your assistance
I need your guidance a bunch

I may sometimes call you 9-1-1
For emergencies, help and rescue
Whenever I have no clue
Or whenever I don't know what to do

I look to you for the 4-1-1
I will be calling on you till the day I die
Till I am no longer
Till my life is done

Thanks for answering me Operator
Thanks for hearing my calls Savior

Time Management
By
Monique Nicole Fox

God's presence supports me as I work and play
soothes my sorrows and makes them okay
straightens my paths
organizes my time in a spiritual way
manages my life's appointments
supervises my day

I acknowledge God at all times
in everything I do and in everything I say
so my life's schedules and events happen with no delay
God is the best time management mechanism there is today

Transfiguration
By
Elizabeth Bennefeld

I thank you, Lord,
that I am not worthy.
I thank you
that I cannot dare to try
to earn your love,

Or else I'd fear that,
failing one small step,
I'd lose your love and life
and fall, a severed vine,
into the fire.

I praise you for your grace
that's grafted me
into the Tree of Christ,

And for the Spirit's flowing
here and there
from branch to root to branch,
bearing away by blood
the waste and residue of self,
replacing it with Christ,

Until that day when all the scars
of grafting have been healed
and all of me
has been made new
in you.

Want Ad
By
Monique Nicole Fox

God I want to place this want ad
Cause I don't want to live a life fearful and sad
I just want to be happy, cheerful, and glad

I want more peace and love
in this world
straight from Jesus Christ and God above

I want violence and war
to stop
all around the world both near and far

I want all of this Terrorist
stuff to halt and desist
And for God to conquer this evil in our midst

I want all to walk in the light of the Lord
Let there be a truce
Let there be accord

I want a life free to open my mail and free to fly
Help us oh God Almighty
Help us oh God up high

What I Believe
By
Sue Crawford

1.As the world debates if there is a God, I believe, that:

“In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” Gen. 1:1 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16)

2.As the world justifies their action, I ask forgiveness.

“And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be Merciful to me a sinner.” Luke 18:13

3.As the world takes prayers out of school, I pray silently.

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do...” Luke 23:34

4.As my husband fights cancer, I believe that whatever God has in store for us, is His will. I believe that He will give me the strength to handle whatever comes, and I will leave my life in God’s hands.

“I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.” Philippians 4:13

What Will It Be?
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Life is like a box of chocolates
You never know what you are going to get
TRUE!
If you don't trust in God or have faith in God. You bet!

Life is more like the ocean, bay, stream, lake, pond or sea
Where God's love flows to everyone, you and me
TRUE!
If you put trust and faith in the Almighty

Life is more like the sun
and God is the light
TRUE!
If you accept his guidance and keep him in your sight
and if you walk the straight path and do what is right

Life is more like a rainbow
many races, many religions, many colors, and many countries
TRUE!
If you don't know we are ONE blood, of ONE God
and should live in harmony
and should fear the Lord not a human entity
Death and destruction will continue to happen just wait and see
Be destroyed or unite peacefully
What do you choose? What will it be?

Your Move, Your Turn
By
Monique Nicole Fox

Your move
Your turn to practice peace
to stop the war
and make it cease

Your move
Your turn
to practice love and light
to put down your weapons
and this bloody fight

Your move
Your turn
to follow the bible's commandments
to confess your sins and repent
and be a righteous woman or gent

Your move
Your turn
to read the bible
to practice what you have learned
and get your life in order before Christ returns

Your move
Your turn
to find God
and to get in a spiritual groove

Articles of Enrichment

A Good Inheritance

By
Sue Butler

Based on Psalm 16:5,6

If we are honest, we all have dreamed of a rich uncle, parent, or friend waiting to reward us in his or her will with a healthy sum of money. The psychoanalyst in me begs to know the reason.

Our flesh or human nature wants and strives for comfortable living. As a result, we buy houses with easier maintenance--aluminum siding, self-store screens, easy-wash windows, riding lawnmowers, garage door openers; the list is endless.

In the last decade, Americans have enjoyed luxuries that our ancestors never dreamed about--remotes for surfing television channels and Internet for easy access to information, shopping, news, pleasure and chatting rooms. In addition, timesaving devices like microwave ovens prepare most meals for busy families today. Washers and dryers clean clothes in a fraction of the time our grandmothers spent to accomplish the same task. Vacuum cleaners whisk away dirt, quickly eliminating the need to pull up the rug and beat it fiercely.

Why do we need more time? What are Americans doing to fill those extra hours? No doubt some must work longer hours in order to pay for these new luxuries. How often does a person need to replace a car, a TV, a computer, a house? Consumers are becoming obsessed by these possessions. The average American watches several hours of television a day. What has happened to the art of reading, playing games, talking to one another, and taking a walk?

The inheritance that the world offers puts us in bondage. We have to have what others are promoting. Advertising appeals touch the core of our greed. Once we succumb, we spend years working to peel away the layers of debt.

However, the psalmist rejoices that the Lord's inheritance is a "good" inheritance. This cannot mean bondage but freedom. God's inheritance will not put a yoke around our necks; it will set us free to experience abundant living. God's inheritance touches our spiritual natures that need to be born again in order to understand and experience the true nature of this inheritance. The Holy Spirit seals our inheritance for all eternity. The life we experience on earth--love, joy, and peace--is a down payment on what is to come.

We no longer have to wait for that rich uncle. He has already made a way for us to receive our due inheritance--our portion and our cup. He promises his yoke is easy and his burden is light. He has come to set us free.

He does not require that we be a blood relative, simply to accept his blood atonement for our sinful nature. Likewise, we do not have to wait for a judge to declare our right to the inheritance. God the Father has already made that provision through the sacrifice of his Son Jesus Christ on the cross at Calvary.

Aborting the Will of God?

***By
Crystal Laver***

Abortion is not an item for many discussions unless it's a heated debate. Pro-lifers have received a bad reputation because of the actions of zealous supporters but also because it is not politically correct. Despite the ill repute it is still the correct choice.

Now, before you shut the computer down, let me explain. We can start with the simple item of what if your mother had aborted you? Or, if that is too difficult, think of the ramifications of the abortion act.

Approximately fifty million abortions are performed a year.

In the US, as of today, it is legal to have an abortion through the ninth month.

One abortion is performed for every three live births.

Less than five percent of abortions are done because of rape, incest or health reasons.

Since 1973, approximately forty million abortions have been performed. Ten million more than the population of Canada.

By the age of forty-five forty, 43% of women have had an abortion.

Half the population since 1973 has been killed because of abortion.

Nearly 2000 abortions a year are performed after the fifth month of pregnancy.

In one day, approximately four thousand babies lose their chance to live.

Now by anybody's standards that is too high. But how long do believers think the Lord will allow this to continue?

2 Chronicles 28:3, 5

He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his sons in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the Lord had driven out before the Israelites. Therefore the Lord his God handed him over to the king of Aram.

Leviticus 20:1-5

The Lord said to Moses, "Say to the Israelites: 'Any Israelite or any alien living in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech must be put to death. The people of the community are to stone him. I will set my face against that man and I will cut him off from his people; for by giving his children to Molech, he has defiled my sanctuary and profaned my holy name. If the people of the community close their eyes when that man gives one of his children to Molech and they fail to put him to death, I will set my face against that man and his family and will cut off from their people both him and all who follow him in prostituting themselves to Molech.'"

Continually throughout the Bible we are shown the mistakes of past generations in worshipping idols and offering their children as a sacrifice. We cringe and cry out for those precious little souls that suffered. We shake our heads and wonder at their mother's lack of conscience. But in our days is life not just offering different idols? The idol of convenience, economy and whim?

Are we not responsible for the lack of morals in our society? Is it not our role to make a difference? Do not be passive about such issues. Read your Bible and find the Lord's true will. Spread His word so others will learn.

However, the one difference in our society compared to the old is the path of consequences. We are not to stone the guilty. Just as the misguided have bombed clinics and

killed doctors associated with these practices, this is the wrong path. How is justification clear when you kill? Never. We, as Christians, must follow the whole Bible, not just the parts that fit our will. We must pray for the Lord's will, *seek ye first the kingdom of God*.

However, just as in the sacrifices to Molech, we must not buy into the political correctness and excuses offered by the world. We must stand by our Creator and His word or be lost to the other side.

These are powerful words and they take a bit to digest. As a woman, I admit this is not easy to decide on. I believe a woman should have a choice but I also know what the Lord says and what I feel for those precious children lost. Therefore, I have made the decision to hang my hat with the Lord. I will not buy into the propaganda distributed by the worldly values.

When I was expecting my first son, they feared I'd miscarried and performed an ultrasound. I was only eight weeks pregnant, at the most, yet there he lay. I was astounded! All I had been led to believe by the world--it's only an embryo, it's not alive, etc.--was false! I had been lied to! That little baby was as alive as anything I'd ever seen! To think I might have believed in the world and aborted that darling child brings tears to my eyes even to this day. Don't get me wrong, it was never an option, but the choice was there because it is *legal*.

I found one of my favorite Bible passages not long afterward.
Psalm 139:13-16

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

The Lord is merciful and full of grace. He sent His Son to die for us. Because of this, those that have done such things as we've spoken of can be forgiven. First, though, you must see the wrong and repent. We must not judge harshly women feeling they must do this but we, as followers of Christ, must act upon what we know to be the will of God.

Help, volunteer, petition, etc. are all options open. Personally I am volunteering at a pregnancy center in hopes I may help one woman avoid such painful decision and come to understand there are other options. That although it looks bleak at the moment, all works out if you have faith in the Lord.

For all have fallen short of the Glory of the Lord. This is the simple truth of why we must not judge or be harsh or embittered to those poor women that have either had an abortion or are contemplating such action. But there is no excuse to not act upon the Lord's will, to express with love the true will of God according to His word. We are held responsible for sitting passively by as two thousand of His precious children are killed every day.

Luke 10:3

Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

Matthew 10:14

If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town.

Matthew 10:32

Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven.

DO YOU NEED LIGHT THERAPY?

By

Lynette Gagnon Sowell

The beautiful season of winter has a dark side--SAD, or Seasonal Affective Disorder. When night falls early, temperatures drop, and an overcast sky blocks out the sun, some people fall prey to this syndrome. SAD's symptoms include fatigue, depression, moodiness, and anxiety. Also, some people crave sugary and starchy foods, and gain weight (not because of holiday eating, either). Exposure to a bright filtered light helps ease these symptoms.

Just as Seasonal Affective Disorder affects us physically and emotionally, another type of SAD can creep in and harm our spiritual selves. Believers sometimes go through seasons of winter. If we turn away from the Son, or distance ourselves from Him, the light grows dim. We become apathetic, or lose our compassion for others. We lack the fruit of the Spirit--love, joy, peace, gentleness, self-control, kindness. We're tired and feel content to warm a pew. We might even pig out on spiritual junk food, things which have an initial "feel good" effect but don't challenge us in our spiritual walk. Like Elijah, we flee to the wilderness and hide in the rocks. We are certain we're all alone and nobody knows what we're going through. There is a cure, however, and it's not finding someone to bring chips to our pity party.

We need exposure to the Son, just like sufferers of SAD need exposure to light. The light of God's Word shines into the dreariest parts of ourselves, blasting every nook and cranny with His radiance. Let His limitless love cleanse you. What? You don't feel strong enough? Turn to Him, and He'll draw your tired self in His direction. *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.** The grave is more desolate than the deepest, coldest winter's night. Take Jesus at His Word. The same resurrection radiance that opened the tomb can energize you, too.

And remember: Get some Sonlight every day. We all can use a good dose of light therapy, no matter what the season.

(*Romans 8:11, KJV)

Family Devotions

By

Sandy Cummins

“Family Devotions” are a time the family spends together learning about and worshipping God. They use the Bible but it is more involved than simple Bible Study.

Family devotions usually include some or all of the following:

1. A Theme or Topic
2. Bible Reading (s)
3. Song (s)
4. Activity
5. Prayer
6. Memory Verse

Obviously the above steps can be added to or minimized depending on the age of your children. A very good book for family devotions is *Leading Little Ones to God* by Marion M. Schoolland. If you would rather prepare them yourself, that’s wonderful, but it’s also lots of work.

I will give an example devotion, which can be modified for different age groups--this one has some Bible readings that are rather violent for younger children, but it will give you an idea:

The Theme I chose was “Trusting God.”

When we believe in God and put our trust in Him He is faithful.

In the Old Testament King David trusted in God. When King Saul wanted to kill him, he trusted in God and was kept safe. He even lived to become King after Saul. 2 Samuel 22: 1- 8, 18-19: *And David spoke the words of this song to the Lord in the day that the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; My God, my rock in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; My savior, Thou dost save me from violence. I call upon the Lord, who is worthy to be praised; and I am saved from my enemies. For the waves of death encompassed me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me; the cords of Sheol surrounded me; the snares of death confronted me. In my distress I called upon the Lord, Yes I cried to my God; and from His temple He heard my voice, and my cry for help came into His ears. Then the earth shook and quaked, the foundations of heaven were trembling and were shaken, because He was angry...” “He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support.”*

Some more men who trusted God included: Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego (Daniel 3:13 - 30), who refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar even though they knew the punishment was death by fire.

They trusted the Lord (Verse 17- ... *Our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire; and He will deliver us out of your hand, O King.*) and He saved them (Verse 27- *And the satraps, the prefects, the governors and the king’s high officials gathered around and saw in regard to these men that the fire had no effect on the bodies of these men nor was the hair of their head singed, nor were their trousers damaged, nor had the smell of fire*

even come upon them.). Not only did God save them, the King who had wanted to kill them turned to God and rewarded his faithful servants. (Verses 28 - 30- *Nebuchadnezzar responded and said, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego, who has sent His angel and delivered His servants who put their trust in Him, violating the king's command, and yielded up their bodies so as not to serve or worship any god except their own God. Therefore, I make a decree that any people, nation or tongue that speaks anything offensive against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb and their houses reduced to a rubbish heap, inasmuch as there is no other god who is able to deliver in this way." Then the King caused Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego to prosper in the province of Bablyon.*)

Daniel refused to stop worshipping God despite a decree made by King Darius and had to suffer the penalty by being thrown into a lion's den (Daniel Chapter Six). Daniel had been set up by jealous officials because Daniel was well regarded by the King but the King and Daniel trusted God to save him (Verse 16- *Then the king gave orders, and Daniel was brought in and cast into the lions' den. The king spoke and said to Daniel, 'Your God whom you constantly serve will himself deliver you.'*). God delivered Daniel by sending an angel to close the mouths of the lions. In his relief the King ordered the men responsible to be thrown in the lions' den and they were killed before they could even reach the ground! Like Nebuchadnezzar before him, Darius sent proclamations to the people about the power of God, ordering them to fear and tremble before the God of Daniel. Daniel also was rewarded and prospered under King Darius the Persian.

There are many Psalms that were written by men who loved and trusted God. Here are some verses...

Psalm 18:1-3- *'I love Thee, O Lord, my strength.'* *The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, My God, my rock, in whom I take refuge; My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold. I call upon the Lord who is worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies.*

Psalm 27:1- *The Lord is my light and my salvation; Whom shall I fear? The Lord is the defense of my life; Whom shall I dread?*

Psalm 37:40- *And the Lord helps them, and delivers them; He delivers them from the wicked, and saves them, Because they take refuge in Him.*

In the New Testament Jesus tells us to Trust God. In Matthew Chapter Six he talks about God providing for the birds of the field and how we are much more important to God than the beasts. He finishes with verses 33-34- *But seek first His Kingdom and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious for tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

In the New Testament Peter was able to walk on the water when he trusted Jesus (Matthew 14:24 - 33).

When Peter then doubted and started to sink (Verses 30 and 31- *But seeing the wind, he became afraid, and beginning to sink, he cried out, saying, 'Lord, save me!' And immediately Jesus stretched out His hand and took hold of him, and said to him, 'O you of little faith, why did you doubt?'*)

There are many other people who trusted in God in the Bible and we are commanded to do likewise.

Activity: Perhaps together with the children you can find a few more examples of people who trusted in God and read their stories. With young children maybe you could encourage them to draw something from one of the stories.

Songs: Trust and Obey for there's no other way to be happy in Jesus, than to trust and obey.

The steps of a Good man are ordered by the Lord and he delighteth in His way
Though he fall, though he fall he shall not be cast down
For the Lord upholdeth him with His hand His hand, with His hand,
For the Lord upholdeth him with His hand
Though he fall, though he fall he shall not be cast down
For the Lord upholdeth him with His hand

Prayer:

Dear Heavenly Father,

Thank you for your protection today and please keep us safe tomorrow. Please help us to live for you and follow your way and not do things we shouldn't just to please others. Lord please keep us strong and faithful and help us to grow into stronger Christians for your service. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Memory Verse:

Philippians 4:6 "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God."

***Homeschooling
To School or Not to School
By
Sandy Cummins***

Homeschooling is more than a decision, it is a lifestyle. If you decide that teaching your children yourself would give them the best Christian education then you are committing yourself to years of hard work.

WHY HOMESCHOOL?

Why do families decide to take on the burden of homeschooling? There are many reasons, here are just a few examples:

- a) **The Local Curriculum doesn't suit your needs:** For example, if your school system only does the sight method of reading and you want your child taught phonics.
- b) **Lack of Choice in Subject:** You have no say in whether your child is taught sex education, religious education (not always of your faith) etc.
- c) **Lack of Choice in Teachers:** Sex education being taught by a homosexual teacher or religious education taught by an atheist.
- d) **Peer Pressure:** Have you heard the teasing/tormenting that children endure at school? Not to mention the profanity, smoking and drug use that are prevalent in today's schools, even in the lower grades. Some people believe that children are too young to cope with this pressure. The child's natural need to conform and be accepted might outweigh their better judgement (even if you have taught them properly at home).
- e) **Lack of meaningful teacher/pupil interaction:** In large schools it has been documented that children will sometimes get less than ten minutes of meaningful interaction with an adult per day. In a homeschooling situation the adult/child interaction is enormous (sometimes constant).
- f) **Believing the Child's Education belongs within the family rather than with strangers:** As we all know, teachers have many students in their classes and never get the time to enter into a caring relationship with all their students. Parents/relatives who homeschool love their children and really care about what is best for them.
- g) **Learning Speed:** With homeschooling the lessons can be tailored to teach the child at their speed. Unlike at schools where fast learners are held back and slow learners don't get the chance to catch up.

Homeschooling is not all roses though. The parent must be committed to their child's education. They must find the time and resources to prepare lessons, make sure that teaching takes place and find extracurricular activities to enable the child some social interaction with children their own age. Often team sports, art, music or theatre are good "outside" activities for this.

Excursions for nature studies/biology, animal husbandry, history and art are great excuses for trips to the country or to museums, art galleries and zoos.

If you are worried about your ability to teach your child, remember this: Who taught your child their native language, culture and many mechanical skills? You did, now all you need to do is continue. If you care, you will manage, especially with the resources that are now available for homeschoolers. One of the greatest resources is the Internet. Online you will find

homepages of homeschooling families, education sites, art galleries, museums, zoos, science, astronomy and many subjects.

Here are some sites that should start you off on your search:

Peggie's Place! The most fun Christian home on WWW!
("http://www.gospelcom.net/peggiesplace/"): "You're on the doorstep of the most fun Christian home on the Web! Rooms full of wonderful resources, warm friends--and a world of fun! Come on in, kick off your shoes, enjoy yourself--you are HOME!" Megalinks from here.

Perkins Family Homeschool House ("http://geocities.com/~perkinshome/"): Great Christian Family/homeschooling site. Wonderful graphics, great message. Wouldn't miss it.

Early Childhood:

The Idea Box - Early Childhood Education and Activity Resources
("http://www.theideabox.com/"): This site should keep your child occupied for a while, it has an "Idea of the Day", "Idea of the Week", Activities, Seasonal (different activities for different festivities), Games, Music and Songs (lyrics only, no music), Recipes (e.g. ants on a raft), Craft Recipes (eg. eggshell chalk), Crafts and lots of links.

