

Gracie's Way

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



Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness

Gracie was the "Queen of Texting".

She could walk...and text, dry her hair... and text, eat...and text, talk on the phone...and text...and text. And, that was before she met her new boyfriend, Justin, the undisputed "King of Texting". Now her thumbs flew more often and even faster, at warp speed.

Her new boyfriend loved her to death, you could tell by the way he drained the life out of her. He had to know about every conversation she had, every meal she ate and every place that she went. At first, she thought, "How sweet, he cares so much!"

Then one day, his texts became, well, not so sweet. "Where've you been? Why haven't you been in touch with me? You'd rather spend time with your friends than me!"

Truth was Gracie loved spending time with her friends, but she loved spending time with Justin more! Guess she'd have to choose—it was the price she would have to pay to date the cutest guy in school.

One by one her friends faded into the background as they couldn't understand why she had to always put Justin first. One day she told her

best friend, Carli, that she couldn't go to the mall with her, even though the trip had been planned for two weeks. That morning Justin had decided to make other plans for her. Carli was heartbroken and she said, "I hope you wake up soon! When you're ready to be my friend again, call me!"

The relationships with her family became strained too. Justin would get mad if she went shopping with her mom so she made excuses not to go. He forbid her to hang out with her older brother because his friends might come around. And, he especially didn't like her doing things with her youth group at church.

Soon, she was staying home unless she was out with Justin, staying off the phone unless she was talking to Justin, staying miserable unless she was in contact with Justin. Sometimes, she waited all day long just to hear from him, only to find out he had been off with his friends. Gracie and Justin were always arguing but, in the end, she always apologized because it was always her fault for upsetting him.

Soon, Gracie's favorite cousin, Brittany, came for a visit from out of town. Brittany was 18, two years older, very popular, pretty and smart. Gracie had always

looked up to her. In a short time, Brittany picked up on her little cousin's dating "bondage", but she kept her opinions about it to herself.

Then one afternoon, Brittany walked into the room she was sharing with Gracie just as Gracie was hanging up the phone from talking with "Prince Harming" and she wasn't looking all too happy.

Gracie gave Brittany a "Help Me!" look. "Big Cuz" walked over, hopped up on the bed beside Gracie, put her arm around her and said, "Want some advice?" Gracie slowly nodded.

"Don't lose who you are trying to hold on to this guy! If he really cares, he'll want you to be yourself, have friends and have fun! A girl has to become the best she can be as an individual before she can be great as part of a couple. Maybe you need a little more "Me" time first!" Then Gracie replied, smiling through her tears, "Yeah, 'Me and My Friends' time and 'Me and my Family' time!"

Then she walked over, picked up the phone and dialed...

"Hey, Carli, wanna go to the mall with me and Brittany?," said Gracie, excitedly.

"Yes, that's right.....I just woke up!"

By Sharon Hawkins

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Special points of interest:

- Watch for our Grace In The Wilderness Teen Girl Conference in October 2010.
- We're on Facebook. Become a fan of the Grace In The Wilderness Page. Look us up...



Proverbs 19:8
He who gets wisdom loves his own soul; he who cherishes understanding prospers.



Going Home



By Marie Pritchett

Recently I took a trip with my Mom, my daughter, my sister, my niece and my nephew.

We went to Michigan, the place where we lived when I was a little girl and where Sonya and I had spent the summers with our grandparents after we moved to South Carolina. It had been 22 years since I had been back and I was excited to show my daughter, Ali, where I had gone to school, where my grandparents had lived and for her to get to know the family that we rarely get to see.

Sonya and I wanted so badly to see the house where we had lived. We sat in the driveway making pictures and finally got the courage to go up and ask if we could come inside. The new owner (who had lived there for 30 years) was a kind, older gentleman. He graciously allowed us to take a look at the house that had been our home so many years before. The house looked nothing like I had remembered. The kitchen was filled with dirty dishes. Boxes and papers filled

every corner, and the stairways were in much need of repair. But none of that mattered.

As I looked around I remembered the Christmas Sonya and I woke to find Santa delivering toys in our living room, and the bedroom where I shared lots of late night talks with my MaMa who lived with us.

