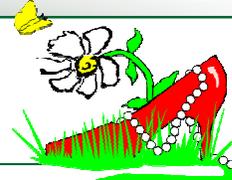


# Grace In The Wilderness



Isaiah 43:19 ...I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.



## A Lump of Clay

what little girls are made of", or, at least that's what we were told when we were little girls. ...But, really??

The Bible says in Genesis 2:7, "The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being." (Actually, we came from man's rib, but you get the general idea.) In Ecclesiastes 3:20, the Bible says, "All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return." God is the Potter who forms us from the clay.

"Blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape." This is a quote that Grace Ankles, Today's Busy Woman, could really live by. Often, she has too much to do. Often, she is bent out of shape. Sometimes, she wonders what is the purpose in all this crazy busyness. Her life seems to be defined by all she can "do" rather than by who she is.

Sometimes, she just wants to "be"...'be' happy, 'be' still, 'be' a woman, fearfully and wonderfully made in the image of Her Creator. Who is she? What is her calling? What is her special purpose? And how can she discover it? Only the One who lovingly created her truly knows the reason why.

Romans 9:21 says, "Does not the Potter have the right to make out of the same lump of

clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?"

Today's Busy Woman may or may not feel that she's been called to what she considers noble purpose. But, what is noble purpose anyway? No task is small or unimportant if Christ has called us to it. You know what they say—"The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." He has things planned that we have no clue about.

Only by being malleable can we become the woman, the masterpiece, the vessel that God has planned for us to become—the one He designed for our good and for His glory. Sometimes it is painful. Sometimes it means we take a pounding by our circumstances, those because of our decisions and those beyond our control.

Sometimes the Great Craftsman uses Satan as a carving tool to perfect us. Sometimes, it's the fire that the Potter decides we need. *I hate when that happens, don't you?* Sometimes the heat seems unbearable. But, oh, the results are life-changing!! And, isn't that God's purpose for the fire? Out of love, He wants to make us His best.

There is an anonymous quote that sums it up. "A clay pot sitting in the sun will always be a clay pot. It has to go through the white heat of the furnace to become porcelain." Perhaps Abraham's servant was faced with the same confusion of his purpose. Abra-

By Sharon Hawkins

ham's nephew, Lot, was captured and held by, not one or two, but four kings. 318 of Abraham's servants were called upon to go rescue Lot. Certainly, as chief servant over all that Abraham had, he was greatly involved in this expedition. After the rescue of Lot from the four kings, Abraham told his servant that he had another assignment.

He must have thought, "What world does Abraham want me to conquer now? What kingdom would he like me to acquire for him?" Then, the moment of truth... Abraham clears his throat,... yes, here it comes... drum roll, please... "Go find a wife for my son, Isaac."

"That's it?," his servant may have thought. "Playing Match Maker? Abraham, are you sure you don't have something more important for me to do? Something maybe, a little less, well... sissy? Something of noble purpose?"

Scripture doesn't indicate that he showed Abraham any hesitation at all. No, he was most concerned with doing a great job for his master, no matter what he was asked to do. He learned the secrets of being a great servant...being willing to serve...being humble and... **BEING FLEXIBLE.**

You know what they say, "Sometimes, less is more." God doesn't need our help to mold us into His best. He's the Potter. Take a radical step toward becoming all you can be...it starts simply with being a **LUMP OF CLAY...**

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### Inside this issue:

A Lump of Clay	1
A Special Mom Tribute	2
Titus 2 Wisdom for Women: The Unexpected Blessing	2-3
You Gonna Eat That?	3
The Switch	4
Trickle Down	4
Your Witness Is Your Fitness	5
I Can Do All Things	6
Are You Making A Mistake?	6
I Surrender All	7
The Majestic Buzzard	7
About the Ministry	8

*Grace In The Wilderness  
Women's Conference  
for Mothers of Special  
Needs Children:  
"A Special Day for  
Special Moms"  
June 25, 2011  
Mount Airy  
Baptist Church*

### Isaiah 64:8

*Yet, O LORD, You are our Father. We are the clay, You are the potter; we are all the work of Your hand.*



## A Garden In The Wilderness: A Special Mom Tribute

By Lissa Hall

I came from a broken home at the age of seven. Being the oldest of five boys and one girl, I had to grow up fast to help with my brothers. We've seen a lot and been through "the ruts," but by the grace of God, He saw us through it all.