Science:

The Natural Science Pages ("http://web.jjay.cuny.edu/~acarpi/NSC/index.htm"): According to the introduction: "This site is an interactive journey through the wonders of natural science. Designed to use animation and experimentation to enhance learning, the site was created by Anthony Carpi, Ph.D." This site is excellent--if you go to the course section you can see detailed explanations with great graphic learning aids, this site is a must for people interested in Science! (or who have school-age children)

The Dr Karl Kruszelnicki Experience ("http://www.abc.net.au/science/k2"): Ever wondered "What Eats Bacteria?", "Why is yawning contagious?" or "What is happening when we crack our knuckles?" --the good Doctor shares his answers from his radio show. "From Great Moments in Science" you are given even more information on many and diverse subjects. Quite an informative site, with subjects that affect real people in their normal life.

Quite Amazing ("http://sln.fi.edu/qa96/amyindex.html"): Amy is a student at The Franklin Institute and investigates science and technology from a student's perspective. Some of her "explorations" include Video Games, The Hubble Telescope, Kite Flying, Amazing Women, Amazing China and more. Each of these articles contains related links.

American Scientist Magazine ("http://www.amsci.org/amsci/amsci-text.html"): "We invite you to sample our articles, columns, book reviews and illustrations, follow links to related Internet resources and participate in discussions of our articles."

How Things Work
("http://Landau1.phys.Virginia.EDU/Education/Teaching/HowThingsWork/"): This site is by Louis A. Bloomfield, Professor of Physics, The University of Virginia. Basically, if you want to know how something works, ask her and she will tell you.

Science/Medicine/Technology:

Exploring and Collecting History Online ("<http://chnm.gmu.edu/echo/>")

EurekaAlert! ("<http://www.eurekaalert.org/>"): "Your Global Gateway to Science, Medicine, and Technology News."

Astronomy:

Star Child - A learning center for young astronomers ("<http://starchild.gsfc.nasa.gov/>): "In level one we have the Solar System where we can see incredible pictures, great information and fun activities. Space Stuff is a collection of miscellaneous space information and activities (e.g. astronauts etc). There is a glossary for any terms you aren't familiar with, when you've exhausted level one, go on to level two and learn more about the solar system, the universe, more miscellaneous space stuff and another glossary. There is also the question of the month, other languages and links."

AstroWeb ("[http://www.stsci.edu/astroweb/astronomy.html](http://www.stsci.edu/astroweb/astroweb/astronomy.html)"): Astronomy/Astrophysics on the Internet.

The Nine Planets ("<http://seds.lpl.arizona.edu/nineplanets/nineplanets/nineplanets.html>"): A multimedia tour of our Solar System.

The Astrobiology Web ("<http://www.reston.com/astro/index.html>"): "Your online guide to the living universe."

The Environment:

Environmental Education Network ("<http://www.envirolink.org/enviroed/>): "The EEN will act as the clearinghouse for all environmental education information, materials and ideas on the Internet." --there are resources for school students, resources for teachers and resources for university students. This place is part of Envirolink, which is much larger and broken into the following sections: ExpressYourself (chat), Sustainable Business Network, EnviroArts, Green Marketplace, Animal Rights and Green Living Center.

World Climate ("<http://www.worldclimate.com/>): "contains over 85,000 records of world climate data (historical weather averages) from a wide range of sources."

AgriBiz Weather Bureau - Historical Database ("<http://www.agribiz.com/weather/agweathist.html>"): For those of you who want to know what the weather was like at a particular time in history

Animals:

Net Vet Electronic Zoo Animal Information ("<http://netvet.wustl.edu/ssitext.htm>")

Languages:

English Dialect Links ("<http://www.netaxs.com/~salvucci/EngDialLnX.html>")

The American Dialect Homepage
(“<http://www.evolpub.com/Americandialects/AmDialhome.html>”)

Maths:

Martindale’s ‘The Reference Desk: Online Calculators (“<http://www-sci.lib.uci.edu/~martindale/RefCalculators.html>”)

Archaeology:

Archaeology (“<http://www.he.net/~archaeol/index.html>”): “The Official Publication of the Archaeological Institute of America.”

Archaeological Resource Guide For Europe (“<http://odur.let.rug.nl/arage/>”): “an ordered collection of hypertext links pointing to current archaeological communication and information resources across Europe.”

Museums/Historical Sites:

Web Museum (“http://www.mechan.ntua.gr/webacropol/tour_acropolis.html”): Virtual Tour of the Acropolis.

Anne Frank House (“<http://www.annefrank.nl/>”)

Museum of Contemporary Art (“<http://www.mca.com.au/>”): This site is the first cultural institution in Australia dedicated to the contemporary visual arts. There are numerous links to other contemporary art sites, the exhibition diary--which lists the coming artists (dates and a short bio), if you click on the artist you will get a full-length biography and pictures of their work. There is information on their education strategy and an online store.

The Historical Text Archive (“<http://www.msstate.edu/Archives/History/index2.html>”)

Making of America (“<http://www.umdl.umich.edu/moa/>”): “a digital library of primary sources in American social history from the antebellum period through reconstruction. The collection is particularly strong in the subject areas of education, psychology, American history, sociology, religion, and science and technology.”

American and British History Resources
(“<http://www.libraries.rutgers.edu/rulib/socsci/hist/amhist.html>”)

Smithsonian Magazine (“<http://www.smithsonianmag.si.edu/>”): Explore Art, Science and History.

King Arthur/Medieval:

The Online Reference Book for Medieval Study (“<http://orb.rhodes.edu/>”): “ORB is an academic site, written and maintained by medieval scholars for the benefit of their fellow instructors and serious students. All articles have been judged by at least two peer reviewers. Authors are held to high standards of accuracy, currency, and relevance to the field of medieval studies.”

Medieval/Renaissance Food Homepage (“<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/food.html>”)

Old English Pages (“http://www.georgetown.edu/cball/oe/old_english.html”): An encyclopedic compendium of resources for the study of Old English and Anglo-Saxon England.

Castles Unlimited (“<http://www.castles-of-britain.com/>”): Dedicated to the study and promotion of British Castles.

The Saxon Shore - The History of the Matter of Britain (“<http://www.geocities.com/~gkingdom/saxonshore/>”): This page is dedicated to what I believe to be one of the most fascinating historical epochs. It was a time of transition, which began with the destruction of the great Roman Empire, and ended with the establishment of a new, Holy Roman Empire. “This site has an “Atlas” which has a map on the left, a description of the selected Kingdom and on the right a list of the known kingdoms of Dark Age Great Britain. There is also a booklist, timeline, FAQ, message board, guestbook and ‘What’s New?’. Very educational and interesting as well!

Britannia Internet Magazine (“<http://www.britannia.com/history/h12.html>”): This page is part of a much larger publication but deals with Britannia’s history--namely King Arthur. There are a series of articles, starting with a hoax perpetrated in 1981. We move on to “A Narrative History of Arthurian Britain”, after that we can move on to the site map, timeline, “Welsh Arthurian Literature”, Arthurian Resources, Arthurian Sources and Texts, The Quest for Arthur (a series of articles explaining the Arthurian legend) and lots, lots more - very comprehensive.

Tom Green’s Arthurian Resources (“<http://www.users.globalnet.co.uk/~tomgreen/Arthuriana.htm>”): This page is made by a gentleman from Exeter College and is absolutely overwhelming in information. His topics include: “The Historicity and Historicisation of Arthur” (academic research), “Arthurian Literature”, “Arthurian Sites” (that is an investigation of actual geographical locations--not webpages), “Myrddin”, “Arthurian Characters”, “Arthurian Folklore”, “Miscellaneous Essays” and “Arthurian Links” (internet and other sources). If you need to seriously research this topic, this is the place to go). Not for light reading.

Early British Kingdoms Website (“<http://freespace.virgin.net/david.ford2/Early%20British%20Kingdoms.html>”): The only Web Site totally dedicated to the Early Celtic Kingdoms of the Island of Britain; its diminutive counterpart across the Channel. You’ll find lots of information here about the celebrated and not so celebrated Kingdoms that flourished in Britain from the time the Romans left until well into the eleventh century.” This page has a map of Dark Age Britain, which is quite colorful and has small descriptions on the various kingdoms.” Arthurian and Dark Ages Places to Visit” shows a map of Britain and the great places to visit (pictures of the sites are surrounding the map) and links to lots of extra information about the places, very informative. This is just two of many choices you have at this site - very extensive and educational - great site.

The Dark Ages King Arthur and Others ("<http://members.aol.com/wjuhc/kingart.htm>"): This site has some information about this subject, but it's main attraction is the extensive book list (and reviews) of books. If you are searching for a book about "The Historical King Arthur", "The Fantasy King Arthur", "Historical Novels about the Dark Ages", "Other Heroes: Robin Hood etc" and other miscellaneous books on this subject - check this site because he's sure to have it. He also has Internet links to visit as well.

Camelot and Arthurian Legend ("<http://www.eliki.com/ancient/myth/camelot/>"): This page opens with a very detailed writing about Camelot--which is very interesting. From there you can click on the names of the central characters of Arthurian legend. The descriptions and information are very specific, and the pictures are great - a wonderful place to familiarize yourself with this intriguing legend.

Camlan ("<http://home.earthlink.net/~neatoguy/caer.htm>"): If you would like to see pictures of ancient swords (the spatha, or gladius) check his 'Battles and weaponry' page. The archaeological page tells us about some of the sites in Britain related to King Arthur with great pictures. There is also 'Historical References, Resources', 'An Arthurian Chronology', 'The Quest' and 'Before Arthur, another warrior protected her realm'. Good site!

The Quest - An Arthurian Resource ("http://www.uidaho.edu/student_orgs/arthurian_legend/welcome.html"): If you would like an in depth telling of King Arthur then proceed to his "An Archaeological Quest for the 'real' King Arthur" page and check out the pictures too, they are fantastic! Fantastic pictures are not limited to this page only, there are more in his Arthurian Art Gallery (which includes lots of information too). The court tells us about the characters and there are links to Celtic information as well. This is a beautiful page.

FeySidhe's Arthurian and Medieval Page ("<http://www.io.com/~feysidhe/feysidhe.html>"): The author of this homepage is working on a detailed summary of Malory's version of King Arthur which is linked from this page. He has a "A Brief Timeline of Major Arthurian Literature" and lots of online links.

Jessamyn's Regency Costume Companion ("<http://www.songsmyth.com/costumerscompanion.html>"): Want to create a Regency costume? Desirous of dressing like a character from a novel of Jane Austen? Do you do period dancing or own a period home with which you wish to coordinate? This is a collection of information, ideas, pattern tips, and images.

Argos ("<http://www.3wis.nl/paul/medsource.html>"): "This page contains information related to my own field of interest (i.e. North-Western Europe from approximately 800-1200 CE) and some guiding links to homepages of huge sites that will lead you further on."

Labyrinth ("<http://www.georgetown.edu/labyrinth/labyrinth-home.html>"): Resources for Medieval Studies.

Net Serf ("<http://netserf.cua.edu/>"): The Internet Connection for Medieval Resources - well set out, arranged by topics.

Medieval and Renaissance Fact and Fiction
("<http://www.angelfire.com/mi/spanogle/medieval.html>")

Politics:

"The United Nation's CyberSchool Bus ("<http://www.un.org/Pubs/CyberSchoolBus>): Event's Orbit is a calendar of global days e.g. (Human Rights Day on December 10th), which leads you to The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, The Rights of the Child. For the teacher you have the following resources: the Classroom Guide, Human Rights and the United Nations, Understanding Human Rights, Topics in Human Rights. There is a Global Atlas of Student Action, Question and Answers, Resources, Stories and an Interactive Declaration.

Dictionaries:

Online Symbolism Dictionary
("<http://www.umich.edu/~umfandsf/symbolismproject/symbolism.html>"): This symbolism dictionary endeavors to provide some possible cultural significance of various symbols, and suggest ways in which those symbols may have been used in context.

Oxford English Dictionary ("<http://www.oed.com/>")

A Web of Online Dictionaries ("<http://www.facstaff.bucknell.edu/rbeard/diction.html>"): Now linked to more than 800 dictionaries in 150 different languages

The Semantic Rhyming Dictionary ("<http://www.link.cs.cmu.edu/doughb/rhyme-doc.html>")

One Look Dictionaries ("<http://www.onelook.com/index.html>"): An index of over 490 dictionaries.

Webster Dictionary ("http://work.ucsd.edu:5141/cgi-bin/http_webster")

Free Online Dictionary of Computing ("<http://wombat.doc.ic.ac.uk/foldoc/index.html>")

American/British Dictionary ("<http://www.peak.org/~jeremy/dictionary/dict-toc.html>"): There are also a lot of linguistic links here.

Dictionary of Phrase and Fable
("<http://www.bibliomania.com/Reference/PhraseAndFable/>")

THOR'S Dictionaries, Thesauri, Acronyms and Almanacs
("<http://thorplus.lib.purdue.edu/reference/dict.html>): Lots of links here.

An Onomastikon ("<http://www.fairacre.demon.co.uk/>): A dictionary of Names.

Dictionary of American Regional English (["http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/dare/dare.html"](http://polyglot.lss.wisc.edu/dare/dare.html))

Encyclopaedias:

Encyclopaedia Britannica (["http://www.eb.com"](http://www.eb.com))

Extrasolar Planets Encyclopaedia
(["http://wwwusr.obspm.fr/departement/darc/planets/encycl.html"](http://wwwusr.obspm.fr/departement/darc/planets/encycl.html))

Grammar and Word Structure:

Strunk's - "The Elements of Style" (["http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/strunk/"](http://www.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/strunk/))

Guide to Grammar and Writing
(["http://cctc.commnet.edu/HP/pages/darling/grammar.htm"](http://cctc.commnet.edu/HP/pages/darling/grammar.htm))

A Word With You (["http://www.accessone.com/~lparos/"](http://www.accessone.com/~lparos/)): A daily on-line column, featuring little known facts about well-known words and phrases.

Focusing on Words (["http://www.wordfocus.com/#Focusing"](http://www.wordfocus.com/#Focusing)): Experience the wonder of words by focusing on the Latin and Greek elements used in English

English Consulting and Language Reference Services
(["http://www.englishconsulting.com/"](http://www.englishconsulting.com/)): "Do you have a question about English grammar or some other language topic? Ask us!"

Guide to Grammar and Style (["http://www.englishconsulting.com/"](http://www.englishconsulting.com/)): "These notes are a miscellany of grammatical rules and explanations, comments on style, and suggestions on usage I put together for my classes." (["http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/"](http://andromeda.rutgers.edu/~jlynch/Writing/))

Dave Wilton's Etymology Page (["http://www.wilton.net/etyma1.htm"](http://www.wilton.net/etyma1.htm)): Word Origins.

Reference Books and Research:

Old English Pages (["http://www.georgetown.edu/cball/oe/old_english.html"](http://www.georgetown.edu/cball/oe/old_english.html)): "An encyclopedic compendium of resources for the study of Old English and Anglo-Saxon England. Now part of ORB, the on-line Reference Book for Medieval Studies."

General Reference Links (["http://www.peak.org/~bonwitr/ref.htm"](http://www.peak.org/~bonwitr/ref.htm)): Including American Demographics, National Libraries of Europe, Publisher's Weekly, Library of Congress and much, much more.

Bartlett's Quotations (["http://www.cc.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/bartlett/"](http://www.cc.columbia.edu/acis/bartleby/bartlett/)): "Familiar Quotations - Passages, Phrases and Proverbs traced to their sources."

Department of Language, Literature and Communication
(["http://www.rpi.edu/dept/lc/writecenter/web/online.html"](http://www.rpi.edu/dept/lc/writecenter/web/online.html)): Lots of Reference Sources.

WWW Webster Thesaurus (["http://www.m-w.com/thesaurus.htm"](http://www.m-w.com/thesaurus.htm))

Infoplease.Com (“<http://www.infoplease.com/>”): Find anything you might want on the Internet by searching their Almanac, Encyclopaedias and Dictionary. This is very comprehensive.

The Traditional Ballad Index
(“<http://www.csufresno.edu/folklore/BalladIndexTOC.html>”): “The Traditional Ballad Index is a collaborative effort designed to help people find reference information on folk ballads. It is not itself a source of song texts or of discussion of ballads, although it contains some summary information.”

Children’s Education Software:

Tutor House (<http://www.tutorhouse.com>): Lots of educational software for sale, great quality. I used to review some of the software--so keep an eye out for my reviews <grin>.

Educational Software (“<http://www.worldvillage.com/wv/school/html/download.htm>”): All the programs here are shareware so they are free for use. Want to teach your infants the alphabet and counting? Check out the ‘Preschooler’s Top Ten’ or perhaps you would like to learn a ‘Foreign Language’ or brush up on your History or Geography? Whatever your need there should be a program here to suit.

Miscellaneous Links:

Mickey’s Place in the Sun Educational Resources
(“<http://people.delphi.com/mickjyoung/educ.html>”) : This place is mainly links - lots and lots of them. There are links to Adult Education (a lot over the Internet for those who don’t have access anywhere in their own country or region); Children and Youth (mainly preschool aged); Clearinghouses; Dropout and Truancy (Stay-in-School Networks and information); Financial Aid - Scholarships, Internships, Grants; Grammar Resources; Organizations; Policy and Research; Publications.”

Biography Com (“<http://www.biography.com/find/find.html>”): “puts over 20,000 of the greatest lives, past and present, at your fingertips. Enter a name in the search box to discover who they were, what they did and why.”

Flintknapping Fundamentals (“<http://www.ucsf.edu/~t64tr/howto.html>”):
Flintknapping is one of the methods by which people work stone into tools.

Today’s Calendar and Clock Page (“<http://www.panix.com/~wlinden/calendar.shtml>”)

Wonderful World of Wombats : “Stumpers-L is an email group or conference where Reference Librarians post questions which have them stumped. With a worldwide community of over 1,000 librarians and other experts sharing their knowledge and resources, Stumpers-L is the world’s largest and most versatile reference desk -- and the answers often make for pretty interesting reading.”

Geographic Names Information System (“<http://www-nmd.usgs.gov/www/gnis/>”)

Edventure ([“http://www.edventure.com.au/”](http://www.edventure.com.au/)): “Australia’s Premier Internet Education Site”

Peering into the Empty Nest

By

Nancy Arant Williams

Mothering is a special calling. It calls for profound commitment, and long nights, and days, sometimes much worry, and always, much prayer. Most of us, as young mothers, see the long years of parenting stretching out before us, and it looks like it will never end.

But the years pass, and one day, we look up, surprised to see that we have worked ourselves out of a job. Now how fair is that? We gave our lives to these precious children, and then they leave. Of course, that's what's supposed to happen, but sometimes it can be a terrible wrench to a mother's heart.

Who is a mother with no one to mother? What identity is left when the nest is abandoned?

I Corinthians 2:9 state, (for those of us who grieve), "*But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them who love him.*"

Fortunately, the Lord knows what lies ahead, and He promises to make a way through every wilderness. In the verse above, He gives hope that, not only will he comfort lonely mothers' hearts, but He will do amazing and wonderful things with those potentially empty years.

If we give ourselves totally to the Lord, submit our bodies, minds, and spirits, to the One who holds the future, we can rest assured that He will use us in awesome ways we can't even imagine. By so doing, He will get the glory, and we will inherit the rewards, and have all the fun of living abundantly in the center of His will. He would have us hold onto truth, and trust for the future, putting one foot forward in faith, and then letting Him honor our commitment.

A brand new commitment, this one is to God, during a strange, new season of life. But, with our eyes fixed on the Author and Finisher of our faith, we can rest, knowing that, far from being useless, we will be a tool in the Father's hands. What more exciting thing could we even dare to dream?

Prayer

By

Sandy Cummins

Prayer is our only form of communication *to* God.

Praying out loud makes many people nervous and self-conscious. Instead of concentrating on the task at hand we are busy worrying. Do we sound pompous, using large words and archaic speech we would never normally utter? Do we sound timid, searching for something to say and the right words to say it?

Matt 6:7,8: *And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition, as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. (8) Therefore do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need, before you ask Him.*

Before introducing our children to prayer we should first become comfortable praying out loud with nobody except ourselves and God listening.

Firstly, what does God want us to say? The only example that Jesus gave us is *The Lord's Prayer*. So perhaps we should look at that and see what it contains, so that we can follow its principles and modify it to suit our individual situations:

Matthew 6 : 9-13 :

*Our Father, who art in Heaven,
Hallowed be Thy Name,
Thy Kingdom come,
Thy Will be done,
On Earth as it is in Heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our trespasses (debts)
As we forgive those who trespass against us
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from Evil,
For Thine is the Kingdom,
The power and the glory
Forever and ever
Amen.*

Our Father, who art in Heaven...--We start with God, this prayer is to our Lord first and foremost.