Sonya and I were talking on top of each other's sentences "Do you remember when...?" or "Do you remember this...?". We felt like kids again. It was so fun reliving all those wonderful childhood memories that we shared. The house had changed so much but our memories could never be taken away. Going home was wonderful.

Have you ever thought about what it is going to be like when we finally go to our Heavenly home? The Bible says there will be no sickness, death or tears. There will be no darkness and there will be no separation from God. We will walk on streets of gold and beside crystal clear waters. Can you imagine? I get chill bumps just thinking about it.

July 1 is the 5th anniversary of my son, Josh's, going home. When Josh entered Heaven, there were no dirty dishes, no trash in corners and no repairs needed. Everything was beautiful and perfect.

Although my heart is heavy I'm glad for God's promise that one day my family will live together again for all eternity in our Heavenly Home.

Revelation 21:21 "...The great street of the city was of pure gold, like transparent glass."

John 14:2-3 "In my Father's house are many rooms...I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you will be there also."

2 Peter 3:13

But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness.



Facing the Giants...

My boyfriend wants to have sex. I know I'm not supposed to have sex before marriage but I love him and I don't want to lose him. What should I do?

If he really loved you, he wouldn't push you into doing something you wouldn't want to do. Age 14

If he really loved you, then he would respect your decision to wait. Age 16

If he really loved you, he wouldn't pressure you into doing something that you know God wants you to wait on. Before you are even faced with this situation. KNOW YOUR ANSWER. Age 15

If he loves me, then he will respect my choice to not have sex until marriage. Age 13

Although when you are young, it is natural to say..."I won't ever do that. I'm waiting for marriage".... but when you begin dating someone you sometimes realize how much you love them and sex is usually the first way that a person will choose to express that love. One of the risks involved is that even if it does not end in an unwanted pregnancy or

in other unwanted factors, you could be left with a broken heart or a space between you and your boyfriend. Something that is supposed to make you feel so whole will only leave you empty when it is not in God's time, which is after marriage. If that guy is asking you to do something you do not want to do, stop and think, does he really care about you? The word "Love" is used too lightly and is often a factor in deciding to have sex. Explain to your boyfriend that you want to wait and how beautiful it would be to share a part of yourself with him after marriage. Sharing this intimacy after marriage secures the blessing of belonging to only each other and giving a gift that is solely yours and his. Decide if losing him is better than losing yourself and pray for God to bring you the strength to decide. Age 18

The answers these girls give are all correct. And yes, your boyfriend may want to have sex but YOU make the final decision of how far to go! Your boyfriend will only go as far as YOU LET HIM.

You have to take responsibility for yourself. Be very careful because sometimes you may let it go *farther than you intended*. Do not put yourself in a situation to fail. You know sex before mar-

riage is wrong so then stay away from the places that will allow that opportunity to happen. Flee from sin. Satan will trap you every chance he gets, stand firm in your faith and FLEE. God gives us *many, many* warnings that our flesh is weak!

Matthew 26:41 Keep watching and praying that you may not enter into temptation; the spirit is willing, *but the flesh is weak*."

1 Corinthians 6:18 Flee immorality. Every *other* sin that a man commits is outside the body, but the immoral man sins against his own body.

If your boyfriend will not wait to have sex then you have two choices to make. You can give in to your boyfriend or you can give in to God!! Either way, you are making the decisions so be willing to face the outcome- good or bad!

God understands you want a close relationship with your boyfriend but sex is not the answer to get that close relationship. Yet the decision is yours and the consequences of your actions are also yours. The Lord is guiding you...are you willing to listen and obey ??

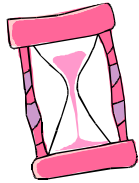
By Brenda Horne

Facing the Giants..con't

Job 11:14-15 *if you put away the sin that is in your hand and allow no evil to dwell in your tent, then you will lift up your face without shame; you will stand firm and without fear.*

Psalms 27:14

Psalm 27:14 Wait for the LORD; Be strong and let your heart take courage; Yes, wait for the LORD.