As time went on, I got married and had a family of my own (2 wonderful sons, Robert and Ryan) and my husband, Robert. I drifted away from God for many years. I sent my sons to church every Sunday.

One Sunday, my life changed drastically. I had just finished cooking dinner and we had sat down to eat when my aunt came up the driveway blowing the car horn. She asked Robert where I was. When she came into the house, she told me to sit down, she had something to tell me. As she lingered on, I asked her to get to the point. She told me my mother had shot herself. All I could do was scream and beg God not to let her die. I needed to tell her I loved her and goodbye if I was losing her. Somehow I couldn't cry.

When we arrived at the emergency room, they wouldn't let me see my mom. I saw my grandmother sitting in the waiting room praying for my mother's life and I realized I needed to pray too. A few hours later they came out and told us my mom was critical and she may not live. She'd lost her right eye and a third of the pallet of her mouth and the whole right side of her face. They couldn't save her eye and asked if we would donate her cornea and we did.

Moma died twice during that time but God sent her back. The doctors said it wasn't her time to go. It was "touch and go" for several months but she survived.

Seventeen years later my mom died from COPD. Before she passed away, she came to live with me after my husband had passed away. We became close and shared a lot. One night we were lying in bed and she said "Sis, you know my time is short and I love you. When I go, don't cry. I'm going home with Jesus and my mom." She said that she had found God many years ago and she knew He loved her.

A few weeks later, my mom went into the hospital. Unknown to me at the time, she was never to come back home. After 52 days on a respirator, I had to decide what to do. I talked to my mom and asked her what she wanted. She said, "I wanna go home with Jesus and Moma." She lifted her hands and said, "I'll fly away." And she did.

This is one of the hardest things I've ever done, especially after having to make the same decision several years before when my dad had died of leukemia.

After losing my dad, my mom and my husband, God has brought me closer to Him and I rely on Him a lot. I just want to say, "Thank you, God, for all your blessing and strength you've given me."

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*This was written in the memory of my mother, Eva Dell Ramey Reynolds (11/4/47-6/21/03). I love you and miss you, Moma!*



## Titus 2 Wisdom for Women: The Unexpected Blessing

By Roberta Brown

It was Springtime, a beautiful new day and Easter was approaching. The daffodils in bloom gaily ushered in this wonderful new season. My spirits were high as I recalled previous visits to this quaint, green house sitting a little way back from the road in our quite little community. As I pulled my car into the circle drive, winding around the well-kept yard of this home, I could see Mrs. Sally Rochester peeping through the glass of her front door. On her face was the ever-so-familiar smile which had greeted me many times before.

You see I had gotten up that morning, and decided to bring some cheer to this very special friend of mine. As she opened the door for me and saw the brightly colored basket I held in my hand, she said with a grin, "How pretty, I'm so glad you've come to visit." After an exchange of hugs and kisses, I was cordially invited to join her in her kitchen. A warmth surrounded me as I entered this room which seemed to say, "Welcome." I could envision meal after meal being planned, cooked and served to family and friends alike

with generous helpings of love.

I was graciously invited to sit and relax in a comfortable rocker sitting in the corner of this cozy room. I gladly accepted the offer as she busied herself putting out coffee and doughnuts for the two of us. Our conversation began as she shared with me some interesting facts about our church and events which had taken place in days way before I was born—some of her favorite stories of days gone by. We laughed as she told me of the days when her house was filled with children, quite normal children, and a very busy household.

We shared the joys of being grandmothers and how things had changed in the last few years. She spoke lovingly of her deceased husband. "You know, I had a good husband," she said. "He wasn't perfect, but he was good to me and treated me fairly. We were married for sixty-three years, had eleven children and ten of them lived to be grown."

I listened intently as she continued. "Now we had our rough times but the Lord was always there true to His word to see us through it all." When I asked her age, she replied with a smile. "I'm eighty-five years old, and I'm not ashamed to tell it, no, not

at all. I'm proud of every year the Lord has let me live and raise my family. You know I had one son killed in Germany, and we had to wait a year after receiving news of his death for his body to be returned for burial." I said, "I know this was a very hard time for you and your family to endure." "Yes," she said, "we had another son who was held as a P.O.W. for sixteen months over there. It was a hard time, a very hard time, but you know prayer is what brought us through it all. Through the years, we've lost four sons through death, but I never question God's will. I figure there is a reason. You know that I know too," she continued, "we all worked really hard all our lives. We grew cotton, had our own vegetables, cows, chickens and hogs so we never had to do without the necessities of life. It was a hard time for everybody back then."