Because of our relationship to the Mighty God, Ruler and Creator of all, we can call Him Father. This is an incredible privilege and should also be very humbling too. When we are speaking to God we are talking to the most awesome and powerful entity in the Universe or any other Universe and yet we enter into a personal relationship with him. That of Father and child. What could be closer? The Father and son relationship is better than a married couple (i.e. being the Bride of God) because the Father has been watching over his child since birth. Encouraging him, and cheering him on through all his stages of development. The Father was there at our

beginning and was so proud when we were born--He loved us then, before we could do anything to deserve that love and He loves us now when we often do things to shame that love.

Our Father is a term of love, devotion, patience, and respect. Where is our Father? He's not down at the pub having a coldie with His mates. He's not away from us at work. He's in Heaven, His rightful home and the place where we will spend eternity with Him.

What a wonderful way to start our prayer - remembering our special relationship with God and the wonderful place he resides. A place so much better than where we are now, a place where we will be welcome--our future home.

Hallowed be Thy Name --After addressing our God in a intimate way we then concentrate on His glory. Hallow (The dictionary defines this as "To make or honor as holy"). The Bible (particularly the Psalms) have many references to praising God's name, here are just a couple of them:

Psalm 7:17- *I will give thanks to the Lord according to His righteousness, and will sing praise to the Name of the Lord Most High.*

Psalm 8:1- *O Lord, our Lord, How majestic is Thy name in all the earth...*

Psalm 113:1, 2, 3- *Praise the Lord! Praise, O servants of the Lord. Praise the name of the Lord. Blessed be the name of the Lord. From this time forth and forever. From the rising of the sun, to its setting. The name of the Lord is to be praised.*

Thy Kingdom come--We want His Kingdom to get here. What are we really asking for though? A revival, or judgment day? I do want judgment day to come. Preferably before my death but after my kids have grown up. Am I just being selfish here?

Matthew 6:33- *But seek ye first His Kingdom and His righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you.*

Thy Will be done, On Earth as it is in Heaven--If we seriously want God's will to be done it can be tough. Especially at the time of *God's Will* happening. To use a personal example, I prayed many times a day that God would heal my terminally ill cystic husband--he was only nineteen, after all. He didn't. I prayed that if He wouldn't miraculously heal him could he at least survive long enough to get the double lung transplant. He didn't. It was certainly God's will and not mine being done--I never asked to be a 22-year-old widow. But now in hindsight it was for the best. My husband would never have had a very high quality of life--he was basically bed-ridden a few months before the end; we would never have had kids--CF often causes sterility; and I would have spent my twenties nursing a very sick person and breaking my heart. At the time this was what I wanted, what I begged God for--but He knew better. I am now re-married with three adorable kids--our eldest son is named after my first husband. God in His wisdom knows better than us, so when His will seems harsh and totally opposed to what you had been asking for, remember, God has his reasons and who are we to judge them?

Now we leave praise for a little while and move to supplication. *Give us this day our daily bread.* God is aware of our needs. Jesus tells us to ask God and He will provide.

Matt 7:7-8, 11- (7) *Ask and it shall be given unto you, seek and you shall find; knock and it shall be opened unto you. (8) For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it shall be opened... (11) If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more shall your Father who is in Heaven give what is good to those who ask Him.*

And forgive us our trespasses (debts), As we forgive those who trespass against us. We need to ask God to forgive us and repent of our sins to be saved. Even though Christ died on the

cross for *all* of our sins two thousand years ago, God still wants us to ask for forgiveness as we become aware of new sins that we commit daily.

Matt 6:14-15- *For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. (15) But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions.*

Not holding a grudge or plotting revenge sounds better all the time, don't you think?

At this point in the prayer I believe intercession comes into play, praying for loved ones who aren't saved and asking for forgiveness for the sins of our children. If they are covered by our covenant with God until they are old enough to choose to turn away, then we, as parents, are in the position to ask God for forgiveness for them until they are old enough to do it themselves--and really understand what that means.

And lead us not into temptation, But deliver us from evil. Even though we are now dead to sin we still live in a sinful world with sinful influences. We will sin 'til the day we die, but that doesn't mean we can't ask God to protect us. Without His protection how much worse would we sin? We just don't know do we?

For Thine is the Kingdom, The power and the glory, Forever and ever, Amen. We started our prayer with Praise to our Lord and now we finish on the same note. As well we should, shouldn't everything in a Christian's life start and finish with our God? So be it.

Now that we have an idea what God requires of us when we talk to him remember to practice talking to Him out loud, respectfully yet sincerely. And when you are comfortable it will be easy to say short, simple prayers with your children. Maybe you can start praying with them when you do your daily devotion.

It is wonderful when out of the blue your young child says, "I'd like to talk to God."

Taking Applications for Membership in the Overheated Generation

By

Nancy Arant Williams

There comes a time, in the life of every woman, if she lives long enough, when things change, and aging brings strange new sensations, some okay, and some just plain weird. Welcome to the *Overheated Generation*.

About the end of my forties and early fifties, I had the impression that someone else had moved into my body, and left me wondering about the absence of its former owner. *Who are you and what did you do with the other me?*

I felt foreign, alien in my own flesh, somewhat depressed, and always sweltering. Never a sun person, I now became an indoor soul, during the summer months I used to enjoy.

Doing ordinary things, like reading, sitting in a chair, in the air conditioning, I would turn red in the face, sweat from my head on down, and wish it were acceptable to remove every stitch of clothing. I began taking showers in the middle of the day, just to cool off. My water consumption increased one thousand-fold.

My moods were wildly fluctuating, with my nights sleepless and damp.

I had studied menopause, briefly in my training to be an R.N., but they had neglected to mention the hot feet in the night that couldn't tolerate being covered. Nor had they said that I would feel like a foreigner in my own skin.

Casually, of course, I mentioned these symptoms to my aunt, and her response was, "I went through it without even noticing."

Bummer, for me, not her. My comfort would obviously have to come from another source.

In my prayer time, I sought comfort from the Lord, and He spoke to my heart, telling me to hang in there, and wait patiently for Him. Well, patience, during this time, wasn't one of my strong suits, so that was a tall order, indeed.

He did give me a scripture that helped me hold on, during the most difficult moments. In Psalms 147, verses 1-6, He says, *Praise the Lord! For it is good to sing praises to our God; For it is pleasant, and praise is becoming. The Lord builds up Jerusalem; He gathers the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted, and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars; He gives names to all of them. Great is our Lord, and abundant in strength; His understanding is infinite. The Lord supports the afflicted; . . .* That was me, numbered among the afflicted.

It helped me to know that He was sovereign, and knew what ailed me, caring about my present perplexing situation. He gave me hope, that there would be an end to this particular tunnel, and that I would see the sunshine on the other side.

My hope was not vain. As confusing and debilitating as the time was, I can now thank Him, for His sustaining grace through it all. The sun is now brighter, and the grass greener, for having spent so long in the darkness of the tunnel. And now all I can say is, "Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord."

***Thankful Hearts:
Giving Thanks to God for All Things.
By
Sandy Cummins***

It is by example that we teach our children most thoroughly. If we spend years telling them, “Trust in God,” “Love the Lord” and “God is all powerful” and yet rail at fate when bad things happen, what are we really telling our children?

The Bible tells us to praise God and to give thanks to Him. Does this only mean when things go well? To research I checked the verses that contained “thanks” and “thankfulness”. Most passages were where God’s people were thanking God for the wonderful things He had done for them. There were a few though that included being thankful and relying on God even in the tough times.

For example: Psalm 30:4-5 *Sing praise to the Lord, you His godly ones, And give thanks to His holy name. For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime; Weeping may last for the night, but a shout of joy comes in the morning.*

Colossians 1:11-14 tells it well “...strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience; joyously giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified us to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. For He delivered us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

Two great men in the *Bible* had many tragedies and difficulties but persisted in faith and remained true to God. The first is Job, who lost everything in his life--his family, his health and his wealth because Satan was sure he only loved God because of the good things He had bestowed on Job. God allowed Satan to take everything except Job’s life off him and what happened? Job remained faithful and God restored his health and money and gave him a new family.

In the New Testament Paul is a fine example--if you read the last few chapters in Acts you will discover a very faithful man being tried by circumstances but continuing in his trust in God. Paul is imprisoned on false charges and held in jail for two years. When the new Governor takes over, Paul’s case is brought forth again. The new Governor (Felix), a Roman, sees no crime, just a disagreement about religion. Thinking it should be handled by the Jews, he is about to send Paul to Jerusalem to face the Sanhedrin. Knowing that this would be a death sentence, Paul insists on his right as a Roman to have the case heard by Caesar. Felix asks King Agrippa to hear Paul’s case as he is at a loss on what charge he can tell his Emperor that Paul is being tried for. King Agrippa, knowing the Jewish faith, said that Paul should be set free, but having made the appeal Paul had to go to Rome.

On the way to be tried in Rome, Paul suffers a shipwreck. Does Paul finally give up on God after being imprisoned falsely for two years and now facing death at sea? No, he gives thanks to God and eats a meal, encouraging the sailors to break their two-week fast too.

In Rome he is under house arrest for two more years where he spends his time witnessing to people and writing Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon.

These men of God gave thanks despite the circumstances of their lives. God has saved us from condemnation, so what right have we to ask for more?

Give thanks to God for everything and our children will grow up living the way the Bible says they should, hopefully becoming Christians in their own right. Curse God when things go wrong and our children will never trust Him and may lose their most important gift. Their eternal salvation. Thank God for His loving Grace to us, for “his mercy on me a sinner.”

The Role of Mothers and Bible Study

***By
Sandy Cummins***

The Role of the Mother?

Mothers, do you ever feel that your job is unimportant, that you should be out working and doing something productive with your time?

Society today sends that message, but God doesn't. Motherhood has always been vital, so much so that it defined the first woman. Genesis 3:20-- *Now the man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all the living.* Eve means life or life-producer.

Parenthood is not a whim, something that you choose if you feel like it, it is a command from God.

Genesis 1: 26-28 *Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. And God blessed them; and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'*

So parents, you are obeying God and fulfilling the very purpose of your creation by having children. If children are so important to God, how important should they be to us as Christians?

Not only are they to be beloved, they are to be nurtured, instructed and trained. They are a lot of work, and they change your life irrevocably. But what incredible love they give in return! I'm sure you'll agree the rewards outweigh the sacrifices.

Following the premise of nurture, instruction and training, I think the first thing we should consider is teaching our children to read the word of God.

Bible study--what is it and why should we do it?

The Bible is the Word of God, 2 Timothy 3:16 and 17 *All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.*

I don't know about you parents, but I certainly would love my children to be equipped for every good work! If the *Bible* is our only communication with God then it is vital for the children of God to read it, study it and learn from it. It is only by knowing God and what He requires of us that we can fulfil His plans for us.

Children are never too young to start reading the Bible. Christian bookstores are stocked with Bibles for children and Bibles for Toddlers. We have one called *Read With Me Bible, An NIV Story Bible for Children*. It has beautiful illustrations and short easy stories.

I have found that just before the children go to bed at night is a good time to read them a story, point out points of interest in the pictures and then send them to sleep after saying "Goodnight to God." During this I work some little point from the night's reading into the prayer.

As an example of how to make it fun and involve the children, when we did the Creation story we used the days as counting practice (using fingers). Then when we said the "And there

was evening and there was morning the ... day” we used a singsong voice so that the children would recognize it on each new day and join in like a little song. If you are in their bedroom you could turn off the lights and say the part “God said, ‘Let there be light.’ And there was light.” And switch the lights back on.

These are just little things but it amuses the children and teaches them something about God at the same time. I am of course obviously referring to very young children. Do not try the above with teenagers!

A Bible verse I’d like to finish this article with is 2 Timothy 2:11-13:

“It is a trustworthy statement:

For if we died with Him, we shall also live with Him;

If we endure, we shall also reign with Him;

If we deny Him, He also will deny us;

If we are faithless, He remains faithful; for He cannot deny Himself.”

What's for Dinner?

***By
Sue Butler***

A reputable cook learns early that good food does not simply “happen.” Much preparation and knowledge of culinary arts go into a tasteful creation. Most liquids used in cooking start with basic tap water--clean but tasteless. Over time another item, whether animal or vegetable in composition, joins with the water to enhance flavor. TIME is essential. The French know that a good beef stew takes time--time for the wine to mix with beef juices and other flavors--onion, garlic, spices--to create an inimitable taste. A French chef looks forward anxiously to hear, “C’est si bon!”

Hot water poured over a tea bag and allowed to steep for thirty seconds does not produce a rich flavor. Tea connoisseurs will say that fresh tea placed in a strainer--or strained after the brewing process--produces the most flavorful and aromatic brew.

Potpourri leaves seeping in a pot of water produces a much more appealing aroma than a quick spray from Candle Scents.

Many Americans buy Ragu spaghetti sauce. However, a true Italian will say that a good sauce must simmer for several hours. Take inventory of your dietary habits--a quick ham and cheese croissant or doughnut for breakfast, a hamburger with fries and a chocolate shake for lunch, a twelve-ounce steak for dinner. If we remove the salt, butter, and saturated oil from our food, we might choose different items. Most American food is quickly prepared and hastily eaten. We do not take time to simmer or savor anymore.

How might we apply these culinary principles of our daily eating practices to the spiritual food that God has provided for his children? When we allow God’s Word to simmer in our souls, we experience a renewal of our minds. Romans 12 reminds us that this should be a daily occurrence. Also, the Word should dwell richly in our hearts. As a result, we will have a new fragrance--an aroma signaling to others that we are different, similar to the difference between a bowl of Campbell’s soup or mom’s hearty chicken soup blend.

God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He does not operate on our schedules. He sees the final product: tasteful, aromatic, and unique. He is willing to wait. His love is longsuffering, forgiving, and unconditional.

Let’s start looking at our lives with God’s timepiece. Impatience will pale into insignificance. Frustrations will become obsolete. Despair will no longer exist in our hearts. These emotions result from unfulfilled expectations. If we believe that God will meet our needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus, then we cannot allow impatience, frustration, or despair to rule our emotions.

We will become more joyful as we wait for God to complete *His* work in *His* time frame. We know the result will be good because God is good! His Word, his lessons, his character-building program for his children have proven the test of time. At the final hour, his creations will pass inspection without a flaw.

***Stories
of
Encouragement***

A Friend In Need
By
Brenda Ramsbacher

Rebecca dreaded meeting this new sister assigned to her and Marge. Shirley had no children. Rebecca had five. It didn't matter. It shouldn't matter. Rebecca wasn't one to turn and walk away from her assignments. In fact, she prided herself, she made the effort to see her sisters every month. They needed her. But more so, she needed them. She was blessed with this sister to visit teach, and she would go every month. No matter, her feelings still told her Shirley needed more help than she was qualified to give but she would strive to complete her task. In any way, shape, or form.

Rebecca pulled up to the curb where her companion stood. "Marge. I'm glad you could get away today. I believe we have a sister who desperately needs us."

"Rebecca." Marge said. Marge drew her name out to get her attention. "You do this to every new sister we receive. Let's take this one step at a time. Goodness, she's been alone less than a year. The most we can do is be her friend and listen if she needs to talk."

I do not, Rebecca thought, but before the words had formed fully in her mind, Marge stopped her once again.

"I know what you're going to say and I don't want to hear it. Besides, here we are."

Rebecca pulled to a gradual stop along the curb and realized her opinion was inaccurate at best. Shirley loved children with her whole heart. Evidence littered the yard. Children freely asked her what she was going to do with the flowers. A couple of children seemed to be giving her advice on how to dig a hole. The interruptions didn't faze her. In fact, the opposite held true. Shirley welcomed the interruptions and the irrelevant questions. Rebecca saw the difference between Shirley's behavior here and at church, but couldn't believe it. Shirley was funloving and free with the children in her neighborhood. Rebecca wondered why she wasn't giving and loving at church, too.

But there wasn't time to ponder the why's. Shirley noticed them. Outwardly, her manner changed. Her smile turned into a frown. Her welcoming spirit to the children around her stayed the same though. But to her visiting teachers, Shirley became reserved in a way Rebecca couldn't put her finger on.

"I'm sorry." Shirley said. She stood and began to dust herself off. "I forgot the time."

"That's not a problem. Would you rather visit outside?" Rebecca asked as they climbed the steps to the porch of Shirley's home. For some reason Shirley became uncomfortable in their presence. And Rebecca knew without a doubt Shirley had been hoping they wouldn't come by today. Another why.

Rebecca knew they couldn't give the lesson planned, but why. So they sat and talked. Shirley told them about her neighbors. Especially the children. She told them about Chicago but not the reason why she left. Shirley mentioned the daycare she worked at.

Rebecca pieced together the facts on their way home. Shirley loved children. She worked with children. She had children over at her home. But she didn't have children of her own. Rebecca knew Shirley to be a widow. Rebecca knew how she reacted at church with the children there. Shirley wasn't hostile or rude to anyone. She wouldn't talk to the children or even the adults unless talked to first. Rebecca and Marge tossed ideas around. It didn't make sense.

Shirley remained a mystery to the whole ward for the next few months. Her home teachers had contacted her but Shirley had always come up with an excuse for the night in question. The missionaries were at a loss. The visiting teachers were the only ones allowed in Shirley's home. But with every visit, the spirit forbade them to give a lesson. So they talked.

Six months into visiting teaching Shirley, Rebecca felt the inspiration to give the visiting teacher lesson. The lesson pertained to children. Another "why" Rebecca would explore later in the journal that housed her visiting teaching experiences.

Rebecca gave the lesson knowing that somehow they would reach this sister. She talked about nurturing both the bodies and their spirits. Rebecca related the escapades of her five children. Marge mentioned the trials, the triumphs, and the tears that went along with raising her children.

They all had tears in their eyes. Rebecca reached the close of the lesson. She felt the tug to invite Shirley to speak. The pull was greater than ever. It would be a turning point in Shirley's life. Rebecca knew it to be true.

"Shirley, I know you don't have children with you. But I take this opportunity to ask you to share an experience that has touched your life."

"Rebecca, Marge. I can't thank you enough for coming here each month. I know it must be hard on you knowing something isn't quite right. I've noticed this has been the first lesson given in my home. I know without you two as my visiting teachers, I would have given up months ago. I didn't feel worthy enough to go to church. But I went. Each and every Sunday morning, I would stand at the door telling myself to go one more week. The spirit knew I needed to go. I felt it. And so I would go. I felt like an outsider. I no longer had my two beautiful daughters and I no longer had a husband. It has been so terribly difficult going and watching all these spirited children around me.

"It hurt to see those children. I had such hopes. I wanted to see them married forever. I wanted so much for them. I can't describe those feelings. But I believe you understand. You are mothers yourselves. You two have made it possible for me to get on with my life. I have found myself within my grief. I have found peace.

"I asked for and received a blessing shortly after their deaths. What a wonderful promise I received that gloomy day. I knew that I would be with other children for the rest of my life. I prayed they would be mine but I can see the broader picture now. I have the neighbors' children. I have my brother's and sister's children. I can see the love shining from their eyes.

"Rebecca, I've noticed something very special about your oldest child. Every week, he has come up to me and asked if he could do something for me. I knew in my heart you didn't tell him to do this. The spirit prompted him and he followed. My regret is I told him I didn't need anything but every week without fail he asked. Did you know, he even came by after school one day to shovel my walk?" Tears freely flowed down her cheeks. When Rebecca nodded, Shirley gave them a watery smile before leaping out of her chair to give them both a hug.

"Wait a minute. I have something I'd like to share with you." Shirley left the room with tears streaming down her cheeks. Rebecca knew Marge had been right all along. Shirley needed a friend more than anything else. It took many months to get her to confide in them and she still couldn't believe it. Shirley had two little angels. Although no evidence showed in the house. Not one picture. Not even of her husband. She realized her prayers had been answered. The whys fell into place. Of course, she would never completely understand what Shirley was going through at this time in her life. But she could be her friend and listen. Just as Marge said in the beginning.

Shirley carried in a blue photo album. "I believe it's time to look at these pictures again." The tears were flowing freely down her face once again. But Rebecca noticed a change. Shirley was at peace. She had let go of the past and was beginning the process of grabbing hold of the future and living life as she should. As her husband and children would want her to live. Yes, she would be fine with the help of her Sisters.