Right on Time When "WAIT" Seems to be the Hardest Word

By Lynn Cowell

Finally, my sweet sixteen birthday arrived. *What was I going to get?* That's what was on my mind! My parents got it right; they gave me a unique keychain with a key to their car. Now obviously, I would have preferred to have a keychain with a key to my *own* car, but still I loved it! That key represented freedom; independence. Exactly what I was craving at that time! They took the time to pick out something they knew I would like. They planned ahead to have the key made. It was the right gift at the right time.

Now, if my parents had given me that exact same gift when I was 6, that would have been totally weird; way inappropriate. At 6, I would have wondered, "What is this was for? Maybe I'm getting that motorized Barbie car I've been dreaming of!" No, wait that would have been a dream. I never did get the Barbie car! Anyway, at 16, my parents knew what to give me and when to give it.

God our Father does the same thing only way better. He gives good gifts to us, His children. James 1:17 says "Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows." Not only does He give good gifts, but He knows perfectly what to give and when to give it too. His gifts are not spur of the moment because He forgot that a special day was on its way (like your brother who scrawls on a piece of paper that he'll buy you something when he gets paid!). God's gifts are all about perfect timing.

When I was in school, I ate, lived and breathed wanting a guy. His name was Greg. I wanted to be able to say he was mine and I was his. Now all through

high school Greg never did come around my way. (I would have settled for another guy if only there was interest. There just wasn't any interest from the ones I was interested in. Ever been there?!)

I prayed about Greg. I even prayed for Greg! But, God seemed to have His IPOD cranked up too high when it came to those prayers of mine, because He wasn't answering or at least He wasn't saying what I wanted to hear. I was so caught up in wanting this guy, I completely missed all of the other great gifts God had already given me like some really incredible friends who I had some super crazy moments with! You see, I didn't get that God's perfect gifts are all about *timing*. I wanted the guy and I wanted him now! Fortunately, even though I didn't wait patiently, I did in fact wait! In my own way, I trusted that even though I didn't like it, He had to know what He was doing.

After high school, I went away to Bible school. About eight months in, you'll never guess who called me...that's right! Greg! Only this time, it still wasn't God's time. You see, I had committed to Him that for that school year I wasn't going to date...at all. I was going to focus on loving Jesus with 100% of me. So I had to tell Greg, "Not now!" I thought I was going to die! Literally. I think it was the hardest thing I had ever done.

After school got out, I headed back home to visit my parents. The very first Sunday I went to church with them guess who was there? Greg. He asked me out and this time I knew that the answer was "yes". It was God's good and perfect gift at His good and perfect time. I forgot to tell you Greg's last name. It's Cowell. Yep...that's my last name. As I said: perfect gift; perfect time.

I haven't always been that patient.

When I was a little kid, one time I couldn't reach my jacket that was hanging on the last peg just above the cement steps that led to our basement. I called out for help, but just refused to wait. A tumble down those steps produced a black eye that stayed with me for a very long time. I didn't trust that those who loved me would come and do what I needed when I wanted it.

Fortunately, I've grown a bit since I was that little kid. I have seen that when we wait on God, it is great; good and perfect every time. I'll admit, sometimes that waiting is a drag! It even hurts at times. The key is, will we wait and wait patiently, all the while trusting that, in fact, His timing is perfect? Can we trust that He has our best in mind and will do what we need when we need it?

Sometimes we don't and we are just like the 5 year old me. We grow impatient waiting for God's gift. We want the gift and we want it now. So we make the mistake of trying to get the gift by ourselves. Have you ever tried to get something by yourself? Are you tempted, like me, to go and get it any way, even if there is a possibility that if it doesn't go just right you could end up with way more than a black eye?

There are times, with all of our prayers, (if we would admit it, maybe we are a bit like the screaming and whining child) God seems to be saying "no" or at least saying "not now". It is here, in the place where our desires intersect His will, that we have to trust. It is here that we must trust that Father knows best and that every gift comes from the Father. Every time, in His time, the gift is good and it is perfect.

The Interview: Kirbi and Donovan (PART 1)

By Brenda Horne

OH NO, I'M 17 AND I'M PREGNANT !