When we had finished our coffee and doughnuts, we walked outside, continuing our conversation as we walked. The sunshine fell around us as we surveyed all the different varieties of daffodils and lilies and some bright little flowers she called "Johnny Jump Up's, all so brightly displayed in her gardens.



## The Unexpected Blessing (Cont'd)

"You know, I used to walk to church every Sunday and take my children. I can't go to all the services now like I used to. I was very active in all the church affairs, but I had to slow down a lot. I am blessed with thoughtful in-laws and grandchildren," she said, "they see to my needs."

Bending over trying to hide the pain she was feeling in her swollen legs, she gently picked a large handful of bright yellow flowers and, with a smile, she placed them into my hands. "Here," she said, "take these home with you and plant them in your garden." With a smile she said, "Now they are different from the others." I gladly accepted them, think-

ing of how a dozen roses would not have meant any more to me than the handful of buttercups handed to me out of love. Before leaving, she had gotten the hoe and began to dig up some more plants for me to bring home for my garden. Carefully, she wrapped a wet paper towel around the stems of the flowers so they would retain their beauty until I could place them into my garden. The cut flowers would be gingerly placed on my kitchen table, where they would retain their beauty.

As I started toward the car she gave me another big hug. Smiling she said wistfully, "You know," she said, "I go to bed at night thinking of what all the Lord has

done for me and I am ashamed that I have not done enough for Him." I replied, "Well, I feel the same way. I can never do enough for Him to repay what he did for me." We said our goodbyes and as I was driving toward home, thoughts started running through my mind. Here I was in the presence of a woman twice my age, married three times as many years as I have been, having eight more children than I, giving me hope and love and sharing with me what the God we both serve had done for her and her family despite all the hardships they had endured. She made my problems look so small, cheerfully waving goodbye to me saying, "Come back soon, dear." Needless to say, I was the recipient of today's blessing.

## You Gonna Eat That?

Ok, I admit it. Those bumper stickers your kids put on your car...you know the ones—"My kid is an honor roll student at Smith Elementary' I HATE THEM! Don't get me wrong, I am happy that your kid is smart, really I am. I just think the bumper stickers are dumb and ugly.

I told my husband, "I am not falling into that whole "bumper sticker" craze. If our girls get one, we will just hang it on the refrigerator with all of their drawings and that will make them happy."

Then that inevitable day came when I picked up my sweet little first grade daughter from school. And as she climbed into the back seat she happily held up her white bumper sticker with blue writing that read "My kid is an honor roll student at Pickens Elementary." I cringed and thought, "*Oh no, not the bumper sticker!!*"

She was so proud, her teacher told her how smart she was and how hard she worked for it. Then she proceeded to tell me where she thought it would look best on my car. "**No, I'm not putting that ugly thing on my car, it's not happening and that's final!!**" .... *I thought to myself.*

When we got home, she bounced out of the car, grabbed my hand and led me to the back of the car where I proceeded to help her peel the backing off the bumper sticker and placed it neatly on the back windshield of my car.

My words tasted a little bit like the paste

you find on the back of those ugly school bumper stickers.

So everyone knows I'm not an animal lover, not dogs, not cats, not birds, not your cute little guinea pig. I love that you love them, but I don't. I don't want your sweet little poochy-poo jumping in my lap wanting me to pet his hairy, little body. It's just not for me.

My husband and I have been married for 20 years. My middle daughter is now 16 years old and has wanted a dog since she was 6. She even hoped to become blind, so we would get her a dog. (I know, I know, that's terrible. I've heard it all before!) Did I mention that I don't like dogs?

In my defense, my youngest daughter is afraid of dogs (and I love her for it !! ... yep, we've already established I'm horrible!) Besides our house is too small AND we are never home, so having a dog just does not make sense. Also dogs smell funny and I don't like them on my furniture and...do I really need to continue?? (You get the point.) Therefore I said we would never own a dog.

So please explain to me after 20 years of saying "NO," how my family ended up this weekend with a 3-year-old English Pointer sleeping on my couch and wallowing in my living room. And explain to me why the following Monday morning, at 7:30 AM I am running down the road of my neighborhood in work clothes and high heels chasing a dog that I said I

would never have.