Anniversary
By
Crystal Laver

My anniversary has come and gone. No one but me realized the date or the anniversary. It is a day that will forever be imbedded in my memory, as hazy as it was. Looking back I'm very ashamed of what I did, but I also know I had to experience it. I'm not sure why, yet, but I know the Lord uses all experiences.

The day started as any other, nothing new or exciting, just the usual. I love my life. I love my children but for some time I had felt myself falling.

Like a bottomless black pit one always speaks of as a child. This one, however, was real. Sometime before Christmas or even Thanksgiving, I started changing. I wasn't sure why, or really what was happening. I only knew I wasn't right.

My precious children, being children, drove me batty, but not only on the bad days, every day. I would snap at them, and instantly be contrite but unable to control it. My memory began to slip. I couldn't remember things I'd known forever. Conversations with people totally slipped my mind and I had to consciously think back to try and remember if I'd even spoke to them. I avoided being around *anyone*. I hated to be with people.

I think this should have really thrown up some red flags because I've always been a very bubbly, outgoing person. No longer. I dreaded the greetings people at church would give. I knew, when I saw them, I'd have to force a smile and pretend everything was a-okay with me. But it wasn't.

The worst part? I didn't know why. What was wrong with me?

I knew something wasn't right. I even mentioned to my husband that perhaps I needed to see 'someone' and get some help. When he asked me what I meant I only shrugged my shoulders and replied maybe they could put me on something. He didn't see the need, he didn't see the problem.

It wasn't his fault. Since childhood I'd been particularly good at hiding my secret feelings. I'd been abused as a child from the age of six until I was fourteen, but no one ever knew. And why? Because I'm good at masking.

Finally, a little over a year ago, it all came to a climax. My husband of eight years discovered some misdeeds I'd committed. Serious wrongs I had committed against him. I was ashamed and scared to admit the truth. He knew and was rightfully angry.

Shame weighed me down. Shame for the sin I had committed. Shame for being a Christian, loving Christ with all my heart, yet sinking so low. Shame for hurting the one I love so very much. Shame for anyone knowing I had done this.

In that moment I made a decision that was singularly the most selfish move yet--I swallowed three bottles of pills. Mostly expired painkillers, but I believed that surely three bottles of them would still be enough to do the job.

I wanted my children to have a better mother. I wanted my husband to have a better wife. I wanted to be done with the job of 'surviving'. I wanted to see the mother again that I'd lost at the age of six to a farming accident. I wanted to be comforted by Christ. I wanted to be done with the pain.

I wanted...I wanted...

That was all I thought of.

In my hysteria I wanted my husband to sit beside me and hold me while I died, so I took all the car keys and the phone and hid them. Needless to say, he did not let that stop him! He called an ambulance with a neighbor's phone, as I wrote a last letter to him, since he would not even have the decency to sit beside me and let me tell him in person!

Looking back, I can giggle at that crazy thought, but at the time I was too immersed in myself. I had forgotten the love and comfort God gives us all. Nor did I remember that I was a 'survivor' because he continually loved me.

In the ambulance I begged them to let me go. I even stopped breathing on my own for a short period and scared the tar out of them. I don't remember much after that, not even much the next day.

However, something that I shared with my husband not long afterward, I know for certain that God would not let me go, yet. For some reason he kept me here. That night I could feel myself going but 'something' wouldn't let me continue on the journey.

Recovering was not easy. The doctors diagnosed me with severe chronic depression and said that from that point on, the first thing I would think of would be suicide in any difficult situation. They explained that it was a new path that had been 'burnt' into my brain and any stressful situation would send the brainwaves automatically to that path. I didn't believe them.

After all, I'm tough. I survived being molested, beat on and losing my mother. Surely I was tougher than that!

I was wrong. Anything that upset me, I wanted to die. I even had to leave the house on occasions to avoid finding something or thinking of ways to die. On a family trip, I looked over the hotel balcony and debated on jumping. Only the thought of my precious children saved me that day.

Not long after this I heard a speaker comment that if we aren't listening to God, he would break us so that we would. I firmly believe this is what the Lord was forced to do with me. So steeped in sin, I couldn't find my way back out through the lies and half-truths.

The experience, though painful and confusing for me and my family, humbled me enough to confess my sins. Giving my problems to the Lord and leaning upon him for resolution. I strive for sanctification and prayed for healing.

John 14:27--*Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*

Psalms 27:1--*The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?*

John 14:6--*Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

I am more committed to Jesus and my family now than I've ever been. The total and unquestioning faith I lacked before, I've received. I can see the self-absorption I wallowed in. I can also see the pain I refused to release and allow the Lord to heal.

I only pray that my testimonial here will allow one person to receive the Lord into their heart and to allow Him to heal their pain and anguish. The world we live in is full of horrors of unspeakable levels; if we do not give ourselves to the Lord, body and soul, we are lost to our sinful natures.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. If you know of anyone, or you yourself, are suffering from similar problems, rest in the Lord. Know that Jesus' strong arms surround you and hold you tight to Him. Get help and remember that like a drop in a pond, every ripple

touches someone's life. You are significant! Seek help from a trusted counselor or friend. Turn to the Lord and become absorbed in his word. Only through Christ is there true healing. Remove the masks and allow Him to heal your heart so that you can serve your Lord.

Philippians 3:12

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.

Carola's Story
By
Lillie Ammann

I stared at the television screen. The announcer had introduced the guest as Carola Spencer, but the wounded creature sitting before the microphone didn't look like my friend Carola. A road map of stitches covered her partially bald head, a bandage hid her right eye, and her face appeared several shades paler than normal. Her voice, however, sounded only slightly weaker than usual as she described her horrifying experience of less than two weeks before.

"I was working in my office at the answering service I own. I heard a noise from the back office and went to investigate. I saw a man who used to work for me walking down the hall toward me. He was carrying a rifle."

I leaned forward to hear the rest of the story. I had watched television coverage of the incident, but this was the first time I'd heard Carola tell her story.

Although Carola didn't remember the gun being fired in the hall, a bullet was later found in the floor. With no time to think clearly, she ran into a tiny restroom. She subconsciously chose to be trapped in the restroom rather than to be shot in the back as she ran away.

The gunman shot through the door just as she slammed it. The bullet went through the door, through the bathroom wall, and into the adjoining business, barely missing Carola. She crouched in the corner and held her hands up to her face. She screamed as the shooter crashed through the door. Silently she prayed that she would be with her dear Lord when the end came.

The next bullet hit Carola in the skull. At first, it didn't hurt any more than a slight bruise. Then she felt as if her eye had popped out of her head, and her face seemed to be melting in her hand. She continued to hold her hand up to her face to try to hold it together.

Brenda Santos, a seventeen-year-old employee who had escaped out the back door when the shooting started, came back inside to try to help those who hadn't escaped. She walked past the gunman who sat on a chair in the back office staring straight ahead, the rifle across his lap. Ignoring the danger to herself, Brenda frantically searched for her aunt Juanita Villalon, who also worked in the office. She didn't find her aunt, but she did find Carola.

Brenda wrapped Carola's face in a sweater, holding it together so that her face could later be reconstructed. Brenda then left again to try to find help. When the police arrived, they knew the gunman was still in the office, so they didn't risk storming the building with Carola inside.

After several minutes, Carola walked out on her own and was rushed to the hospital by helicopter. The police found the body of the gunman, eyes open, sitting upright in the chair where he had killed himself.

Six days and two long and delicate surgeries later, Carola was released from the hospital with an implant in place of the eye she had lost. The news that two of her six employees had been killed in the shooting added to her emotional trauma. Her eye leaked blood and other fluids; her wounds had to be gently cleaned several times a day. Even such a simple task as brushing her teeth was painful, and extreme fatigue overwhelmed her.

Yet, here she was, just days out of the hospital, being interviewed on a television news show.

"How did you survive?" the reporter asked.

“I know that God saved me,” Carola answered. “I don’t know what He has planned for my life, but I know He saved me for a reason. I just have to figure out what it is that He wants me to do and do it.”

I wasn’t surprised to hear that she had maintained the deep faith and positive attitude that I admired so much. Although she had a long way to go to regain her physical health, her faith had helped her maintain her emotional balance.

Carola is a deeply spiritual person, and prayer has always been an immense source of strength. She listens to prayer tapes and believes that the Holy Spirit ties us all together. She knows that we’re in this mortal life only for a moment, and the life that comes after this one is what really matters. This tragic incident will affect Carola only for the rest of her days on earth. In the end, it won’t matter. Something infinitely better than this will come after her mortal life.

I knew that Carola had spent many hours, one hour at a time, in the chapel at her church in Perpetual Adoration. This time of reflection and private communion with Jesus had been a source of strength to her. She had the faith and courage to face death and, perhaps more difficult, survival and rehabilitation.

Carola’s faith would naturally lead her to find meaning and purpose in the tragedy and try to turn it into something good. As the Bible says in Romans 8:28, “*And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*”

Carola has the reputation among her friends of always being positive, upbeat, and caring. Many people would feel a strong hatred toward the man who caused them pain and grief. In spite of what Carola’s attacker did to her, however, she feels no hate for her former employee turned killer. She strongly believes in Jesus Christ’s second commandment: “*Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.*” (Matthew 22:39).

Carola comes from a Christian family. Her parents instilled their faith and love in her from an early age. After the shooting, her parents and sister spent hours in prayer for Carola. When Carola was released from the hospital, her mother became the caregiver. With no medical knowledge or nursing experience, she bravely tackled the many tasks needed for her daughter’s recovery. Three times a day, as she administered treatments to Carola’s eye, she repeated the words “In the name of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.”

Carola’s boyfriend Jack Broaddus was another source of strength for her. In the hospital, he had told her, “That man shot at you three times. How the other two bullets missed, I don’t know. The bullet that went through you missed your brain by a fraction of a hair. It missed your larynx box by a fraction of a hair. If he had used a hollow point bullet, your face would have exploded. Carola, you have no idea how lucky you are. God really loves you. He really took care of you.” Those words inspired her and helped her maintain her own strong faith.

The ages, races, genders, educational and social backgrounds, and work experiences of Carola’s employees are widely diverse. In spite of surface differences, however, they all share a strong faith in God, and they live what they believe.

Although they had almost touched death, they all returned to work the next day. They knew that customers would be sympathetic about the tragedy, but they probably wouldn’t risk their own businesses by continuing with an answering service if the phones weren’t being answered. The staff arrived at the office, which had been already cleaned and repainted, each wondering if she had the courage to do her job. Linda Cathey, one of the workers who had escaped out the back door during the violence, led the group to the spot where the bodies of their

co-workers had fallen. They knelt in prayer that morning and every morning after that. They shared Bible verses and their spiritual experiences.

Their faith and courage is even more remarkable to contemplate knowing that Brenda had lost her beloved aunt, and they all had lost two special friends. Some of the employees had been witnessing their Christian faith to the killer, and he had even attended the church to which several employees belonged. Linda's husband is a minister who assisted with the funeral of the man who caused them so much sorrow. As difficult as it was for him and his family, he felt called as a man of God to perform this duty. Another employee was the assailant's cousin. The coworkers had tried to help Pam Henry, the killer's girlfriend and his first victim, escape from an unhealthy relationship. They had also tried to help the troubled man who responded to their help with violence. The employees dealt not only with grief and stress, but also with concern that others might think badly of them for being friends or relatives of a person who committed such a horrific crime.

They knew that Carola had already lost her eye and two employees who were also her friends. They sensed that losing her business during her long recuperation would be another devastating blow. Like Carola, they made a choice--the choice to triumph over tragedy, to become victors rather than victims. They looked past fear, pain, and grief into the future and beyond tomorrow.

For years, Carola had been a giver. She had helped individuals in need. She had worked tirelessly for charities and civic organizations. However, she hadn't treated herself as well as she'd treated others. She had no medical insurance to cover her astronomical expenses.

The person who had always been so strong was now weak, physically, emotionally, and financially. She couldn't manage her business; she couldn't pay her medical expenses; she couldn't even care for herself. Now Carola herself had to learn to accept help.

Her family and boyfriend Jack cared for her physical needs - preparing her meals, cleaning and medicating her wounds, washing her hair, driving her to doctors' appointments. Her employees and Jack took care of her business. Her friends raised money for her medical expenses.

Carola had nightmares, not of the shooting, but of monsters and vague, shadowy dangers. She dreaded going back to the office; she feared that the scene of the violence would trigger an emotional reaction she wasn't ready to face. Equally important, she was so used to being the leader, the strong one, she didn't want to appear weak to her employees.

Jack told her, "You shouldn't feel that way. You'd be so proud of them. They're working with such a good attitude." He suggested that Carola go to the office with him just to walk through to see how she felt. Late one afternoon a few weeks after the gruesome event, he took her to the office.

All of the employees were so excited to see her that she immediately decided, "I need to come back to work, if only to see how things are going." Enough time had passed that she wasn't as uneasy about being in the office as she'd expected. She already knew she needed to be doing something, and her business had always been extremely important to her.

Carola says of her employees, "They're all heroes." Their example of returning to work the next day and their support of her have been an inspiration to Carola. "They were all amazingly strong. I didn't want to let them down."

A month after being shot, Carola turned her attention to her business again. In a brief moment of weakness in the hospital, she had told her mother, "He ruined my whole life!" A few

weeks later, though, her true spirit prevailed. She would not allow one criminal or one tragic incident to control her life.

She would give power over her life to no one or nothing except the Lord. She had a mission--to find God's purpose for her life. She couldn't do that by hiding out in her parents' home, avoiding risk, avoiding life.

Several years have passed since Carola heard a strange noise in the back office. As she stepped out of her office to investigate, she couldn't have imagined how her life would change in the fifteen minutes that followed.

On that day in the fall of 1997, she couldn't run or hide from the danger. She couldn't stop the violence. She couldn't save the lives of her two friends.

After she awoke in the hospital, though, she had a decision to make. She could have chosen self-pity. She could have cried out, "Why me, O Lord?" She could have become bitter and filled with hate at the evil that had been done to her and her friends.

Instead, she chose faith. She chose to believe that "all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose."

She chose to look for God's purpose in her life. Her story inspires everyone who hears it. She has told the story herself in speaking engagements at civic organizations, churches, and other groups. Her friends have shared her story, through private conversations, public speeches, and in a book, *LOOK BEYOND TOMORROW: THE CAROLA SPENCER STORY*.

Carola's hair has grown back and hides the physical scars. The prosthesis replacing her right eye doesn't see or move, but it looks like an eye. She has regained her strength and her incredible energy. Even though she has five titanium plates in her face, the surgeons worked their magic without marring her beauty. Her gorgeous face remains unflawed, but it is her inner beauty, faith, spirit, and determination that shine the brightest.

Carola has found her purpose--to reflect God's grace and love to a hurting world. She inspires us to give no power in our lives to circumstances, no matter horrific, or to people, no matter how evil, but to give power only to God.

If You Deny Me....
By
Pamela S. Thibodeaux

Being a writer I read a lot of books for research and inspiration. Being a Christian I read for knowledge and wisdom as well as deeper understanding of God's word. Most of the time I am blessed enough to gain all of these things from what I read.

Recently I read the book *No Wonder They Call Him Savior* by Max Lucado. The book is a study on the Cross and those present --and missing--at the cross on that fateful day when Christ was sacrificed.

Let me tell you something, this is one book *every* Christian should read. In fact, they should own it and read it over and over and over. It is that powerful!

There are chapters that make you smile (yes smile), chapters that make you cry, chapters that make you reflect on your own faith and chapters that *rip* your heart out.

This man has a unique way of expressing the Grace of God through Jesus Christ and I feel *every* believer (regardless of your denomination) will benefit from reading this book.

How did I benefit? I have a deeper appreciation for Christ's sacrifice and knowing He did it for *me*. We all presume that we wouldn't desert Him in His darkest hour. But, would we? How many times do we desert or reject Him today?

Several years ago, as a new Christian, I was meditating on the Scripture "*if you deny Me before men, I will deny you before My Father*" (Matthew 10:32). I prayed that I would never deny Christ. As I mentioned, I was a new Christian and not very bold in my faith outside of church. I was also new at listening to Christian radio. I was--and still am--a country music fan. Anyway, I would always turn the radio off the Christian station when I got out of the car because I knew no one else in my family liked the music. Well, immediately after praying that I would not deny Jesus this occurred and God spoke very plainly to me: "Why do you turn the station? Isn't that a way of denying Me? If they don't like the music, let them change the station."

Talk about an eye opener!

Now, some of you may think that I'm exaggerating a bit, but I'm not! Since that day, I do not change the station. My local Christian music station is programmed on my radio and every radio I own is set to it.

The result? Well, my family is not so quick to change the station. Sometimes they just turn it down a bit but leave it alone. And one of my children--a high school dance-line choreographer--loves Christian music. In fact, he tries to use an upbeat Christian song for all of the kick dances he creates!

I believe we would all benefit by praying for God to reveal to us the seemingly "little" ways we reject Him in our daily life. It will greatly aid us in becoming stronger, bolder Christians. There are many things we say and do that we may not even realize are hurtful to Jesus. And, anytime you hurt Him, you reject Him.

Many of you have read many of my articles and--hopefully--you know I don't write to condemn but to inspire. Same goes for this article. We all fall from grace. We all make mistakes. We all reject Christ (yes, I still do, too). But isn't that what Grace is all about? If we never fell, we wouldn't need the healing power of God's mercy!

I love Christ with all my heart and I pray daily that I not fail Him in any way. When I do, I pray--and try to listen--when the Holy Spirit convicts me! Sometimes it's little things that matter--like not paying for a stamp I took from work--but the Bible says: "*It's the little foxes that spoil the vine.*"

May we *all* open our hearts and minds to Christ's teachings and not be so quick to defend our actions when we are convicted. Yes, many others who claim to be Christians are just as bad--or worse--than we. Yes, the world is hard to live in. Yes, it's *very* hard to live what we believe. Christ never said it would be easy. He did say, however, that we would not be alone!

PS: Yes, I reimbursed my employer for the stamp. I had every intention of doing so from the beginning...Thank God He didn't let me forget!

Despite It All
By
Carolyn R. Scheidies

A handicapped person is to be pitied, but cannot be the heroine, wrote the agent. What? The writing books said, “*write what you know*”. I know disability. At thirteen, I contracted Juvenile Rheumatoid Arthritis which put me into a wheelchair. My world of pain was a long way from the call I felt in third grade to write. It was my dream.

Later, my pain drove me to set down my deepest longings in poems and stories. They not only ministered to me, but also gave me a desire to share Christ’s message of hope with others. During high school, under the tutelage of a writer, I sold my first stories. During college I sold my first feature. After graduation I went through the first of a series of reconstructive surgeries. During the next year I relearned to walk, discarded leg braces and crutches and walked down the aisle to marry the man who accepted me just the way I was.

Over the years, despite more surgeries, I continued to hone my writing, publishing hundreds of poems, plays, articles and more. When I turned to writing novels, many of my heroines were disabled--and the manuscripts were returned. That changed when Barbour Publishing, accepted my book *To Be Strong*, a book in which the heroine has severe limitations. Today I have 11+ published novels (both print and e-book) and counting. With God’s help, my third grade dream became a reality, not in spite of my disabilities, but just maybe, because of them.

The Divine Appointment

By

Nancy Arant Williams

The day was sweltering, heat steaming up from the blacktop parking lot of my Wal-Mart store. I had put off long enough the task of running errands, not my favorite deed. I prayed that morning, "Lord make me a blessing. Surely someone, somewhere must need what I have to give."

The heat and I haven't gotten along for some time, so going out in it to shop, which is another un-favorite thing to do, was less than appealing. Inside the door, I grabbed a cart, and wondered if their air conditioning was broken. It was not cool inside. My cart had a crotchety, square wheel, so I traded it in.

This day was not going as I planned. I fished my shopping list out of my pocket, and looked up just in time to avoid a collision with another cart.

On a bench, just inside the door, sat a young woman, about the age of my daughter, and I couldn't help but notice her grimace.

I stepped up to her, and noticed for the first time, another cart, parked to her left, which held several items, and a beautiful dark-eyed baby boy. She was holding the baby's bottle in her hand, when I asked, "Are you okay?"

She looked up and said, "Oh, I have a bad knee. I thought I could do my shopping today, but I'm having trouble walking and pushing the cart. I should never have tried to come, but it has to be done, and my husband is out of town. The doctor says I need surgery on the knee, but how can I when I have a baby to care for?"