Meet Donovan and Kirbi Bliss, they are very active members of their church, Clearview Baptist. They have two beautiful little girls and they are happily married....but that was not always the case. In the beginning, Kirbi and Donovan's relationship was not an easy one, especially when she became pregnant at age 17. I had the privilege of interviewing Kirbi and Donovan about their relationship at that time and how difficult it was for them both.

How did you become a couple? **Kirbi:** We met in 10th grade as friends and started dating. **Donovan:** I sat behind her in class in 10th grade and we became a couple after that. I wasn't really thinking far enough ahead to consider children, I was just interested in having fun.

At that time, what were your thoughts about sex before marriage and what had you been taught about it? **K:** When Donovan and I started dating I told him up front that I wanted to wait until I was married. I had always planned on waiting until I was married. **D:** I knew sex was wrong before marriage but I really didn't care. My parents never really taught me about sex or anything pertaining to it. It was mostly a joking subject in my house. I quit going to church in the 10th grade so I wasn't taught anything about church or how God expects us to live morally. **Do you think if you had continued to go to church it might have changed how you dealt with things?** **D:** I really believe that if I had stayed in church, my life would have been different. I think it would have taught me more respect for others and myself. I would have learned to live the way the Lord wanted me to instead of how the world shows you to.

Why didn't you wait? **K:** The longer we dated the harder it was to resist the temptation. Everyone tells teenagers *not* to have sex but no one explains how strong the desire is and how much your feelings overtake you to go through with it. The temptation is so strong and once you reach a certain point it is almost impossible to resist. That is why you should not put yourself in a position to fail.... you think you can stop, but chances are *you will not want to stop*. And once you've gone to far, there is no going back.

When you became sexually active, did you have concerns about it? **K:** At first I was really concerned. **What were your concerns?** **K:** I was worried about an STD but not about getting pregnant because I was on birth control pills and I thought that was enough. **D:** I had a few concerns about STD's and possibly having a kid, but I just

put it to the back of my mind. **Why do you think your concerns about STD didn't stop you from having sex?** **K:** I guess I just thought it wouldn't happen to me. **D:** We were so young that I figured the chances were pretty slim, and I didn't care all that much.

So you got pregnant while you were taking birth control pills? **K:** Yes, but I was also taking antibiotics. I did not know that antibiotics would affect my birth control pills.

When you found out you were having a baby, how did you respond? **D:** I was so wrapped up in drugs and alcohol when I got Kirbi pregnant, I really didn't have a reaction. I was pretty numb to everything. **K:** I was scared!!

Scared about what? **K:** I left Donovan's house and went and stayed with a friend. I had no idea what I was going to do. I guess it was more like a shock. I could not believe this was happening to me.

Did you think about how scared Kirbi must have been since she was the one having the baby? **D:** I did think about Kirbi but there was nothing I could do about it. We both made the decisions that got us there.

How old were you when you became pregnant? **K:** 17 **D:** 18

Who was the hardest person to tell about your baby and why? **K:** My best friend's mom, I knew she would be so disappointed in me and I didn't want to disappoint her. She was so encouraging to me. She was like my second mom and she loves me very much. **D:** Kirbi told everyone before I had a chance.

How did your parents respond to you getting a girl pregnant? **D:** My parents were both disappointed at first. I think they were afraid I wasn't going to be a good father. I know most of my family had the same thought. My grandmother told me when my daughter was about 3 that I was a lot better father than she thought I was going to be.

Were you scared about your future and the future of your baby? **K:** yes **D:** No **Why?** **K:** Not so much my future but the future of my baby. I didn't know how to raise a child. I was an only child myself and knew nothing about babies. Also how would I support this child? **Why not?** **D:** I dropped out of school at 17 but I had full time job that was stable, so I felt I could take care of her financially.

So you were willing to help support your baby? **D:** The day Cheyanne was born I started paying child support. It was not court ordered but I made a vow to myself that no one would call me a worthless father. I have tried my best to be a good father, financially and in every other aspect. **Did you ever**

think that you didn't want the responsibility of a child? **D:** No, I didn't want that responsibility. I don't think any 18 year old does. But it was coming whether I wanted it or not.