As I ran breathlessly down the road, sweating like a pig, screaming the dog's name, I realized I had that funny taste in my mouth again. This time my words tasted somewhat like Milk Bone dog biscuits.

Am I the only woman who has ever eaten her words? Especially with children and pets?! We make decisions and we stand by them, word for word. Then a chain of events happens and we're munching on those exact words.

We as moms do our best. But sometimes we just get it wrong. I am so thankful for a God who says exactly what He means. He has never recanted, or restated. He has never had any take-backs or re-do's, mixed feelings or mixed words. When He said it, He meant it and that settled it. His word is true, inspired, infallible and inerrant! He got it right the first time! Now that's something I don't mind chewing on!

*2 Tim.3:16-17: All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.*

*Psalms 119:160: The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever.*

By Brenda Horne





## The Switch

By Robbie Gravley

I have had the extremely special opportunity to serve as the Team Chaplain for the Greer High School boys basketball team the past three years.

The relationships that have unfolded during the seasons have been amazing. We have literally laughed, cried, built fires, sat in a circle and sang songs, and eaten a lot of chicken fingers & spaghetti. Two years ago in a State Championship run, I even had to put my pre-game devotion on youtube for them to watch because I was snow skiing in Lake Tahoe. Was this because I didn't have enough faith in them playing that far in the playoffs when I scheduled my trip? Well, maybe! But they did, and my "long distance devotion" must have been all right, because they won the Upstate Championship that night and I got to see them play for the State Title a few days later in person.

Last year during a remarkable 25-1 season the team was having trouble staying focused for an entire game. They would go on a 15-2 run, then sleepwalk for several minutes. They were winning every game and sometimes looked like they could beat the Boston Celtics, then they

would play very average basketball for several minutes.

One road game midway through the conference season, they fell behind by 10 points with three minutes to play, but got on a roll and a last second shot sent the game into overtime. They dominated the extra stanza and won by ten.

The next devotion I asked them, "What happened? What was it that, all of a sudden, when you trailed almost the entire game, then in the last six minutes off the clock outscore the opponent by 20 points? It was like someone turned on a switch, wasn't it? No explanation, except the switch went on, right?" I got a lot of blank stares and nods that "yes, it was like someone turned on a switch." So with that, I pulled out a \$3 light switch that I had bought at Lowes and said, "OK. Here is your new switch. We are all going to take a Sharpie and sign the cover of this switch. Every game before you leave the locker room, someone needs to turn this switch on. Now you have no excuses. The switch will always be on." With some smiles and sparkling eyes, they got it. They needed to always be ready to go from the opening tip.

As busy adults, we are very much like that. We wander from task to task without much motivation for much of our

days and even weeks. We don't achieve nearly as much in our work, our relationships, and our ministries as we are capable of. It is because our "switch" is not turned on.

Luke 12:35 talks about being ready. It says to keep the switch on. The context of this verse means to be literally "ready to go,"—like if you were waiting on a ride for somewhere you were excited about. You were dressed, the light was on, and you keep getting up to look out the window to see if they were coming yet.

When you tackle your everyday tasks with that kind of purpose and energy, even the smallest of tasks can become something to embrace. Take simple joys in checking things off your list. If you are picking kids up at school, be the best school picker-upper there ever was! If you have a boring task at work, do it so well with an enthusiasm that makes everyone else think, "what's up with her?" If you are involved in a ministry, whatever it may be: remember that God gave you that opportunity, and it is a chance to serve alongside the Living God!

In other words, turn the switch on!

**Luke 12:35**  
*Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning.*

By JoAnn Case

## Trickle Down

Recently, my son had a governmental agency show up at his newly leased apartment. He was required to sign a new lease as the property had been taken by the government due to a financial mess created by a dishonest business in another state. The owner of the property had done nothing wrong. The dishonest business owner was convicted of scamming innocent people out of more than \$13 million dollars. That bad decision of one person trickled down and affected many people including my son. That got me to thinking. If bad decisions can affect lots of people on many levels, what about good decisions? This happened just days before I left for a mission trip to Bahia, Ecuador.