The words poured out like Niagara Falls, and she had tears in her eyes as she sighed. I prayed silently, "Lord, is this the one you sent to me today? If so, show me the way."

I said, "What if I help you? I can get you a wheelchair, and you can show me what you need. We'll have your shopping done in no time."

"I sure hate to bother you. Really, I'll be all right if I just sit here a little longer." I could tell she didn't believe it, even as she spoke the words.

"It's no bother. Just let me go find a wheelchair."

I helped her into the chair and put my purse into her cart.

I said, "What's the baby's name?"

"Gabriel. We call him Gabe."

I smiled at him. "Hi, sweet darling. Are you helping your mama shop today? You're being such a good boy." He grinned back at me.

I said to her, "He's awfully good for this time of day. Most babies his age are tired, and grouchy, ready for a nap."

"I am lucky that he's so good," she said, sounding unconvinced.

I pushed her chair, and she pushed the cart, and we checked off milk, bread, apples, orange juice, cereal, hamburger, baby food, toilet tissue, and potato chips before she said, "Okay, that's all I need from the grocery section. Are you in a hurry?"

I said, "Not at all. In fact, I'm having a great time with Gabe. I have little granddaughters of my own who I don't see enough of, and this is a great substitute. Maybe I should pay you for the privilege?"

She laughed, "If only life were like that."

I said, curtsying, "Where to now, my lady?"

She smiled, "Pharmacy, if you please."

We waited while her prescription was filled, and I asked, "Is your leg feeling any better with the weight off it?"

"A little. I don't know how I'm going to get home, with all this stuff to carry in. I guess I'll manage somehow."

She finished shopping in the baby aisle, and said, "I guess that's about all I need." We joined the throngs in front of checkout number four. She grimaced in pain, and I said, "Could I get you something for pain?"

She said, "I usually take ibuprofen, but I left it at home."

"No problem, I always carry some with me," I said, fishing it out of the black hole that was my purse. "What would you like to drink?"

She noticed the Pepsi cooler not a foot away, and said, "Pepsi would be great. Not diet, though, please."

She reached into her purse, as I said, "Don't worry; I've got it."

She popped four pain pills as we inched closer to the register.

She said, "Thanks for everything. I mean it, I don't know what I would've done if you hadn't come along."

She handed the clerk her money, and we headed toward the door, and out into the shimmering heat. I pushed her chair and she pushed the cart. My shopping seemed insignificant.

Her car was a mid-sized compact, beat up, full of baby necessities. I helped her unload her cart and strap the baby into his seat. She hobbled to the drivers' side and said, "We should be fine now. Thanks again."

She reached into her purse, and handed me some bills. I waved them away, saying, "You keep it, sweetie. You might need it for the baby."

"Thanks," she sighed.

It had to be at least ninety degrees out and even with the windows down, it was probably over one hundred degrees in her car. I hoped she had air conditioning, but didn't want to ask.

I reached the in-store cart corral, where I planned to drop the wheelchair, then thought to turn around. Her car was still sitting there.

I could see her head bent over her hands, as I approached the car. "Are you okay, sweetie?"

"My car won't start. The stupid thing is so temperamental; I should have known this would happen. What else can go wrong?" she burst into tears.

I put my hand on hers. I said, "It's okay. Let's get you home. I'll bring my van around, and we'll load you up, and run you home."

She said, "You don't even know me. And I live twenty-five miles away. I can't ask you to take me that far."

"You don't have to ask. I'm offering. That just means I'll get to spend more time with Gabe."

I turned my air on full-blast, fully intending to take her the twenty-five miles home. I loaded her into my van, along with her baby and groceries, car seat, and diaper bag. I could see her start to relax, when she said, "I really hate to have you go so far out of your way."

"I don't mind. Will you have some way to come and retrieve your car?"

"My husband will be home tonight and he'll pick it up."

I was thinking about the time we'd have together, and how I could share God's love, when she said, "Oh, look. It's my in-laws, pulling into the parking lot, right over there. They can take me home. They only live a block away from us."

I could see her light up at the idea. I pulled in next to them, and she called out to them enthusiastically.

I helped load her things into their car, disappointed that I wouldn't get to plant a spiritual seed. But I saw her face relax in joy at their arrival and I couldn't help but understand.

As I walked to my car, I had to ask the Lord, "Why did you shorten our time together? Was I not supposed to talk to her about you? Was I not supposed to pray for her, minister to her needs?"

I already knew the answer to my question. I had done what he'd asked, and tilled the soil, and at some point, he would use someone else to plant the very special seed.

Then I heard his voice in my spirit asking, "Can you rest in that? In having only a tiny, passive part in my plan for her?"

And my answer, after a small shift in attitude, was, "Of course."

The Gift
By
Lillie Ammann

“Father in Heaven,” Mary prayed. “I know I should be thankful for what I have, and I am. I praise You and thank You for the many blessings of my life. But I pray for a gift from You--a gift that will let me leave my mark on Your world. I want to know that when I’ve joined You in Heaven, Your world is a little better because I was here. Amen.”

Mary thought of all the gifts she saw in people around her. Judy was a wonderful mother. Her legacy would be her family, with Christian values and faith. Roger had built a business that provided jobs for twenty people. His employees, their families, and his customers were all blessed by Roger’s gift. Susan had just signed a publishing contract for her inspirational book. No one could guess how many thousands of people would grow in their faith when they read it. Sam volunteered several hours a week at a homeless shelter. He touched the hearts and lives of so many people when they needed it most.

The list could go on forever, thought Mary. Everyone seemed to have something to offer, everyone but her.

“My child, I have given you the greatest gift of all.” The voice echoed in Mary’s mind and in her soul. You’ll understand tonight.”

~ * ~

That evening, Mary entered the fellowship hall of the church for the potluck supper.

“Mary, come join us.” The welcome came from a table filled with her friends.

“Hi,” Mary said. “How is everyone?”

“Better since you’re here,” answered Sam. “I always get a lift when I see your smiling face.”

“Thanks, Sam, but I’m sure you get more of a lift from volunteering at the homeless shelter.”

Sam arched his brow in a question. “Why would you think that? I love working at the shelter, but sometimes it’s very depressing. There’s so much more that needs to be done, sometimes I wonder if we’re accomplishing anything. I probably would have given up long ago if I didn’t have you to inspire me.”

“Me inspire you?” Mary leaned forward. “I don’t understand.”

“You’re the one who told me about the shelter in the first place. You were so disappointed that you couldn’t find transportation to volunteer that I said maybe I’d volunteer.” He grinned. “You were so excited that I had to carry through to keep you from being disappointed in me.”

“I didn’t mean--”

Sam interrupted Mary’s protest. “I’m not complaining. In fact, I’m very grateful to you for encouraging me to volunteer in the first place and for encouraging me to continue. Even if I do get discouraged from time to time, working with the homeless is the best thing I’ve ever done. And when I am discouraged, all I have to do is think about your smile, and it lifts my spirits.”

“Mary lifts everyone’s spirits,” Judy said. “When I had my first baby, I was practically a baby myself. Sometimes I think I cried as much as the baby did. Seeing Mary at church every week was a big help.” She turned to Sam. “Like you said, that beaming smile always made me

feel better. The baby too. She'd stop crying as soon as she saw Mary. And Mary always acted like she thought I was the greatest mom in the world."

"I do think that," Mary said.

"I'm not, but your faith in me certainly made me a better one. When there was nobody there but the baby and me, I'd get so stressed out, I didn't know what to do. She'd just keep screaming and nothing seemed to help. But I'd think about Mary and I'd sit in the rocker and talk softly to the baby. I'd tell her I was trying to be as good a mother as Mary thought I was." Judy chuckled. "I don't know whether Melody had cried herself out by then, or whether it was the rocking and the talking, or whether she recognized Mary's name, but she'd finally go to sleep. She's eight years old now, and she runs over to Mary as soon as we get to church. Mary makes her believe she's the smartest, best little girl in the world."

"I know what you mean. I remember when I had some serious business problems." Roger looked around the table. "I thought I could solve my problems by bending my values just a little. When I saw Mary at church, she told me how she admired me for basing my business on my Christian values. Her faith in me made it much easier to resist the temptation to compromise my beliefs."

Mary opened her mouth in a surprised O.

"What happened with your business problems?" someone asked.

"We all know the Lord works in mysterious ways. I had some tough times for a few weeks, then I got the biggest contract of my career. The businessman who signed the contract told me he had been watching me to see if I would compromise my values in order to save my business. He did business with me because I didn't take the easy way out. I might not be as successful as I am today if Mary didn't have so much faith in me," Roger said.

"I would never even have finished my book, much less sold it, if it hadn't been for Mary," Susan said. "I've worked on the manuscript on-and-off for years. After Mary found out I was writing, she started asking me every week how my book was coming." Susan turned to Mary. "You were so excited, you inspired me to keep writing even when I doubted I'd ever finish. I wasn't going to tell you 'til the book came out, but this seems a suitable time to let you know." Her voice quivered as she said, "Mary, the book is dedicated to you."

Mary tried to wipe the tears from her eyes. "I don't know what to say. I can't believe..."

She didn't realize Pastor Davis had stepped up behind her until she felt his hands on her shoulders. "Attendance at this church has improved since you've been a member. Several people have told me that seeing you here every Sunday in your wheelchair inspires them to be more faithful in their own attendance." The minister patted her shoulders. "Mary, you have a very special gift. God put you here to inspire and encourage your fellow man. Your smile is a beacon light of faith and love that will shine in the hearts of the many people you inspire long after that smile is lighting heaven instead of earth."

~ * ~

"Father in Heaven, thank You for answering my prayer. Thank you for the gift I didn't know I had. And thank you that now I know. Please help me continue to use the gift You have given me to Your glory. Amen."

Gone Fishin'

*By
Rie Sheridan*

"Hey, Dad, can we go fishin'?"

"Not today, Tommy. I've got a meeting in town in twenty minutes. Maybe tomorrow, Champ." Mike Reynolds gulped down the last of his black coffee and snatched his briefcase from the empty chair beside him as he passed the boy on his way to the front door. "Be good. I'll be home around eight and we'll go out for a hamburger. Mind Karen, you hear?"

Tommy nodded solemnly, his small face a picture of woe. Mike almost relented. He knew it was hard on the boy, being alone with the baby-sitter so much of the time, but since Valerie's death, he just wanted to throw himself deeper into his work...wanted only to forget for a few minutes now and then.

"I'll see you soon, Tommy," Mike promised, brushing the six-year-old's forehead with a quick kiss and edging out the front door as Karen Talbot stepped in.

Karen was a responsible girl and Tommy adored her. They would be fine. Tommy would get over his disappointment, and by the time Mike got home, the boy would have forgotten all about the fact that Mike had let him down...again.

Mike hurried to his car and got behind the wheel, pulling out into the street and heading for town. His mind skipped from one detail to another, planning, coordinating, organizing, in the skilled fashion for which he was becoming an office legend.

Somewhere along the way, the rocket of his thoughts lost altitude and dropped into a time warp... He was a little boy again, playing on his Grandpa's farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains. His own parents had been killed when he was four and he'd been raised with the love and faith of his paternal grandparents.

He remembered a day when the heat had danced across the ridges in iridescent waves, and he had called to Grandpa as he drove past in his ancient Ford truck. "Hey, Grandpa, can we go fishin'?"

His grandfather leaned out the window--a lean, hearty man with a leathered, worn face. "Not today, Mikey. I got to go to town. But you help your grandma, and I'll bring home a watermelon for supper. We'll go fishin' first thing in the morning. I promise you that." Without another word, he had driven off down the winding mountain road.

Supper had come and gone that night, with no sign of Grandpa. The next morning, the Sheriff had driven out, and soberly informed them that Cecil Reynolds, Sr. had apparently suffered a heart attack on his way down the mountain and run his truck off into a ditch. He wouldn't be taking Mike fishing that morning...or any other.

Mike stopped his car with a screech of brakes. What did this business meeting really matter anyway? There were other staff members who could handle it equally well, if not better. Some things were more important than business, and his son was one of them.

He pulled into the parking lot of the nearest convenience store with a pay phone, and called in to work. Then he turned his car for home.

It was a great day for fishing.

The Grandma That Never Grew Up

By

Nancy Arant Williams

Dad's mother was a pip.
She had seven children, thirty chickens, and a lust for life I had never seen anywhere else.
She was in her late fifties when I was born, but she never seemed old when I hung around with her.

Her chickens were her babies, and she had favorites. She sold eggs at fifty-cents a dozen, infuriating my mother, who thought she ought to give them to her children free of charge.

One day while I was visiting, I saw a chicken wandering around her enclosed porch.

I asked, "Grandma, what's that chicken doing in the house?"

"Oh, his mama wouldn't set on the egg, and I knew it was a good one, so I brought it in, and slept with it to keep it warm. During the day, I put it on the stovetop, so the oven's heat would warm it."

I didn't know what to think. I knew Grandma was different, happy and funny, but I hadn't yet decided if she was weird. I did know she was totally crazy about me.

"You hatched this chicken by yourself?" I smiled, in awe.

She laughed, "I sure did."

"What's his name?"

"Dinky. He's the runt of the litter."

"Poor Dinky," I said, petting his featherless head. I had never touched a naked chicken before. It was an odd, cold feeling, and I wasn't sure I liked it. I grinned. He was so ugly he was cute.

"Well, why don't you put him back out with the other chickens?"

She looked sad. "I tried, for a couple of days, but look at him. See how his feathers are almost gone?"

"He looks cold," I frowned.

"He probably is."

"Well, what happened to his feathers?" We city girls had no clue to the inner workings of life on the farm.

She looked at me, and patted my shoulder, knowing I was as tenderhearted as she.

"The other chickens refused to accept him. They pecked at him, and pulled his feathers out."

"Why did they do that?"

"Well, it's just one of the unfair things about life."

"Poor baby," I felt tears fill my eyes. I asked, "What will happen to him now?"

"Well, I'll feed him on the porch, and I even made him a little bed, which he sometimes likes and sometimes doesn't, but he seems pretty happy when I pay attention to him."

I could just imagine what my mother would say about a chicken living in the house. Maybe I'd keep it to myself.

Grandma held up a tiny, plaid, wool coat, lined with cotton. She sewed like a dream.

"Is that for him?" It had no sleeves.

"Yes, I just finished it. Shall we put it on?"

She chased him, and caught him, gently setting him on her lap. She pulled the tiny jacket over his head, and we watched as he settled down.

She said, "He's finally warm. He may go to sleep."

She set him on his little bed and he tucked his head down, and slept.

At the age of eight, I realized she understood animals as well as she did people.

I could smell the sweet fragrance of apple pie, full of cinnamon and allspice. There were always wonderful smells coming from her kitchen, and dishes in the sink, soaking in hot soapy water. She heard me sniff, smiled, and said, "It should be ready in a few minutes. Hungry?"

"I am, if it's your apple pie."

I hated to be disloyal, so I decided right then and there, never to tell my mom how much I loved Grandma, how I loved her warm, loving embrace, or how she had sewn a jacket for a chicken.

When I exited the bathroom, Grandma was in front of the television, doing exercises. The man on television was on his back, with his feet toward the ceiling, bicycling to the beat of the band. She kept up, pedaling for all she was worth.

"What are you doing, Grandma?" I laughed. I had never seen old people doing exercises.

"Trying to keep from getting old," she giggled, sitting up and hugging me.

"You're not old, Grandma."

"Well, you know, age is a funny thing. I used to look at old people and think, 'they're ancient.' But now that I'm old, I've learned a secret. Now I know that inside of every old person is a kid, just waiting for the chance to get out and show his stuff." Even then, I thought that was a little optimistic.

"Really?"

"Oh, you bet, sweet thing. Deep inside of me, there's a thirteen-year old girl with straight black hair down to her waist, and a little curl on her forehead, and she's glad to be alive." I had seen pictures of Grandma, and I knew she was describing herself.

It didn't take long to realize that Grandma was a little weird; that not all grandmas hatched eggs in their beds, or made coats for chickens. But it didn't matter, because, just like Dinky, she was special. And to be loved by her made me feel like a queen.

My beloved grandma made it all the way to her mid-eighties, still just a kid at heart. Her youth and vitality were a fragrance that I hold tightly, even to this day. And just like her, I want to be playful to the end, and never, ever grow up.

Katie and the Giant
By
Nancy Arant Williams

Her name was Katie.

“Hi, I’m Nan,” I said, and she smiled. “I’m Katie.”

She smiled at one of our more confused residents, and squeezed her into a hug. “I love you, too, Clara,” she said. Katie and I worked at the same nursing home, and Clara was up and down the halls a million times a day, no mean feat at nearly one hundred years of age. She always demanded a hug whenever she ran across one of us. She annoyed some of the staff, but Katie and I never got tired of giving hugs.

I was new in town, six hours from my ‘home’, where the kids and grandkids still lived, and was struggling to find my niche in this ‘foreign land’.

Katie said, “Let’s have a cup of coffee, and sit, shall we? My back is killing me.”

I asked, “Can I do anything to help?”

“No,” she said, “I was in a car accident a while back, and my back and right shoulder have never been the same.”

She asked, “Are you new around here? I know just about everyone, and I don’t believe we’ve met.”

Over the next few days, she shared her story. She was a dear Christian woman, who had lost her husband, her father, and her brother, to cancer, all within the past seven years. She had cared for them one after the other, in her home, taking out a mortgage to pay the bills, and now had no choice but to work to keep a roof over her head, at age sixty-eight.

When she showed me a five-year old photo of herself with her husband, I could hardly recognize her. She barely resembled the woman in the picture. The striking woman in the picture had few wrinkles, and dark hair, a sweet smile, and lively eyes. The Katie before me had aged twenty years in only five. Her hair was white, her tired face etched with lines, only the eyes giving away her identity.

I hated it that she had to work so hard at her age. It bothered me to see her working for low wages, so tired by the end of the day that she could barely stand. She became the friend I was so desperate for, the answer to my prayer. I kept thinking, *she’s the same age my Mom would be, if she’d lived.*

One day over lunch, she said, “I’m refinancing my home, so pray that it works out. If I can refinance, I can lower my house payment by over three hundred dollars a month, and not have to work so hard.”

A few days later, I said, “So Katie, how’s the refinance coming?” She visibly wilted at my question. “What’s that matter? I asked.

She said, “The banker looked up the records at the courthouse and said that the loan was sold three times since I first took it out five years ago, and all four mortgage companies are still listed as current lien-holders, which means there isn’t a clear title. The new bank won’t refinance without clear title. And the current mortgage holder in Texas won’t even talk to me on the phone. I just don’t know what to do.” She buried her head in her hands.

I was familiar with mortgage companies, owning rental property before we moved, and knew they could be difficult, if not impossible, to deal with.

She said, "I wrote a couple of letters and phoned but they're so rude, they won't give me the time of day."

I had the feeling she was late on her payments. I silently prayed, *Lord, show me what to do.*

A week later, she said, "I got a letter of foreclosure, and I'm at my wits' end." There were tears glistening in her eyes as she added, "I'm so depressed, I can hardly see straight."

I hugged her and prayed for her, asking the Lord for wisdom. Somebody had to do something. I asked for her loan information and phoned the State of Texas, talking to several people before finding out that the State Attorney General's office is the only watchdog over the mortgage industry in Texas.

The woman said, "If you'll contact them, they will investigate your complaint." I knew the ropes. Sometimes it takes months to get anything done and sometimes nothing changes no matter how hard you fight. The woman added, "They have a web site where you can make your complaint on-line."

"Give me the address," I said. As a computer novice, I was unsure of my ability to make a complaint, but I had nothing to lose, and Katie had everything to gain, if we could get someone to listen.

I pulled up the screen, after several tries, and it said, "To file a complaint with the Attorney General, fill out the form below, and your claim will be addressed within thirty days." Now to be fair, I decided to give the mortgage company notice, hoping maybe they would get busy and take care of business if motivated to do the right thing. So I faxed them a letter, explaining the problem, in case they didn't already know, and told them I was contacting the Attorney General. Scripture requires us to go and talk to the offending person, before advancing higher up the authority ladder.

I struggled through the three-page complaint form, and pushed enter, barely hoping for a happy ending, trusting God that my complaint wouldn't end up lost in cyberspace. When I hadn't heard back from anyone in more than a week, I mentioned it to Katie. She said, "I had a letter from the Attorney General's office, and they are investigating. They have thirty days to get to the bottom of it."