Did you want to get married once you found out you were having a baby? **K:** No **D:** No **Why not?** **K:** I knew we were not ready but I did want us to try to work out our relationship. **D:** We both knew we were not ready for marriage. We were not even together when we got pregnant. **It didn't bother you that you got a girl pregnant that you were not actually dating?** **D:** No, I don't think it did. Kirbi and I still cared for each other, we just couldn't find a way to be happy together.

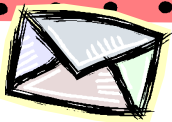
How did you feel about childbirth? **K:** I was scared to death; I passed out at the first Dr. visit when they drew blood. **D:** It wasn't really anything I thought about.

Were you alone during the delivery? **K:** No **Did you want Donovan with you during your delivery?** **K:** yes, He was the only one in the delivery room with me. **D:** **Did you think it was important for you to be in there for the delivery?** **D:** Yes, I wanted to be able to tell my kid that I was there when they were born., though I knew I wasn't going to be able to help Kirbi much in the delivery room .

How difficult was it being so young and pregnant? **K:** It was very hard. I would get so upset just thinking about being pregnant and all the "unknowns" of my future that it would make me physically sick. **D:** I was out of school so it really did not affect me. I knew it was a lot harder on her than me. I probably didn't think about it too much. We both made the decision that got us there and it was our problem to deal with.

Did people/friends treat you differently? **K:** My true friends were there for me but some just faded away. I never heard anyone say anything negative to me but I am sure they thought it. I did get a lot of "you look too young to have a baby" and I would just say, "I am". **D:** Some people will judge you the minute they see you and others will understand what happened, even if it wasn't right. I think its harder on the girl than the guy. The girl has the job of carrying the baby for nine months, and all the other changes having kids does to you. Unless people are told that a guy has a girl pregnant, no one will know. He doesn't have to go through the nasty looks that are sometimes given to girls about being pregnant.

-----Continued next issue-----



Letter to My Teenage Self: WWJD?

By Marie Pritchett

What am I doing here? How did this happen? I am a "good" girl. I am not like them. I only wanted to "fit in", be a part of the "in" crowd. Something deep inside kept telling me not to come but I thought it would be ok. I told myself that I didn't have to do anything but hang out and have fun. The minute I walked into the room, I knew that I had made a terrible mistake. Several people turned to look at me and began whispering to their friends.

Beer and wine coolers were everywhere. I saw a couple of people handing others pills but pretended that I didn't. Couples were disappearing into the bedrooms. I acted like I was having a great time but I wasn't. I was miserable.

To make things even worse, I saw kids who were a part of my youth group. How could they be in a place like this? Some were even participating with the "partying" crowd. I

tried not to make eye contact with any of them. I did not want them to see me here. I was so ashamed.

Just as I turned to try to leave as quickly as possible, I ran straight into a girl I had tried to witness to many times at school. She looked me straight in the eye and called me a "hypocrite". My heart stopped. I felt like I would be sick. Nothing had ever hurt me more! I stumbled for words to explain why I was here but she heard none of it. All she saw was me doing exactly what I had tried to tell her was wrong. Even though I was only drinking Dr. Pepper I had not only hurt my testimony, I had hurt God.

Why didn't I listen to the Holy Spirit? I knew that God was trying to tell me not to come but I had convinced myself that as long as I didn't do anything bad that it could not hurt. I was so wrong! How could God ever forgive me? Would my testimony be ruined forever? What if the girl from school never accepted

Jesus as her Lord and Savior and spent eternity in Hell? How could one bad decision hurt so much?

Have you ever been in this situation or one like it? I am sure most of us have. You may try to convince yourself that you can "change" them when in reality it may do the opposite...they may change you. Surround yourself with people that encourage and bring you up, not ones who want to see you fall.

Get a WWJD bracelet and before making a decision ask yourself, "What Would Jesus Do?" In each of your right and wrong choices, always choose obedience.

Exodus 23:2 "Do not follow the crowd in wrong doing".

1 John 1:6 "If we claim to have fellowship with him yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live by the truth".