Sin can have a hold on an individual, a family or a community for years. Being open to the Gospel of Jesus Christ and opening ones heart to accept him, opens doors to a new life. Those changes will

not only impact the eternal destiny of the individual, but also the here and now. One community in particular here is known for problems with drugs, alcohol, adultery, and an array of other problems. It is also known to be dangerous and not exactly the place you want to call home. Over a week in March, we were able to share the gospel and disciple many people. The home church responsible for this area, will be working with the community in the coming days to help them embrace the lessons of the Bible that will continue to make a difference in their lives.

One evening, we had 8 ladies show up for Bible Study. All eight made decisions for Christ including an 84 year old, a 76 year old and a 67 year old. Let's face it; those ladies obviously have a limited amount of time left in their lives here on earth. It always makes my heart sing when Senior Citizens come to Christ!

The single most positive decision a person can make is the one to follow Jesus Christ. Does that eliminate all problems in this life? Absolutely not! However, Jesus does provide a peace that passes all understanding and will lead believers in the right direction. Following him has that same trickle down effect. Good decisions will impact you and others - your family, your neighbors, your community, your church, your country and even the world!

I will continue to pray for the people of Bahia. It will be exciting to hear future reports on the changes that take place. The trickle down effect will have eternal impact! Make a good decision today and eternally impact those around you for good!

**84-Year-Old Maria**





## Your Witness is Your Fitness

By Erin Lewis of Curves, Pickens, SC (864) 898-2400

Most of us don't assume a connection between our physical health and our witness for Jesus Christ. We know in order to be effective witnesses in a fallen world that we must portray the outward signs of a Christian (kindness, patience, a giving spirit, etc.). In the same way that our actions show the world we are His, our

physical fitness is a testament of our relationship with Jesus.

If our bodies are temples to the Lord and the Holy Spirit actually resides in these same bodies, shouldn't we take the best care of our bodies? And what if the Lord asked you to run ½ mile and tell someone about Jesus, could you do it? What if you were called to evangelize in a remote part

of the world? Would you be physically fit enough to endure? Does your body reflect discipline, love and care? Or does it reflect over-indulgence, laziness, and indifference?

We can show God our gratitude and obedience by taking care of the bodies He gave us. Our bodies are a living testament to Him.

## I Can Do All Things Through Christ Who Gives Me Strength

By Jennifer Winch



It didn't matter what I did, I have always struggled with my weight. This past summer, I decided I was going to do something

about it, no matter how hard it was. I prayed that God would give me wisdom, guidance, strength, courage, and determination to lose weight and not stop until I was much healthier!! I am not going to tell you it has been easy, because it has not!!! But I will tell you that it is so worth it!!

Two months after I turned 23, I found out I had a problem with my thyroid. Long story short, the specialist thought I had thyroid cancer. I had my thyroid removed, and praise the Lord, no cancer!! I take medicine everyday to replace what my thyroid does. (Your thyroid is like the "command center" for all your organs. It controls your energy level, metabolism, etc. If it isn't working properly, you can have lots of problems). You can still lose weight without a thyroid; it just makes it a little harder.

I started my journey Aug. 18, 2010, one week after I turned 34. Since then, I have lost 61 lbs. I knew I was overweight, but really did not realize how much. I still felt the same on the inside as I did before. I had tried many times to lose weight, but would get discouraged and quit. It's frustrating when you exercise an hour a day, 4-5 days a week, and only lose ½-1 lb. that week. I was afraid to start trying again and not be able to finish.

My husband, Cary, was "officially" diagnosed with diabetes in Sept. 2009. He was admitted to the hospital for 7 days with complications. His illness was a major eye opening event for me. The surgeon told me that if Cary continued with his uncontrolled diabetes, that he would not be around to see our girls graduate from high school. WOW!!! I

realized then that I had to make a change for him too. I also realized that I have to be a good role model for my 2 girls!! If I don't do it, who will?? (*Well, Cary, too, of course, but you know what I mean.*) And besides, God loaned them to me. He knew we were the best ones to raise them up. I need to be healthy so I can. If I am overweight, I put myself at risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, and the list goes on and on. I started processing how to be healthier at that point.

Let's talk about Food!! I am a carb addict!! (Hello my name is Jennifer Winch & I am addicted to carbs!!) I could eat my weight in carbs everyday and be perfectly happy! Mac and cheese, chocolate chip pizza, banana pudding, my mama's 5 flavor pound cake...mmm...the list never ends. The first change was to start making a conscious effort to choose foods that are healthier!! Don't get me wrong, I still struggle! (BUT...I can do ALL things through Christ). Now I eat a low calorie, low glycemic index diet (a diabetic diet). What does that mean? It means I choose foods low in carbs & high in fiber. I have basically quit eating bread and sugar. I am eating more meats and green veggies (asparagus, broccoli, green beans, etc). Portions are important too. I may eat peas, but only have ¼ c. instead of ½ c. Water is very important!! My goal is to drink 100-120 oz. a day. And instead of sugar I prefer stevia in the raw. I can tell a difference if I eat greasy or sweet foods. I don't feel as good.