I prayed, "Lord, you know these big companies. They have no idea who Katie is; nor do they care that she's a widow, struggling to make ends meet. And the way it looks, they really don't care. You say you control hearts of rulers and kings, so please get their attention, and make something happen."

From my experience, it would take a miracle to straighten this out, certainly within God's ken, but otherwise totally hopeless. If God didn't do something soon, Katie would lose her home.

A few days later, she said excitedly, "I got another notice from the Attorney General's office. They told the mortgage company to cease and desist from harassing me until the end of the thirty day investigation."

I asked, "What happened? Have they been harassing you?"

She sighed, "They keep calling, demanding two more payments."

"So what did the letter say?"

"For me to do nothing until the end of the thirty days, and if they call, I'm to tell them to leave me alone."

As far as I was concerned, the thirty days were inching past, slower than molasses in winter, but at least Katie seemed relieved that someone somewhere was working on it.

At the end of the thirty days, Katie called.

“The Attorney General’s office forced the mortgage company to clear the title on the mortgage, so I can close on my new loan by the end of the month. And they are in big trouble, too.” I could hear the excitement in her voice. She would be keeping her home.

Over lunch, she said, “On Friday, my new loan will close. Oh, Honey, I finally see light at the end of the tunnel.”

I could see an awesome parallel here, exciting me so much that I could hardly contain myself. The Lord knew I had little computer savvy and less than no clout with a big corporation several states away. Looking at it in the natural, we can know that the chances of one individual making a difference are infinitesimally small, but God...

Once again He had taken something far less tangible than the slingshot and stones of the shepherd boy, and done something amazing, even impossible. He had once again slain the giant, proving His faithfulness to us, His beloved children.

Life Assurance
By
Nancy Arant Williams

We were in shock when the call came, telling us my husband's mother had just died of a stroke, at age 63. She had no history of health problems, and seemed amazingly robust for her age.

In fact, she was on a ladder, cleaning out cupboards at her daughter's house, five hours from home, when the first symptoms appeared. Within five minutes, she collapsed, dying only hours later.

Walking through the fog of grief, I found his family looking to me for strength. I had lost my own mother two years earlier.

The only comfort I could give was to escort them through the maze of 'death-work' needing to be done. This included dealing with the doctors, who wanted to know if we wanted an autopsy. "*Does anyone ever really want an autopsy?*" was my question. I couldn't imagine it.

In a daze, we followed the black hearse that carried her body back home, realizing oddly, that you couldn't just set a body upright in the front seat to get her back home. We wondered aloud how people without resources worked out that little problem. It felt a little irreverent, even thinking such crazy thoughts, let alone bringing them up.

I mentioned hearing the story of a family whose grandmother had accompanied them on a trip. The old woman had died in the backseat without notice, and they stretched her out flat before she could stiffen up, wrapped her in a blanket, and tied her to the top of the family station wagon. The idea sent us into fits of laughter, until my brother-in-law asked, "Is that true?" I couldn't honestly remember. Someone had to assume the job of picking out the burial clothes, as well as unearthing a current photo indicating how she wore her hair, and makeup. These had to be ready when we made the dreaded trip to the mortician.

My sisters-in-law and I were assigned the task of choosing the burial dress. We had a little trouble, because she wore a lot of black, and not much else. We just couldn't imagine burying her in a black skirt and white silk blouse, her trademark outfit. We decided to dress her in the most cheerful outfit she owned; a royal blue and gray print shirtdress, not as cheerful, on second glance, as we had hoped.

I found it difficult digging through her lingerie drawer, knowing she would be embarrassed; but then I remembered I wouldn't be doing this in the first place if she were alive. I just wasn't sure it was necessary. We discussed the need for pantyhose, knowing full well, she would not appreciate being buried without it. I tossed in a pair, along with some shoes, just to be on the safe side.

We had washed the clothing she died in, and found ourselves folding it and putting it away, as if she would pick it up to wear again tomorrow. Too late, we realized she would not.

Dictating the obituary was particularly trying, because for the first time, we realized she would no longer be there for any of us. A feeling a little akin to what an orphan might feel crept over us; it felt so final.

Deciding on the funeral date, and notifying the newspapers and insurance companies all had to be done the first day, and it was exhausting work. Planning the service, complete with all her favorite music and verses just about did us in emotionally.

We ordered the food for the funeral, Mom's favorites, ham, and roast beef, potato salad, rolls and whipped fruit salad, baked beans and three-bean salad. She was an excellent cook, and for some reason it seemed important that no one leave her funeral hungry. We added white cake with chocolate frosting to the menu, knowing she would not want the meal to end without a nice dessert.

And then came the challenge of picking out the casket. Nothing can prepare you for the daunting experience of entering a mortuary to purchase a casket. You may have purchased houses, cars, life and health insurance, groceries, and myriad other things, but this purchase has to be the strangest of all.

The thin, aging funeral director said, "Right this way, ladies and gentlemen," and led us down the stairs and around a corner to the showroom, where caskets lined the walls and filled the room, with barely space to walk between them. He began to explain the immense number of options available.

It was eerie, really, a lot more like purchasing a car than we had anticipated. We had to decide on price range. Did we want a Cadillac or a Volkswagen? The funeral director assured us that people are most comfortable purchasing the best they can afford, in which to lay their loved one to rest.

I wasn't fooled by his words even though he spoke in a quiet, dignified voice. I knew he wanted to sell us the more expensive model, with the higher profit margin. I had to remind myself that his was a business.

He showed us a confusing array of choices. I signaled the family that we needed to decide this alone, and we asked the man to give us some time.

We were getting punchy, with no sleep to speak of for several days. I asked, "Okay, now, Guys, what was Mom's favorite color?"

"Red," said my sister-in-law.

"That's right," I said. "She was fond of red. Very." Looking around, we noticed there were no caskets in her favorite color, so I asked, "Well, what about pink?"

"Pink is good," said my husband. "She liked pink."

We found one, in shiny mauve pink metal, that we thought she would like. It was within our price range, and since Dad stood there, more or less paralyzed, we made the decision for him.

I had been through this before, but in such a blur of grief at my own mother's death, I hadn't really checked out caskets in detail. I looked at the tags that hung from the handles, wandering from one to the next. These were obviously of the Cadillac variety, especially the shiny mahogany and teak models. I thought a black casket a bit morose, and wondered how popular they were.

I was meandering into the *Price is No Object* area of the room, and wanted to see how the other half lived, or died, as it were. I turned over the tags, and read that the most expensive models claimed to be moth proof, mildew proof, waterproof, and insect resistant. Each one came with a gold-embossed, one hundred-year guarantee, which seemed ridiculous, since none of us would be alive to dig it up and test the claims by then.

I read the tag out loud, and we laughed, realizing that Mom would have enjoyed the irony. In the midst of excruciating pain, we were treated to a touch from heaven we'd never known, and realized that God's sense of the ridiculous was truly sublime.

In a way, though, it was sad, because a plain little pine box, built with love, in someone's garage, was no longer good enough to bury in. Now it had to cost six months' wages and put poor people into serious debt.

We were wondering: could it be that people spent extra money to guarantee a seal on the box, thinking that if it was sealed tight enough, they could not be called to account for their lives on Judgement Day?

The truth seemed obvious to us: no matter how exquisite the box that went into the ground...it was still just a box holding the shell. And if the shell belonged to a child of God, the box would be less than insignificant. Surely in the presence of the King of Kings, a high priced box to house the shell must seem a ridiculous expense indeed.

And guarantees notwithstanding, against coming unsealed, scripture promises that the box will be opened and the dead will rise incorruptible.

It was comforting to us, on that day, and the difficult ones that followed, to know that in spite of all the nonsense and games men might play, we needed no guarantee but God's.

The Magic of Words
By
Pamela S. Thibodeaux

We've heard so much about the magic of Harry Potter. Many say it's a mystical tale of good and evil. Critics claim it's dangerous. They say the author is teaching our children witchcraft and sorcery!

I believe it's all about the magic of words.

Many people today don't realize the power of spoken--or written--words. But, think about it. God *spoke* the world into existence. The Bible says that "*the power of life and death are in the tongue and they that indulge in it shall eat the fruit thereof*" meaning that our words will bring life or death--negative or positive--into our lives. It also says that "*as a man think in his heart so he is*" giving evidence that there is even power in thoughts which are merely unspoken words. Jesus said to the devil, "It is written." Though He was referring to Scripture, I feel that this statement suggests that there is also power in the written word. The Bible--the written Word of God--is loaded with Scriptures about the power of words and the tongue, especially in the book of Proverbs.

One of my all-time favorite ministers of God's word, Joyce Meyer, made a statement one day that changed my life and challenged my way of thinking. She said, "Hurling words of judgment is equivalent to stoning in the Old Testament."

WOW, what a concept! We've all heard the old saying about sticks and stones but I wonder, can words cause harm?

I think we all know the truth on that one. Words can cut. Worse than any stick or stone can bruise flesh, hurtful words can cut hearts and bruise souls. Even via the Internet love, gentleness, kindness and patience or anger and sarcasm can be shown in our choice of words and tone of emails and messages.

Now I'll admit, as much as I always try to walk in love, I have the tendency to speak without thinking and end up hurting someone's feelings. But once I'm convicted that what I've said is wrong, I always try to make amends.

As human beings we have the ability to speak good or bad into our lives.

As Christians we have the authority to *call those things that be not as though they are*.

As writers we have awesome power and responsibility to use our words for the common good of all mankind. Even in mystery and horror novels, good almost always wins out!

Writing has been known as a talent, a gift, and a craft. Writers are called word-smiths and artists. Some are natural-born writers, some are self-made, some make their way up step-by-painful-step. No matter which type of writer you are, there is room for all of us at the top. There is no need to push and shove each other off the ladder of success. If necessary we can walk around and climb over each other, but we should always reach out and lend a hand-up to those who need it.

So let us think about what we say, either in person or in the written word and may we always remember; *pleasing words are like honeycomb, sweetness to the taste and health to the body for both the speaker and the recipient of words*. (Prov.16:24)

Mission Possible, with God's Help

*By
Lillie Ammann*

I sat at the computer, staring at the screen. Would this project fail because my computer ate the file? I'd truly felt led by God to write this book. Now, just five hours before the deadline to deliver the manuscript to the printer, the book was locked inside a computer that refused to release it. The mission I thought I'd been given now seemed impossible.

I found myself speaking aloud in the empty room, pouring out my heart in a disjointed prayer. "I thought this was Your plan, Lord. What's going on here? Did I completely misread this whole situation? The story will glorify You. You seemed to open every door to make this happen."

Sighing, I thought back to all those open doors. My friend, Carola Spencer, had been shot and critically injured. A gunman had come into Carola's business early one morning to confront his estranged girlfriend. He shot and killed both the girlfriend and a coworker as other employees escaped out a back door. When Carola came out of her office to investigate, he shot her in the head, then turned the gun on himself.

I learned of the shooting when a mutual friend called me, saying, "Turn on your TV quick. Carola's been shot!"

I watched in horror as the SWAT team swarmed Carola's office. I prayed for my friend and her associates.

The media reported that Carola had been airlifted to a trauma center, but hours passed before her friends learned of her condition. She lost an eye and her sinuses and the bones inside her face were shattered. Hours of intricate surgery and five titanium plates saved her life and her face.

The only help I anticipated offering Carola was my prayers and the prayers of others. As soon as I learned of the tragedy, I went to the LoveKnot, an Internet email loop of Christian women writers, to ask for their prayers.

All of them agreed to pray, and one of them said, "Why don't you write Carola's story?"

"Thanks for the suggestion. I'll think about it." It was too soon for me to think about anything but Carola's recovery.

Just a few days after the shooting, Carola agreed to a number of television interviews. She faced the camera, with a road map of stitches covering her head and pale face.

"How did you survive?" a reporter asked.

"I know that God saved me," Carola answered. "I don't know what He has planned for my life, but I know He saved me for a reason. I just have to figure out what it is that He wants me to do and do it."

Carola's friends weren't surprised to hear that she maintained the deep faith and positive attitude that we all admired so much. Although she had a long way to go to recover her physical health, her faith helped her maintain her emotional balance.

Carola had always participated in numerous charitable and civic activities and helped people in need. However, she hadn't treated herself as well as she'd treated others. She had no medical insurance to cover her astronomical expenses.

A group of friends formed an organization, Friends of Carola. As we discussed possible ways to raise money for her medical expenses, someone said, "Lillie, you're a writer. Could you write a magazine article about this and donate the money?"

This was the second time someone had suggested I write Carola's story. Could this be a message from God? I shook my head and started explaining why a magazine article wasn't a good idea.

"A magazine wouldn't pay enough to make a dent in the medical expenses."

Another friend asked, "Couldn't we use the article as a plea for donations?"

"I don't know if we could get a magazine to accept such an article. Even if we could, it would take months," I answered.

Another person spoke. "This story needs to be told. Look at how Carola and her employees live their faith. Surely other people going through terrible tragedies could be helped by learning how they coped."

Not knowing what to do, I turned the discussion to other avenues of fund-raising. We ended the meeting with no firm plans.

A small voice in my head urged me to write a book, but I wondered if the voice came from my own ego or from the Lord.

I could think of a million reasons to ignore the voice. Carola and her employees and family might not want their story told. People might think I was taking advantage of this tragedy to publish a book, when I hadn't been able to sell any of the manuscripts I'd completed. We probably couldn't afford to publish the book ourselves, and selling the book to a publisher would take too long. Maybe I didn't have the talent to tell the story effectively. The project would take too much time away from my life.

Most importantly, I worried about my own emotional reactions. I identified strongly with Carola for several reasons. I had been a crime victim, robbed and molested in my retail store years ago. I had struggled through months of medical treatment and therapy following a debilitating stroke five years earlier. I had seen my business suffer when I couldn't work for months. Although Carola's experiences and mine weren't exactly the same, there were too many similarities for me not to relive many of the strong emotions I had experienced.

Yet the idea wouldn't go away. A few days later, I went to a meeting of the San Antonio Writers Guild. The speaker was a printer/publisher who specializes in self-publishing for authors. After the program, I asked him if he thought we could raise a significant amount of money for Carola's medical expenses if we published her story. Not only did he assure me the project was viable, but he offered to do the printing at a reduced price if we delivered a camera-ready manuscript in time for him to print it during a brief lull between major jobs.

I reported this to Friends of Carola and suddenly doors opened everywhere I turned. People volunteered to proofread the manuscript. Carola's friend who owned an advertising business offered to donate the book cover design. Carola received numerous invitations to speak at local organizations, and she could sell books at each meeting. A publisher friend gave me free advice. God's voice seemed loud and clear.

As I prayed for guidance, I felt called to the mission of writing this book, both to raise money for Carola and to inspire others. Carola, her family, and her employees were overcoming this tragedy through courage, hope, faith, and love. Their positive reactions to a horrific experience could inspire countless people who face tragedies every day.

I interviewed Carola less than six weeks after the shooting. During the next eight weeks, I spent over one hundred hours interviewing the victims and writing the story.

Despite my earlier fears, the people I interviewed were enthusiastic and eager to have their story told. The experience of sharing their encounter seemed cathartic for many of them, and they wanted to share how their strong religious faith helped them cope with the catastrophe. Since each person had a different perspective on the incident, tying all the stories together into a coherent narrative proved to be a difficult challenge.

Besides the interviewing and writing, I spent many more hours coordinating the logistics needed to prepare and publish the manuscript. Except for designing the cover art and taking and scanning the photographs, I did everything necessary to prepare a camera-ready manuscript.

The experience was intense, exhausting, emotionally draining, and exhilarating. The remarkable courage, the incredible hope, the abiding deep faith, and the forgiving love shown by all the participants inspired me. I knew the story could inspire many others as well. I felt blessed to have a part in spreading God's love through this story.

The pressure increased as the deadline approached. The day before the manuscript was due to the publisher, I met with several proofreaders throughout the day, reviewing their comments and questions. Carola delivered the photographs around eight o'clock that evening. I expected to work late into the night to complete the manuscript.

I'd made a back-up copy of the computer file earlier in the afternoon. After Carola left, I made the corrections pointed out by the last proofreader and added the photographs. I planned to save the document as soon as I finished. By one-thirty in the morning, after hours of tedious work, everything looked perfect.

As I tried to save my document, the file disappeared! My computer refused to find the file, and nothing I did made any difference. The manuscript remained locked in a computer I couldn't access.

Now I sat in my office, alone with God. "I really thought You wanted the story told, and I thought You wanted me to tell it. You have to help me here. If you don't want this done, let me know. If this is just a trial I have to overcome, I need to know."

I must have sat at that desk for almost an hour, questioning God and full of doubt. I didn't hear a voice. I didn't see a sign. Nothing happened. But gradually a peace came over me. I didn't make a conscious decision. I just took my last back-up disk into the other room to my husband's laptop computer. I didn't know how the book would get finished; I just knew in my heart that it would. I opened the file and re-entered all the corrections I'd made from the day's proofreading. Since the laptop couldn't handle the photographs, I went to bed.

When I woke about three hours later, I called Carola's friend, Jack Broaddus, to ask him if I could use his computer. When he said I could, I called the publisher to ask for an extension of the deadline. He said I could deliver the manuscript at the end of the day.

I spent a long, frustrating day on a strange computer that wouldn't cooperate. I had to re-enter the photographs three different times, losing them twice. Finally, at the very end of the day, the manuscript was perfect on the screen but wouldn't print on paper.

I called the publisher to explain the problem.

"Put the file on a CD and bring me the CD," he said. "Just get it here before we close at 5:30."

I arrived at the office with the CD barely in time. However, because of differences in computers, what appeared on the publisher's computer screen looked nothing like what I had so carefully designed.

"It's Friday afternoon," I said. "You can't start on this until Monday morning. Why don't I work on it over the weekend? I'll print it out some way and get it to you first thing Monday."

He agreed, and I hurried home to call a computer programmer. Over the weekend, the computer expert managed to fix my computer so that it functioned just enough for me to print the document, one page at a time. Monday morning when the printer opened for business, I delivered a camera-ready manuscript.

Although I hadn't known when or how, I had known from the wee hours of the morning on Friday that God's plan would be fulfilled.

Look Beyond Tomorrow: The Carola Spencer Story was released less than four months after the tragic incident. Carola has spoken at many organizations, and her story has inspired everyone who has heard it. Friends of Carola have sold books in their businesses and at organizations to which they belong. Now the book is available on the Internet for wider distribution. We'll never know who is inspired by Carola's story, but we know that the message of God's love and the power of faith is being shared. I thank God that the mission that seemed impossible became possible with His help.

The Move
By
Sara J. Blake

I couldn't believe my ears. I didn't believe what my parents were saying, and I certainly wouldn't be going along with it. They had been saying they were moving since I was ten years old, and now they were doing it when I was one class short of graduating with my Bachelor's degree. And they were asking me to go with them!

I wouldn't do it. I had worked too long and too hard to reach this point. Besides the one remaining class, I wanted to get my Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. I couldn't move to some small town in Indiana, even if I had begun my college career there.

That was eight years ago. I didn't care if my parents thought it was God's will. That phrase had lost its power over me when my husband used it to try to convince me to move to a location where we would be isolated from people who understood my pain and the limitations severe visual impairment imposed on me. Isolated from the people who could help me if I decided to leave because of the emotional pain caused by our almost constant fighting.

But I was losing the battle. My parents were right; getting to an airport would be difficult for me, and someday I would want to move out of the small town where I was attending college. But what about my life? Was I going to waste away in a strange place just so that I could be near people who would help me? That was no better than wasting away in a strange place just to make my husband happy. That conflict had eventually led to my divorce.

Angrily, I wrote an email and sent it to a support group for blind people and their families, hoping that someone--anyone--might hear what I was trying to say. I don't remember whether I got many responses to that email. I finally gave up the battle, withdrew from school, and moved back to spend the remaining two months in my childhood home before it was sold.

Shortly after I returned home, I experienced a dramatic loss of vision. I became unable to navigate comfortably in the house I had lived in since the age of seven, bumping into boxes often. I was unable to differentiate day from night. I visited the ophthalmologist, and he told me that my corneas had become scarred and the scarring was preventing me from seeing. I needed a cornea transplant. Perhaps something might also be done about my partially detached retina...

But I was moving. I became angry and began to read anything I could find about the eye conditions which together were responsible for my visual impairment. I joined more email discussion groups and asked more questions. In my reading and in discussions with people in the email groups, one name kept coming up: Dr. Michael Trese.