If a Hoppy Toad Had Wings

By Sharon Hawkins

Hannah Hoppy Toad, was born in Bog Hollow to a great family who came from a long line of the finest Hoppy Toads. They were all great jumpers and their beautiful skins were the richest, most velvety green. Hannah had long, graceful legs. She was loved more than she realized by her family and her friends.

Bog Hollow was a beautiful meadow and all the little Hoppy Toads leaped and played among the tall grass, all except for Hannah. One day when Hannah was young, she had watched a butterfly flit across the pond and land in the meadow on the other side. The meadow was called Faraway Dreams. From that day on, Hannah sat like a bump on a log watching the meadow across the big pond. She thought it was the most beautiful place she had ever seen and that the grass was greener there. Her friends begged her to hop and play, but she refused. She would just say, "How I wish I lived in Faraway Dreams. If only I had wings, I would fly away."

Day after day, she sat and longed for what she didn't have. Slowly, because she didn't use her elegant legs to hop and play, they became bony and frail. Her beautiful green skin faded as she wouldn't leave even long enough to go eat the flies in the meadow. She just ate the dead insects around the log where she was sitting and being a bump.

Her parents had tried to talk to Hannah, but they couldn't reach her. She was so distant... so far away in Faraway Dreams. One day Hannah's Grandma came to find her, she was worried because she had heard Hannah was unhappy. She hopped up on the log beside

Hannah and saw the desperate state she was in as she sat staring across the pond. Grandma had been around the Hollow a time or two and thought she'd seen it all. But never had she seen such a sight as hollow-eyed Hannah sitting there pining away for Faraway Dreams. It was heartbreaking.

Grandma said tenderly, "Hannah, what is it, honey? Why are you so sad?" Hannah cried, "Oh, how I wish I lived in Faraway Dreams. If only I had wings, I would fly away." Grandma said, "What is it about Faraway Dreams that you long for?" Hannah looked confused, "I'm not sure", she replied, "It's too far away and I can't see what's there. But I think it must be a beautiful meadow with flowers of every color and a fresh, cool nook with lily pads and all the flies a girl could eat. And there have to be handsome, strong boy frogs my age. And, look, the grass is greener in Faraway Dreams."

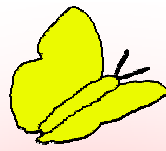
Grandma said, "That grass isn't greener, it's just a shadow off the mountain making it look that way. Follow me, I have to show you something." They hopped down a trail to a clearing. As Hannah looked out, she saw her friends laughing, playing and hopping from one lily pad to another in the cool, clear pond. There was a fragrant field of rainbow flowers that was breathtaking. She'd never seen flowers up close before or smelled them, for that matter. She had only seen flowers faraway in Faraway Dreams. She watched as her friends caught all the flies they could eat, and the air was still thick with more. Boy Hoppy Toads were playing Leap Frog Ball in the field, their froggy muscles glistening in the sun.

Hannah turned to Grandma and said, "Thank you for bringing me here, my eyes have been opened! Everything that I was wishing for was right here all along, right here in Bog Hollow! Oh, why have I wasted all that time pouting when I could have been enjoying my life here?!"

Grandma smiled, "I'm so glad you realize that, Hannah! Hoppy Toads were never meant to have wings. God put you right here and provided everything to make you happy." Hannah agreed, "Now that I know the truth...wild horse flies couldn't drive me away."

Aren't we just like Hannah? Often wishing for what we don't have, while not enjoying all the awesome stuff we do have? Maybe I can't sing but I can play the piano. Maybe you can't draw but you can write a touching story. Maybe your friend can't speak in a group but she's the one everyone goes to for advice. We all have gifts and God means for us to use them to glorify Him. We are His hands and feet and we are all different. If we were all right hands, there'd be a lot of waving going on, but little else would get done.

And, wouldn't it be boring if we all looked alike? God loves variety and He made us each beautifully unique. No one else has your face, body style, hair, skin, family, friends, school, church or the same personality, gifts and desires as you. You're God's rare, precious princess. The next time you're thinking of flying away, just remember a Hoppy Toad wasn't meant to fly,...then LEAP FOR JOY right where you are!!!



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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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Courage is being scared to death and saddling up anyway. —John Wayne

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