However, I do splurge on occasion to keep my sanity. I will eat 1-2 small bites instead of a huge serving. It's crazy, but my favorite foods don't taste the same anymore. (I know. I was shocked too!! See, you CAN do ALL things through Christ!!). My favorite new food is "Ole Mexican Extreme Wellness Wraps" from Ingles. They have 12g fiber & 5g carbs. So essentially they are negative 7 carbs. You can use them for ALL kinds of

meals!! Bacon wraps, sandwiches, pizzas, chili dogs, taco night, etc. The possibilities are endless.

Exercise! For me it is just as important as eating better. My typical exercise routine is 4 days a week. I run a 5k (3.1miles) 3 days and the other day I do 45-60 mins. of cardio or yoga. When I first started exercising, I did the elliptical for 30 mins. and thought I was going to pass out. After I had been exercising regularly for several weeks, I really wanted to try running, but I was chicken. I was afraid I would get on the treadmill (with people watching) and not be able to run. I thought about it for 2 weeks. I prayed about it and told God my fears. Then, one day I walked into the Y and every elliptical was taken. Really?? Every single one??!! Yes, every single one. Guess what was open?? Yep, the treadmill. I said, "Okay God. I got it, here I go." I hopped on and pushed the 5k button. I ran for 30 seconds & thought I would quit breathing. I walked the rest of the 5k that day. But every time I went to the Y, I would go back to the treadmill to walk/run. I started competing with myself each time I went. I tried to run a little longer and go a little faster. Now I can say I am ADDICTED to RUNNING!!!

Several weeks ago I got on the treadmill to run. I wasn't really "feeling it". After 90 sec. of running I was ready to quit. But I told myself #1) you can do ANYTHING for 30 more seconds and #2) most importantly you can do ALL things through Christ who gives you strength. Every step I took I repeated, 'I can do ALL things through Christ who gives me strength'...'for the next 30 seconds'. I said it to the rhythm of my feet hitting the treadmill. I did it!!! I ran for 10 min. & 30 sec. without stopping!! HOLY COW!! I could not believe I had run for that long & didn't stop!!!! If I can do it, ANYONE can!!! Because God WILL give you strength! It's amazing what you can accomplish if you put your mind to it. Your mind is so powerful!!!

# I Can Do All Things (Cont'd)

By Jennifer Winch

Just as Pastor Stuart preached a couple of Sundays ago, you must have a determined mindset. Every day I must have a determined mindset to be a healthy example for my girls. I must be deter-

mined to be a light that shines brightly for Christ. Never underestimate yourself!! You can do it!!

If you sincerely ask God, He will help you make good food and exercise choices.

He will help you be a good example for the lives you impact. Life is only a vapor. Spend every 30 seconds making it count!!

Remember, whatever the challenge...you can do anything for 30 more seconds & "I can do ALL things through Christ who strengthens me" (Phil. 4:13)!

By Cathy Whisnant

## Are You Making a Mistake?



Several weeks ago my husband did a series of messages entitled "The Seven Worst Mistakes a Church Can Make," found in the book of Revelation. In these letters to the churches, the Lord tells them what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong. Of course, we know the concerns the Lord had for these churches were about their relationships with Him.

After reflecting on the concerns the Lord had for the churches, I think we can also see what happens in our lives that many times cause our marriages to grow stale. With this thought in mind, examine your marriage! What are you doing right and wrong? Are you making the same mistakes in your marriage as these seven churches were making in their relationship with God?

**Church 1: Ephesus** This was a dynamic group of people. They worked hard, but they had left their first love. They let other things take their focus off of God. What about your marriage? Do you work hard to keep things together, but you have fallen away from the love you felt when you married your husband? Are you allowing other people or circumstances to take your focus off of your marriage? Go back and recount those days when you were dating! Remember the "goose bumps" you got when he picked you up. You can still have those if you return to your first love.