Dr. Trese is a leading retinal surgeon and has devoted his research efforts to retinopathy in infants, especially those born prematurely. Since all of my current problems were complications of retinopathy of prematurity, I decided to see him and ask about appropriate treatment. Like my previous doctor, he recommended a cornea transplant. He also recommended retinal reattachment. Dr. Trese was able to reattach my retina successfully on the same day that I received a new cornea. I experienced substantial visual improvement. In time I needed a second cornea transplant, and this has had a poor outcome. However, my retina remains attached, and this allows me to gain the most from the small bit of vision I still have.

When I think about my initial reaction to the proposed move, I wonder. I am convinced that God was moving me into the very place where I needed to be. I would not have seen Dr.

Trese without moving--I would have been living 1,500 miles away and been content to find the best doctors in my local area. Instead, I was treated by one of the leading ROP researchers in the world. God was also moving other people into place to minister to me and so that He could use me to minister to them.

My initial angry email arrived in the mailbox of someone who had just arrived home from the hospital after a serious pedestrian accident. Reading it was difficult for him at the time--his own emotions were fragile as he tried to cope with the limitations his injuries placed on him. However, he saved the note and later remembered being astounded by its length. Later, as I continued to struggle with the emotional impact of what was happening to me, he began to write and encourage me. We eventually met in person at a convention in July, 2000; and in July, 2001, I had the pleasure of praying with him as he received Christ into his heart.

God has blessed our friendship and used it to encourage us both to face things in our past which He wanted to heal. Had I not needed to vent about the move, my name would not have been familiar to Kevin... Had I not lost my vision, I would not have continued to participate on the email list. Kevin's accident was the talk of the group; but it would have been a sad story in my mind. All things work together for good for those who love God and are called according to his purpose. I have never met a person God has not called. I have only met people who may need to wait patiently for His glory to be revealed.

The Path of Life

By

Lauralee Bliss

With a map in hand, daypacks on our backs, and sunlight gleaming in crystal clear skies, Steve and I arrived at an overlook in Shenandoah National Park, eager to begin our bushwhacking adventure. Before us, a meadow carpeted with yellow wildflowers, much like a yellow brick road, led to the woods and the waterfalls we hoped to find. Beyond the falls, we intended to hike into the valley and pick up a trail that would return us to our car. Our hearts were filled with excitement, for we both loved a walk in the beauty of God's creation.

The first leg of our journey carried us through bushes and brambles with no trail to follow. A certain excitement prevailed in a journey where only a compass and map provided the principal means of navigation. It was as if we were explorers of old, searching out a new and unpredictable land. Soon we could hear the rush of water playing over the rocks in a soothing medley orchestrated by God's handiwork. The falls materialized before our eyes, awesome in grandeur, powerful yet simplistic. Except for a minor brush with the dreaded stinging nettle plant, reminding us that not everything in the woods was beautiful and painless, we deemed the first part of the journey a success. We entered the valley floor to find homes tucked away in the woods. I thought how lovely it would be to have a home so close by protected land. One could venture into their backyard and be on a trail in the woods, ready for a new adventure. We turned onto a small road, and easily found the blue-blazed trail that would lead us home.

Only a short ways up the trail, I discovered a problem. According to my watch, the bushwhacking adventure had taken much longer than we had anticipated. Time had slipped by, and before we knew it, we were in competition with the sun sinking rapidly below the treeline. We hurried on, determined to complete the hike before it grew too late. To our dismay, the blue blazes that marked the trail were few and far between. Several times we strayed off the trail and had to backtrack. We rapidly consumed the water in our water bottles with the arduous climb, only to find ourselves running low with no other source in sight. Darkness soon fell across the mountainside like a black drape. The air became chilly. I realized that along with the lack of water, we had no flashlights in our daypacks to illuminate the trail. The blue trail blazes began to blend in with the trees, making it even more difficult to follow. We stumbled over rocks and roots in our path. I tensed at that moment, imagining terrible things happening to us with darkness sweeping across the landscape. What if Steve tripped over a root and sprained his ankle? I could never help his solidly built frame up a narrow mountain trail. Or what if we truly became lost and had to spend the night in the woods without proper clothing, food, shelter, and most importantly, water? The images were frightening. *No, we have to make it out*, I thought. *We have no choice. We must go on.*

Soon it became so dark that we could no longer see any of the trail ahead of us. We paused in our tracks and asked ourselves what to do. Should we find a place to spend the night? Should we keep going? Finally we decided to head straight up the mountainside, certain to come across the parkway that skirted the summit. We left the trail, and without a flashlight or water, hiked up the steep incline. My legs began to burn. My mouth felt like sawdust. Tree limbs snagged my hair and lacerated my skin. Neither of us spoke as we summoned all our strength to concentrate on the task before us.

Finally we made it to the crest of the hill, and to our relief, the hard pavement of the Skyline Drive--black and mysterious in the evening shadows, yet the path that would lead us to our car. We hugged each other and rejoiced before settling down to another two-mile walk to the overlook where our car was parked. The pounding of our feet on the road made ankles and legs ache even more. Choking on the dry phlegm in my throat, I yearned for a tall glass of ice cold water.

All at once we came upon an overlook, and what did we hear but the bubbling of water. We hurried over to find water gushing forth from a stone fountain as if Moses had rapped on the stones with his staff. We drank deeply, finding our bodies and our spirits strengthened by the life-giving water flowing from a fountain of rock.

A mile later we returned to the overlook and our car where the trip began. The meadow, once a brilliant yellow, had turned a drab gray. The woods were but crowded poles barely visible in the lights of towns reflecting in the valley below. We had returned humbled by the path we had tread. To us, the trip was like the path of life, filled with beauty and discovery, but also danger, toil, and snares. Yet through it all, God preserved us.

No matter what obstacles we may come across or what we may see, with the light of God's mercy and grace shining upon us, the path of life still leads to glory.

Peace, Be Still

*By
Cheryl Speir*

We bought property in the country, and had moved an old trailer on it to live in until we could build a house. There was so much to be done that David worked nights so he could have the daylight hours to do the many things that needed doing. Our two small sons were always right there to help. The dirtier the job the more willing they were to help. At the end of the day they would be so dirty that they were almost unrecognizable.

One night I gave each a good scrubbing to remove the traces of their active day. I then pulled each boy out of the tub to be towel dried. You can't help but give clean little boys a big hug and breath deeply. "There is nothing like the smell of little boys fresh out of the tub," I thought to myself. Dressing them in their nightclothes, I began the rituals of bedtime. We read a story, said prayers and I tucked each one in telling them with a smile and a kiss, "Sweet dreams, I'll see you in the morning."

With the boys settled, I began my own nightly preparations for bed. It had been a long day as had most since we bought our property. Each night I collapsed into bed, sleeping soundly unless I heard a cry from the boys. As I pulled the cover over me, I turned onto my side and went almost immediately to sleep.

Suddenly I jerked awake. The bedside clock said it was nearly three in the morning. What caused me to wake up? I listened for the boys, but didn't hear anything from their room. Then I heard a crash of thunder. "Oh, it's just a storm," I thought and snuggled back down to return to sleep.

I thought the wind sounded odd. I decided it was just the way the sound was bouncing off the sloping hills. The wind picked up and I heard what sounded like snapping limbs in the distance. I sat up in my bed as a gust of wind hit the trailer, causing it to vibrate. The wind grew louder and the trailer started shaking. It started shaking so badly, I was reminded of a boat rocking in a storm. I thought with dismay of the tie-downs sitting under the trailer, waiting for the weekend to be installed. The noise outside the trailer was at a roaring pitch. The trailer was rocking from side to side so hard I knew without a doubt that it was going to turn over.

"My children," I thought with my heart in my throat. I swung out of the bed and tried to stand but had to hold onto the wall to keep from falling. Their room was in the lower level of our split-level trailer. The only thing I could think of was to get to my boys. I had to hold the walls on either side of me as I went down the few steps. The whole time the trailer kept rocking harder and harder, making my progress difficult. The eerie sounds the wind made got louder and louder, keeping me from hearing the frightened cries I was sure would be coming from the boys' room.

As I walked into their room, I heard them crying and calling out to me, "Momma, what is happening? What are we going to do?"

I had to let go of the wall to walk towards their beds, but the force of the rocking threw me onto the oldest son's bed. When the younger saw where I was, he leaped across the space between the beds landing in my lap.

"What are we going to do?" they kept repeating. Both little faces were looking to me for answers. I had none. I felt so helpless knowing there was no place to hide.

I opened my mouth to offer comfort and heard myself saying, “We are going to pray, that is what we are going to do. Remember when Jesus spoke to the storm? We are going to do the same thing.” Comfort and peace came into my heart with those words. A calm came over them as they bowed their little heads beside me.

Out loud I prayed, reminding God of how Jesus spoke to a storm long ago. Then I said “Now, in the name of Jesus we speak to this storm and say peace be still.” Immediately with those words the wind stopped. The trailer stopped rocking and there was no sound coming from outside. The silence was shocking, coming as it did so quickly on the heels of the deafening noise we had just experienced.

Together we three rejoiced in what we knew to be our divine rescue. Aaron asked for permission to sleep with his brother, which Chris gladly granted. With a joyful heart, I settled them into bed once more.

I walked through the trailer and was amazed to find no damage. Some things were knocked over and scattered, but not a lot was broken. I tried to look outside to see if there was any damage but it was too dark to see anything.

Early in the morning I got up to check outside. What I saw reinforced the knowledge that God’s mighty hand had indeed been upon my household. Behind the trailer, we had two livestock gates that David had propped up and set an old car hood on to use as a makeshift shed for his tools until he installed the gates. The hood had been lifted up high by the wind and tossed fifty feet, cutting a path through the tops of trees like a giant saw blade before landing on the ground. In front of the trailer, David’s sixteen-foot aluminum boat had been lifted up from the ground and thrown the same distance. It landed on a pen we were building for the chicks that we were expecting, smashing it beyond repair. On both sides there were downed trees and debris laying everywhere. In the middle of all this destruction, there stood the seemingly untouched trailer, not even a window broken.

Hearing a car approaching, I turned and watched David drive down our long driveway toward home. I couldn’t wait to tell him, “Guess what the Lord did for us this day!”

The Precious Prodigal
By
Nancy Arant Williams

I loved her the moment I saw her, the little girl I had prayed for. Her personality was laid back, and she grew up to be a happy-go-lucky preschooler, with a sweet spirit.

Then she began kindergarten, and struggled with a learning disability. The teacher wasn't open to giving extra help, until I had a small but effective conniption--fit.

I struggled along with her, through the worst of her troubles, encouraging and praising, but somehow, things only got worse. For reasons I couldn't understand, she became withdrawn, and hostile, erecting a wall around herself that I couldn't have broken through with a pick-ax. Whatever I said was wrong, and I was at a loss to know how to correct the problem. I asked repeatedly what the problem was, but her only reply was "Nothing, it's just me."

She refused any overtures of caring, no matter the source. My heart was broken. I wanted to say to her, "Who are you and what have you done with my baby?"

When she was eleven, she packed up her dog, her suitcase, and what little money she had, and only the Lord woke me before she could run away. I was a compliant child myself and had trouble relating to her rebellion. I offered to listen, but was rejected outright, with those words all parents dread hearing: "You just don't understand."

Her teen years were spent flagrantly violating every principle we had lived by. I had done everything I knew to do to protect her, and yet, I felt I was in the middle of a nightmare I just couldn't shake off.

She became pregnant at age sixteen, and I thought my heart would break. A more humiliating experience I could not imagine. The baby came, and she was beautiful, and I loved them both with all my heart, the baby-child and mother-child.

My dear dad, her grandpa, died and the day of his funeral, we took our grief to a movie, portraying a mother and daughter with a wonderful relationship, and I knew I just couldn't stop fighting for one of our own.

She went straight to her room, as she always did, so I knocked on her door, waiting. When she grudgingly invited me in, I sat down on her bed. I said, "You know, I have always dreamed of having a relationship with you like we saw in the movie. I want that so bad I can taste it. I am going to stay right here, until we figure out what we can do to get it."

She stared at me, with hesitation, and I said, "Can you remember when our trouble began? Was there something that happened to cause it?"

She looked down at her hands, quiet, before saying, "Sure. When I was six, grandpa started molesting me."

I wanted to die, but it was not the time to cave in. What more could happen to ravage our family?

At least it was out in the open, no longer a secret she had to protect. Her reason for keeping silent was, "I didn't want to break up the family."

When I asked, "Did you think I wouldn't believe you?"

Shaking her head, she said, "No, that's the trouble. I knew you would."

I was relieved to know she felt that way. At least it was a start. We sought help, and talked openly about feelings, and pain, and for the first time, she let me enter into her world. It was a tough world to live in, but at least we were together.

She looked for love in the wrong places for a time, bringing home young men you wouldn't want your daughter to date. My best friend, who'd been molested, explained that a molestation victim sees herself unworthy of the love of good people, and gravitates to those she relates to.

I told her, "You are beautiful, and loved. You are a blessing of Jesus, and if you give yourself to the Lord, He will give beauty for ashes. He will bring you a wonderful young man who will love you with all his heart, and admire and adore you." I was testifying with my mouth to what I hadn't yet seen, knowing God could do it. I could see she didn't believe me, but she was hopeful.

One day she called from seventy miles away, crying, and said her boyfriend had beaten her. I knew God was working when she waited for me to speak. I said, "I'll come and get you, and while he's at work, we'll pick up your things, and bring you home."

I waited for her to protest, as she always did, but she just said quietly, "Okay, I'll be waiting."

She moved home, and at her brother's urging, began to attend youth group with accepting peers who already knew all about her, and had been praying for her. She became what they envisioned her to be, beautiful, clean and forgiven.

I will never forget the day she gave her testimony in front of the church. She said, "I've done everything wrong a person could do. I felt God couldn't possibly love me, and yet I know He does. He's changed me from the inside out, and I want to live for Him."

I could see her soften, light started to shine from her eyes. For the first time she chose to spend time with her family, and began to connect with her baby. When her molesting grandfather was dying of a stroke, she went to his hospital bed, where he lay comatose, and spoke what was in her heart. When she called to tell me, she was crying; "I just wish he could have said he was sorry."

I spent the summer praying for God's man who would love her toward wholeness. And though I didn't know it then, He was already working it out.

When the University's fall season began, with new students attending the youth group, one young man began to call, becoming a minor pest. He was quite enthralled with her, and nearly moved into our home. And when he wasn't with her, they were talking on the phone. Within two months, I could see, he was God's man for her. Just as I had hoped for, he loved her, nearly worshipping at her feet.

God was answering prayer. He saw her through to the other side, set her upon a Rock, and loved her back to health.

She's been transformed into a godly woman, with a sweet spirit, and a heart of deep compassion. She is serving the Lord, with her dear husband, and three precious little girls. She has a tender mother's heart, a sweet-smelling fragrance of the power of God, and proof to me, that we serve an awesome God, for whom nothing is impossible. Nothing.

School Board Wars
By
Nancy Arant Williams

I watched the fighting, at the first school board meeting, in awe. Who were these people? We were new to the area, a small development in the woods, and in our excitement to fit in, we attended meetings for this and that, but never had we come across people like this.

It was clear they were powerful. They owned acres and acres of land in the school district and yet, they stood out, angry, backward, and unwilling to change.

My husband, John, has a very even disposition and, by the second meeting, everyone in the neighborhood was encouraging him to run for a seat on the school board. Elections were coming up and no one was willing to run. Why would they? There were a few incumbents on the ballot and I could only admire them. I tried to discourage John from running, since most board meetings, open to the public, were simply another round in a battle that had never been won.

Trying to be a supportive wife, I attended the meetings, only to come home shaking my head, frazzled, discouraged. No matter what the school board wanted to do, purchase new books to replace the ten-year old texts, put in computers, hire a new teacher for the overcrowded two-room school, the ideas were fodder for the flame.

We heard words like, “We don’t need anything new; what we used seventy years ago was good enough then and it should be good enough now.” Of course, they were remembering a tiny school, where the six of them attended with only a few neighbors from farms within a two-mile radius. The school now accommodated thirty-eight children, from kindergarten to eighth grade, and the building was old and needed repairs.

The restrooms were some of the earliest displays of indoor plumbing, and were showing their age. The building sat on family land, on loan, donated by a long-dead relative, in what the family considered a fit of temporary insanity, and they were frustrated by their inability to move the school and reclaim the land. The five sisters, of course, had different last names, and were all grandmothers. I noticed that their children and grandchildren had very little to say when these tiny, but formidable, women were present.

They had a baby brother, now in his seventies, who lived the life of a hermit, albeit on a large piece of very visible land, right off the highway. He had no phone and didn’t talk to people, except when he had to do business. He was what the kids called a junk man, collecting castoffs of every description, and they were more afraid of him than anything. He steered clear of school board meetings.

As the election approached, neighborhood representatives went house to house, campaigning enthusiastically for John, who they saw as hope for the future. To the family’s chagrin, the turnout for the election was wall to wall, and John won a seat on the board. His vote, it seemed, would turn the tide of decision, toward more progressive thinking. Within a year, the school had purchased new books, bought new playground equipment, made plans to add a third classroom and hire a new teacher, all with a furor from the family.

They were sick. Their taxes would be going up, they fretted. No matter how many times the board tried to explain how the tax base worked, the family would hear none of it. They just couldn’t, or perhaps wouldn’t understand that our combined tax monies would make

improvements nearly painless. Even after their tax statements demanded no increase in out of pocket monies, they were still adamant that no more changes be made.

They fought the addition of the new classroom, nearly running the third teacher out of town on a rail, and had a great deal to say on the subject of replacing the bathroom plumbing.

After awhile, I said, "Honey, how would you feel if I stayed home from the meetings? I'm having trouble dealing with their anger. They're so unreasonable, I don't know how you can stand listening to them."

He said, "You stay home if you need to. I'll be fine." I didn't go, and I tried to stay neutral, but somehow I always heard, through the grapevine, about the warring going on. I could see the weariness in his face after each meeting, and I thought him heroic, just being faithful to what he saw as his calling.

The third year, the board voted in a computer set-up for each of the three rooms, and the uproar took an entire year to die out. The fourth year, the board voted to blacktop the playground and parking lot, and the sisters nearly had a stroke over the projected dollar estimate of costs.

I tried to pray about my attitude. I was struggling. I didn't understand these people. How could they be so difficult? What gave them the right to make the decisions affecting so many people? I knew the Lord was telling me that I had an attitude problem, but it was easy to blame them. Their bad attitudes were plain as day. My own was not. I was struggling to forgive them, knowing they had never changed, and were unlikely to, at this late date.

How does one go about loving people who not only don't see themselves as a problem, but refuse to change? That was the crux of the problem. It was easy to forgive people who were repentant, but how do you forgive the hard-hearted?

One day, I asked John, "Honey, how can you listen to them day after day and know they will never change? How can you go on patiently answering their angry questions?"

His answer was thoughtful. He said, "I guess I try to see it from their point of view. We all moved into their territory, encroaching on their power to maintain the status quo, and then we upset the balance of power. They're afraid, and they're just fighting back, to hold onto what worked years ago. They don't really hate us, as much as they hate the inevitable."

I thought about his words a lot. He was right. In order to deal with them, and forgive them, I had to see them as frightened, cornered, and fighting back.

After John had been on the school board for twelve years, we moved away. I heard from a former neighbor that the sheriff had to be called to a school board meeting. She explained that the son of one of the sisters had been voted onto the school board, and when he voted with the majority on a hotly disputed issue, his mother had chased him around the schoolyard with her umbrella.

Well, some things never change. And some people never change. And I couldn't say I wasn't glad to leave the chaos and turmoil behind. But I did learn that God expects his kids to learn to get along with the world, even love those in it, and maintain a heart of compassion. Even if they never change.

See Me Through
By
Kathryn Lively

It's funny how we can make time for just about any unimportant task under the sun, but there is barely enough time for prayer. I find I fall into this trap often; I drive to work with the radio blaring--the bass vibrating my skeleton--then eight hours later I come home immediately to the television and let the day drain my memory as it numbs to the pleasant white noise. By nightfall, I'm either too tired or too unwilling to contemplate giving myself to anything or anyone but sleep. Another day of potential prayer, another opportunity to give myself to God, gone.

To combat this spiritually-dangerous habit I recall the life of an early twentieth-century nun, Therese Martin of Lisieux, who experienced a similar spiritual apathy due perhaps to restlessness, though her love for Christ was real. Therese devised her own personal system of prayer, known as her "Little Way," where prayer came in brief, spontaneous bursts throughout her days. Short on length at first, Therese's prayerful life thrived upon the assurance of God's love despite her own unconscious neglect in replies.

After her death, this nun's "Little Way" grew as others sought to emulate this unique approach to prayer. It is a way I incorporate in my own life with just four simple words: "Lord, see me through." I get into my car now, and before I crank the engine or fiddle with the radio I bow my head for this simple prayer. I ask Jesus to see me through the day--the headaches at work, the challenges I face, the temptation to speed home when the day is done. I ask Him to see me through my exercise regimen and on to the evening and finally through a night of uneventful sleep. I live every day at a time, assured of God's love and grateful to know that any time of the day I can pause my frantic routine and pray that He will see me through it.

The Stranger
By
Nancy Arant Williams

The doorbell rang just as I had put away the last load of laundry. I turned down the stereo before opening the door. I'd been singing along with praise tapes all morning.

A stranger stood on the porch, ragged, and dirty, with his hat in his hand.

I opened the door, "Hi, may I help you?"

His face was weathered, deeply etched with lines, but his eyes were gentle. He looked to be in his early sixties, but I wondered about that. Aging might come easier, living on the streets.

"Ma'am, 'scuse me for disturbin' you, Ma'am. I stopped by the church across the street to see the priest about some work, but no one answers the door. I heard your music, and thought you might be able to help me."

I said, "Oh, the priest is probably out at the Veterans Hospital, where he works as the chaplain. May I help you?"

"Well, I was just wondering if you might have work for me to do to earn money? I need bus fare to my daughter's place in Florida."

"Please come in." He hesitated, looking around, uncomfortable. Had no one ever invited him in before? I said, "May I take your backpack?" When I saw his uncertainty, I said, "I'll just lay it by the door, so you'll know right where it is."

I was uncertain about this. I had never entertained a transient before, but he seemed harmless to my untrained eye. And didn't scripture say something about entertaining angels unaware?

"Why don't you come in out of the heat?" The heat shimmered on the cement outside, temperatures registering in the nineties this first week of July, with no respite in sight. He shivered, as if not used to air conditioning. I said, "Come into the kitchen, and we'll see if we can think of something."

A warm smile lit his eyes, "Thank ya', Ma'am."

I asked, "How about something cool to drink?"

"I am a mite thirsty. It's been a long, hot walk from town out here." He had walked seven miles in the heat, carrying what looked like a heavy backpack. He had to be exhausted.

"Lemonade okay?" I asked.

"Just fine, ma'am."

I handed him a glass, and gestured toward a kitchen chair. He wiped his damp forehead with the back of his sleeve, took a sip of lemonade, and smiled. "Sure is good lemonade. Haven't had any since I was a boy."

"Really?" I held out my hand. "My name is Nancy, what's yours?"

"Don," he said.

"Nice to meet you, Don. Do you mind my asking where you're from? I mean, where you call home?"

"Oh, well, I've been pret'near everywhere, but Ohio is where I was born."

I felt silly when I realized I had given lemonade to a man who probably hadn't had a real meal in some time.

"Don, are you hungry?"

He smiled. "I could eat something." I noticed a space where four front teeth should be, and wondered what I could make that he could eat. I fixed him a gooey cheese sandwich, a bowl of applesauce, and a glass of milk.

I said, "You know, my husband is working so many hours, he hasn't had time to mow the yard. Would you be up for that?"

He grinned, "Oh, I sure would, ma'am. I'll do a good job for you, too."

"I'm sure you'll do fine," I said. "Please don't overdo in the heat. Just stop and rest in the shade when you need to." I appreciated his willingness to work instead of just wanting a handout, but still felt guilty, sending him to work out in the heat. I pulled out the mower, checked the fuel level, and laid out the weed eater on the patio. Even the handles were warm. I didn't envy him the job.

He pulled a large red handkerchief from his pocket, and tied it around his head, then put his hat back on. In just over an hour, he had mowed and trimmed the entire yard, only stopping long enough to drink the soda I had set in the shade for him when he needed a break.

When he finished, I said, "Come on inside where it's cool, and rest awhile." He resumed his place at the table, as I handed him a glass of ice water.

He asked, "What do you think, ma'am? Did I do a good job on the lawn?"

"Don, I don't think my husband could have done it any better. You did an excellent job," I said, handing him three ten-dollar bills.

"Kind of you to say so, Ma'am."

"I really appreciate it, Don. Is thirty dollars enough?"

"Oh, ma'am, anything is a help. Thank you."

I prayed silently before asking, "Don, could I ask why you live on the streets?"

"You know, nobody's ever asked me that before. I guess it all started when my Grandpa died. He raised me."

"And you missed him?"

"I'm still not over it."

He seemed embarrassed by the tears that filled his eyes. Hastily brushing them away with his sleeve, he said, "He was my best friend. I still miss him everyday of my life."

"He must've been a wonderful man." When he said nothing, I asked gently, "How long ago did he die?"

"Nineteen-fifty-two."

Our eyes met. I said, "You've been grieving over him for fifty years?"

He looked surprised as he said, "I never understood any of this before." Tears fell again, and I put my hand on his.

I said, "Don, do you know that God cares about your grief? He bottles every tear. He loves you, and He can take away the pain you feel. He can heal it."

"Do you think so, ma'am?"

I smiled, "I know Him. He says he comes to those who are broken hearted." He nodded. "Don, do you think you might have started drinking to kill the pain of losing your grandpa all those years ago?"

"I did. I didn't know what else to do."

"Well, God wants you to know that you can stop grieving. He will help you deal with the pain, so you won't have to drink to make it better anymore."

"Do you know somewhere I could get help for my drinkin'?"

“Well, I could take you to the mission, where they have a special program to help people get past these issues, and I’m sure they can help you.”

“And you’d drive me there?”

“Of course. Would you like me to?”

“I think I would, ma’am.”

I asked him if I could pray for him, as we sat in my car in the cool of the shaded garage. He said, “If you would, ma’am, I can use all the help I can get.”

I said, “Lord, you know about Don’s pain. You care that he has been grieving over his grandpa’s death all these years. Your Word says that you draw near to those broken in spirit. Right now I ask you to draw near, and put your comforting arms around him, and show him how much you love him. Show him the plan you have for his life, and we’ll give you all the praise.”

I had never hugged a transient before, but I couldn’t help hugging Don, just before we drove away in a brand new direction.

Biographies of Contributing Authors

Lillie Ammann

Lillie Ammann is the author of *Stroke of Luck*, a romance novel featuring a disabled heroine and available in print and electronic formats; *How to Get Started as a Network Marketer from Home*, an ebook from Dream Jobs to Go; and *Look Beyond Tomorrow: the Carola Spencer Story*, the inspirational story of a victim of workplace violence. She is an active volunteer for her church, an advocate of electronic publishing, and the Editor-in-Chief of Our Mail Network, a publisher of newsletters and information products. Lillie's mission is to bless others through her life and her writing for the glory of God. She invites readers to visit her website at www.lillieammann.com or email her at lillie@lillieammann.com.

Elizabeth W. Bennefeld

Elizabeth W. Bennefeld has worked as a freelance editor and writer since 1984. She and her husband Al live in Fargo, North Dakota, with their two cocker spaniels, Rascal and Ladd. Elizabeth and Al's interests include electronics, astronomy, music (trumpet and saxophone, respectively), storm spotting, and public and emergency services work as members of their local amateur radio club. Elizabeth has found her spiritual home within the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). Some of Elizabeth's poetry and short stories can be read at <http://www.sff.net/people/Bennefeld>.

Sarah J. Blake

Sarah J. Blake is a freelance writer specializing in health topics, parenting, and inspirational topics. She maintains a Website at <http://www.growingstrong.org> and volunteers as the moderator of several email-based support groups for people with disabilities and their families.

Lauralee Bliss

Lauralee Bliss is a multi-published author of ten inspirational romances, both in print and e-book form. She enjoys writing novels that are reminiscent of a roller coaster ride for the reader. Her desire is that readers will turn the pages until they reach the end and then will come away with both an entertaining story and a lesson that ministers to the heart. Her e-books have won numerous distinctions. Lauralee is the founder of Christian E-Authors <http://www.christianeauthor.com> and is a member of American Christian Romance Writers and EPIC.

Visit her web site at: <http://lauraleebliss.homestead.com>

Diana Lesire Brandmeyer

Diana Lesire Brandmeyer has been writing since she was seven. She didn't take her ability seriously until after her first husband, John, died. Realizing life doesn't always happen tomorrow, she began writing a few articles and children's stories. With strong encouragement from her new husband, Ed to write to her heart's desire, Diana wrote her first inspirational romance, *A Time To Dance*.

Diana is excited to find inspirational romances becoming available in e-book form. She feels with this technology, Christian women all over the world will have access to books expressing their lifestyle as well as being able to use them as witness tools.

Diana lives in Illinois with her husband, Ed, and three sons, Andrew, Benjamin and Joshua. She loves animals and has two dogs. Reading is a favorite hobby along with jazz dance classes. Her favorite shared activity is riding bikes with her husband.

Sue Butler

Sue Butler lives with her husband in Wyoming, MI. She has three children, one daughter-in-law, and a precious year-old granddaughter. After spending almost two decades as a stay-at-home mom, Sue took a teaching position with a local Christian school. There she taught in the English Department for twelve years. During that time, she received her Masters Degree from Calvin College. Presently, Sue is a Consultant who specializes in Education and Curriculum Development. In addition to developing a unique writing curriculum, Sue is author of the e-book *10 STEPS TO EXPRESS YOUR FAITH THROUGH WRITING*. She has created and maintains the Write4Christ web site and Sue's Open-Hearted Suggestions (SOS), an ezine dedicated to offering lessons plans, writing tips, FREE downloads, and links to educational sites for Christian educators and administrators. Visit <http://www.write4christ.com>. Subscribe to the FREE ezine at [subscribe-sos@write4christ.com](mailto:sos@write4christ.com).

Sue Crawford

Ask Sue Crawford about the places she's been, and she's likely to tell you tales, the likes of which you read in the aisles of the nation's leading bookstores. Her travels to Australia at a tender age and subsequent sail around the world gave her an insight and love of exotic lands that few of us will ever attain.

Taught to love books by her father, she also learned common sense and the value of the practical things in life from her mother. She folds both of these lessons into her writing, creating real, breathing characters with lives not so unlike yours and mine. Her passion for the written word blossomed early, and was nurtured by her assignment as student librarian in elementary school. For five years Sue lovingly tended the words of the immortals, then her attention shifted to the one true thing in every high school junior's life...boys.

Over the years Sue has lived and breathed the lives of her characters, living in nineteen different states and traveling abroad with both her parents and husband. Her gift with words has evolved from writing stories about the boys she would meet and fall in love with to vignettes capturing the lives of people whose paths she has crossed to the character-driven novels she writes today.

Sue finally ended her globetrotting days, settling in rural Arkansas with her husband, dogs and cat. She works in nursing and pours her heart and soul onto paper (or maybe a keyboard) during her off-hours. As written by T.L. Schafer.

Sue's Website is: <http://romancereport.com/authors/suecrawford/> .

Sandy Cummins

Sandy Cummins has been a Christian since the age of thirteen and is happily married with three kids. During the day Sandy homeschools her three children and in the evenings (and afternoons) is the CEO of Writers Exchange E-Publishing (<http://www.writers-exchange.com/epublishing>).

Christine Duncan

[Christine Duncan](#) attends Arvada Covenant church in Arvada, Colorado where she lives with her husband and children. She is the author of *Safe Beginnings*, a cozy mystery novel which was named one of the top books of the year 2001 by [Inscriptions Magazine](#).
(<http://www.inscriptionsmagazine.com/BOTY.html>)

Rita Hestand

Texas born author Rita Hestand lives in a small rural town in North Central Texas, with her soul-mate husband, Don. She's the mother of two lovely daughters, and has six grandchildren with another on the way. Rita is an avid reader and runs Romancing The Web Reviews, and Rita's Kid Reviews on the Internet. Since Rita became e-published she has learned a lot about the web and does her own website at ritahestand.romance-central.com. She loves to find beautiful graphics and changes her site often. Rita belongs to RWA, WRW, EPIC, Word Museum, The Romance Report, and is a DIVA. She writes articles on writing. Rita loves poetry and has several print published through Sparrowgrass Poetry. She writes contemporary romance, children's illustrated ebooks, and short stories too. Check out her site at <http://ritahestand.romance-central.com> Or e-mail her at hestand@airmail.net .

Kathleen E. Kovach

Writing has been in my blood as far back as I can remember. I have memories of scribbling on a piece of paper before I learned how to form letters. My first attempt at poetry was when I sold “The Fat Cat in the Black Hat” for ten cents to my friends, so you can say I was a professional writer before second grade. Fame is fleeting, however, and now I’m a middle-aged mother of two waiting for that next big sale.

My love of the Lord confirmed my need to put my feelings on paper. In my BC years, before Christ, my style writhed in teenage angst. It was the hippie era, so between the doodled daisies and peace symbols, I poured my heart out, but felt no ease to my “pain”. Then, at the age of seventeen, God rescued me from the swirl of my psychedelic emotions. I received him as my personal Savior and suddenly my folk guitar was playing a different tune. Peace and love became more than words on a poster. And the direction of my writing went from “why me” to “why not Him”. My Savior, my friend, my yoke-bearer now guides my pen.

My primary interest is the Inspirational Romance genre. A relative once asked if I had one, and I asked her what she meant.

“Do you have an inspirational romance?”

“Oh, yes!” Which leads me to mention the other three men in my life. I share my love of the Lord with my husband of a quarter-of-a-century, Jim. We were blessed with two perfect boys, (well, in God’s eyes, anyway), Jon and Joey. Both are grown, leaving me with an empty nest which I began filling immediately with computer equipment and writing materials.

May everything I write be as Paul’s encouragement to the church in Corinth, “... written not with ink but with the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of human hearts.” --1 Cor 3:3b

Crystal Laver

Crystal Laver lives in beautiful Colorado, a stone's throw away from many historical sights. She enjoys writing and art. Under the pen name Lauryn Hale, Crystal has published one historical novel, *The Undertaker*, and contributed to several free ebooks. Finding the beauty and simplicity of creating covers for novels, Crystal opened her own cyber-store, Colorado Covers.

Her life is dedicated to many blessings the Lord has showered down upon her, especially her wonderful husband, Troy, and their three sons, Skyler, Cameron, and Tristan.

Homeschooling her children and shooting for the perfect haven of a home occupy many hours of her time. Crystal and her family attend their local church regularly and are actively involved. During the time that isn't taken up with these pursuits, she works as managing editor of the historical department for Wings E-Press.

For with God nothing shall be impossible. Luke 1:37

<http://www.geocities.com/laurynhale>

<http://www.geocities.com/coloradocovers>

Or email her at laurynhale@yahoo.com .

Kathryn Lively

Kathryn Lively is the author of *Little Flowers* (Highbridge Press, 2001, and FrancisIsidore E-Press, 2002) and the editor of the Write Stuff newsletter for the Catholic Writers Association. More information on her writing is available at her website: <http://www.livelywriter.com> .

Lianne Bruynell Lopes

Lianne Bruynell Lopes attended the Washington Bible College in Lanham, Maryland where she received a B.A. in Theology and Elementary Education. For two years, she taught fourth grade, then marriage and motherhood took priority. She currently lives in the lovely coastal city of Vitória, in Brazil, where she and her husband serve as missionaries. Lianne is mother to two young girls whom she homeschools. She enjoys history, and is a hopeless romantic. Together, those make up the brunt of her writing. Lianne's short story, *Class Reunion*, was published in Words, a charity literary magazine in London. She is editor for an online column at Suite 101, Ireland's Mythical History, <http://www.suite101.com/welcome.cfm/5719> and also maintains a site on World War Two resistance heroes <http://www.ww2heroes.com>. Lianne's first full-length novel, a romance set during the early stages of World War Two, is available through Mountain View e-publisher at: <http://www.trebleheartbooks.com/Lopessnop.html>. Lianne's personal homepage can be found at <http://www.geocities.com/mercywriter>

Judy Miller

Known by her grandchildren as Gramma Judy, and to her friends as Jude; Judith Jean (Walts) Miller was born and raised on a farm in Mid-Michigan. Ten years ago, Judy moved to Saginaw, Michigan.

“Because I was young when my children were born, I grew up with them. I made up stories to tell them and then we acted the stories out. Great elaborate plots of sneaking through the woods looking for bad guys or burying treasure, making a map and the next year, digging up our treasure. I now use some of those incidents as background for the children’s stories I write.”

Judy has one sister Susan, born when Judy was thirteen. She also has four grown children, a son and three daughters and six grandchildren.

Judy has many flower gardens, a small vegetable garden, two bird feeders, squirrel and rabbit feeding areas and watering containers for all.

Judy also enjoys cross-stitching.

A graduate of two correspondence courses at The Institute for Children’s Literature, Judy has had an article published in Children’s Playmate magazine, and her first book *Hidden Treasure* published with Writers Exchange E-Publishing.

Judy’s website is: www.grammas-tales.com

Carolyn R. Scheidies

Carolyn R. Scheidies' credits include 11+ novels, a devotional journal, three poetry booklets, and contributions to six non-fiction books. She's written for a variety of publications, and has a regular column in a regional paper. Scheidies also speaks to different groups, teaches workshops on writing, and guest lectures at UNK.

<http://welcome.to/crscheidies>

<http://come.to/bookreviews>

RubyLee Schneider

I've been writing since I was in grade school, but only seriously since the 1980s. My published writing includes short stories (confessions and others), articles and devotional meditations. In October 2000 Awe-Struck Ebooks published my first novel, an Inspirational Romance, *HEART PATROL*. The sequel is about ready to send to the editor. I'm active in my church, Bible Study Groups and English Handbell Choir. In addition to writing I enjoy sewing, quilting, gardening, and snatching time to be a member of a Prayer Mission Team--which prompted this particular meditation.

God Bless,

RubyLee Schneider

Rie Sheridan

Rie Sheridan has been writing for many, many years. More than she cares to admit. She writes in several genres, but this is her first acceptance in this venue, and she is pleased to be included. She is a writer, columnist, and reviewer for numerous e-publications.

Lynette Gagnon Sowell

Lynette lives in Texas with her husband, two kids, and four cats. She's written several novels--yet to find a publishing home--and had a short story published through Mountainview Publishing. Her historical fiction book reviews are at Christian Writers Web Community at iUniverse. She is the 2002-2003 secretary for American Christian Romance Writers.

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Cheryl Speir

Cheryl Speir is a free-lance writer as well as a columnist for a local publication. She is the editor for the free weekly ezine, "Write 2 the Heart". The url is www.write2theheart.com She is married to her high-school sweetheart and has raised four sons. Her email address is cheryl@write2theheart.com .

Pamela S. Thibodeaux

Pamela S. Thibodeaux is a member of the Golden Triangle Writers Guild--
<http://gtwg.nstemp.org> --and the author of two e-books, *Tempered Hearts* and *Tempered Dreams*.

Her writing has been tagged as “Inspirational with an Edge!”

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Nancy Williams

Nancy Williams is a retired RN, lives in mid Missouri, and hosts a pastoral retreat called The Nestle Down Inn. She has a husband, two married children, and three precious granddaughters who live in Nebraska. She and her hubby moved to MO at God's suggestion, and she is trying to learn to bloom where she is planted. She loves the written word, and desires to bless the Lord in thought and deed, but especially in word.

Karen Woods

Karen Woods lives quietly in West Central Illinois. Once her time was spent in teaching adults at colleges. Now, her time is spent in service to her family, Church, and community. She's a homeschooling Mom and the principal caregiver for her elderly mother-in-law. When writing fiction, she writes primarily psychological thrillers, suspense, political intrigue, and romance. Works of fiction by her may be found at <http://www.fictionworks.com/default.htm> and -soon- at <http://www.lionhearted.com/>.

Thank you....

Thank you so much to all that gave to this devotional book. May the Lord bless this book and use it to plant the seeds to many of which may never have heard otherwise. May we be used to further God's will. And to you wonderful readers that took the time to read our inspirations from the Lord, may His glory truly shine down upon you all the days of your lives.

In His Glory, for His Glory...