**Church 2: Smyrna** These were a faithful bunch but when persecution came, they almost chose to give up and close the doors. Do you feel like giving up in your marriage? This letter ends with saying, "Don't quit but stay the course. I have a life-sized crown ready for you." Listen, God sees the pain and the hurt. But He tells you to hang in there...stay the course. He has a great reward awaiting you for your faithfulness to your husband.

**Church 3: Pergamum** This was a compromising group. They were compromising their beliefs and giving into the pressures of the world they faced at that time. The pressures today, I believe, are far greater and we seem to have little resistance to worldly beliefs. We seem to think that seeking the things of this world is far more important than our marriages. Do not believe Satan's lies! The marriages we are building should be built on the foundation of Christ and His Word, not the world's crumbling foundation.

**Church 4: Thyatira** Many of these members were hanging out with women who had no morals and no values. It seems as if anything went for them as it does in our world today. What kind of woman, what kind of wife are you when no one is looking? What are your secret desires? We may think we have it hidden, but be assured that God has x-ray vision! Become the Godly woman He created you to be!

**Church 5: Sardis** This church had a reputation for working hard, but also for being

dead. Do you work hard at your job and at play, but put no effort into your marriage? Marriage must be nurtured in order to grow! Galatians 6:7 tells us a person reaps what he sows. What are you sowing into your marriage? Death will come to any marriage where the job, hobbies, and friends come first. But life comes to the marriage where praying together, studying God's Word together, and worshiping together comes first!

**Church 6: Philadelphia** These church members were faithful, but they had little strength. So many times we feel we have been faithful to our marriage, yet we get little back in return. God says that little is much when He is in it! Galatians 6:9 tells us not to grow weary when doing good. God rewards the faithful, so keep your head held high and know that God sees your faithfulness.

**Church 7: Laodicea** Oh, this is the church we all remember! God said they were neither hot nor cold and it made Him sick. Are you really putting your all into your marriage or are you just half-hearted in your actions and your love? It's time, as I have already mentioned, to return to your first love. It is time to put the spark back in and light the marriage fire!

If your marriage is struggling today, I hope you will take this advice God had for His church and build your marriage into something extraordinary! I know you can do it!

By Mary Beth Oxendine

## I Surrender All



On the morning that my husband, Tom, died, I asked to be alone with him before they told anyone else. I went in to him and I prayed, "Lord, I don't know how I will make it without Tom, but would You please show me each morning as I am waking up what You want me to do that day..."

Before he would leave for work, Tom would always tell me what he needed me to do for him that day and then he would

wrap his arms around me and pray for me! After Tom's death, I asked Christ to be my husband and the father to our children so I needed the Lord to tell me each morning what he wanted me to do.

On the Monday morning after Tom's death, when I was waking up, I knew what I was to do. After breakfast, I called Duke Power and made a change to a program where we pay a set amount for electricity for 11 months. On the 12<sup>th</sup> month, either I pay Duke or they pay me depend-

ing on how much I am under or over the amount. Then, I had the cable and internet shut off and changed our phone plan to just a house phone with no caller ID or call waiting and a block on long distance.

I let our cell plan go and I changed it to a cell plan with only \$10 monthly usage and no contract. Then I only gave the number to my children. It was turned off except when I was in the car so they could reach me.

## I Surrender All (Cont'd)

By Mary Beth Oxendine

Three months later after I had gone through our emergency fund, I got my first check from Tom's retirement with the State. I understood why God had prompted me to take the actions before. There was a delay--the check should have come in 4-6 weeks, but it came after 3 months. That's when I realized that my income had dropped by 70% over what we had received in September before my husband died.

The biggest blessing was that Tom died with no debt! Because he not only believed in living the economics that he taught, he was very careful with the resources God put in his hands. He always obeyed Titus 2 and we lived it out as a family.

We decided that I would come home after

Josh was born. Every year since we were married, he told me what I was to do if he died. The first time he talked to me about this was just weeks after we were married and it scared me to death. I called long distance to my mom. When I told her what he told me, she said, "Mary Beth, he is an economist and he will do this every year of your marriage. He is a planner. So honor him and reassure him that you will do as he wishes. Then, he will be able not to worry!"

Two days before Tom died, he told me I was not supposed to go back to work if anything happened to him. Like every year, I promised that I would obey his wishes so for the three years since his death I have been home. The blessing of no debt helped me be able to do what I

promised. I cut back our living 70% and there were wonderful things the Lord has taught me and our children during this time.

Tom had other things in place so that it wouldn't have been such a drastic drop, but my age, the losses in the economy and other things that he trusted would be there, weren't.

But Christ had a different plan, one to teach me about greater trust--that now Christ was our provider, protector and defender. We would see His mercies anew every day!!

*All to Jesus I surrender;  
All to Him I freely give;  
I will ever love and trust Him,  
In His presence daily live.  
I surrender all, I surrender all;  
All to Thee, my blessed Savior,  
I surrender all.*

-Judson W. Van DeVenter



## The Majestic Buzzard

One summer evening a few years ago, my husband came into the house and said, "Honey, you're not gonna believe this--there is a huge hawk walking around outside our back door."

He was right—I couldn't believe it! I opened the back door to see this big, majestic bird strutting around our back steps like he owned the place. His chest was puffed out and when I opened the back door, although I was only a few feet from him, he didn't even flinch or try to move away. He just glared at me like I could be his next prey. It was one of those surreal experiences that makes you wonder, "Am I really seeing this?"

The bird was brown, quite beautiful and larger than any bird I had ever seen up close in real life. He looked to be the size of a small toddler, just walking around. It seemed the bird had been injured and couldn't fly out of our fenced-in back yard. With an intimidating beak like that, we were afraid to get too close to check it out either.

In fact, we wouldn't let our kids go out in the yard. (*He really looked like he could carry off a small child.*) We didn't trust this bird with his glaring eyes, puffed out chest and that creepy, methodical stride. Hate to admit it but I was afraid to go out there too. *It was like being under house arrest by 'Big Bird'.*

I decided to do some research on the bird. I 'googled' birds of North America, in particular those native to the Southeastern U.S. I pulled up bird pictures and soon discovered that our majestic hawk, was truly...well, a...buzzard! Not even a fancy buzzard...common buzzard was the term under the picture.

You've got to be kidding me! Not quite the regal eagle we thought it was! Here we were thinking it was a hawk and a bird that Animal Control would revere and want to help us with. But, would they really want to help us with a bird that spent its days eating rotting, dead carcasses? Eewwwh! ...Needless to say, we were relieved when the bird was strong enough to fly away the next day! We were free at last!

Christians too can be all puffed up and proud like this majestic buzzard...strutting around like we really have something to brag about when truly we don't. Sometimes it's a big problem for those Christians who have the most going for them, ...those who are at church every time the doors are open, ...those who give every time the plate is passed, ...those who are there every time there is a need. Like the old Mac Davis song says, "Lord, it's hard to be humble when I'm perfect in every way!" Lord, help us!!

Perhaps no one understood this struggle with pride more than Peter. After all, he walked on water and got picked to be the Rock that Christ built the Church on,

definitely a couple of 'head swelling' achievements.

Bragging to Christ in Matthew 26:35, Peter declared, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you."

Guess he didn't feel too cocky after he denied Christ three times before the cock crowed that morning just as Christ had predicted. In fact, Peter was so broken by his denial that the Bible says he went outside and wept bitterly.

He must have learned from the experience though. Later on in 1 Peter 5:5-7, Peter calls us down off of our high horses all the way down to our knees. *...All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time.*

Maybe we should rewrite the old Mac Davis song to be... "Lord, it's easy to be humble when I compare myself to You and I fail so miserably trying to be perfect in every way!"

Truth is I'd rather be a bad songwriter, than a majestic buzzard any old day, wouldn't you?!?...:o)

### *Proverbs 29:23*

*A man's pride brings him low,  
but a man of lowly spirit gains honor.*



## Grace In The Wilderness Ministries

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### FOCUS SCRIPTURE VERSE:

Isaiah 43:19

...I will even make a way in the wilderness, and rivers in the desert.

Grace In The Wilderness is an out-reach ministry for Today's Busy Woman. Our mission is to encourage women of all ages:

- To look upward to God as they discover Him in a new and deeper way,
- To look inward as they discover who they are in Christ, and
- To look outward as they discover God's plan for their lives.

We appreciate your prayers and support. Donations are also appreciated and may be made payable to Grace In The Wilderness Ministries (address to the left).

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Women's Conference  
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"A Special Day for Special Moms"  
June 25, 2011  
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*Sometimes you put walls up not to keep people out, but to see who cares enough to break them down. -Anonymous*

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