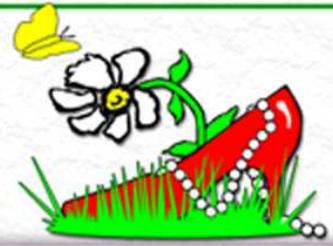


GRACE IN THE WILDERNESS

A MINISTRY FOR TODAY'S BUSY WOMAN



I WILL EVEN MAKE A WAY IN THE WILDERNESS, AND RIVERS IN THE DESERT - ISAIAH 43:19



Lessons From A Basket of Laundry

By Sharon Hawkins

Grace Ankles, Today's Busy Woman

has a plate that's full to overflowing. Her tasks may vary from day to day but there is a common thread that runs through each one—LAUNDRY!!

Her day might include working 8 hours, carrying her son to basketball practice, running by the store...and laundry! Another might include errands for her parents, balancing her checkbook, a science project ...and laundry! Sometimes, it's church, homework, making dinner ...and laundry! Then on her day off, it's cleaning the bathrooms, the kitchen, the floors ...and laundry! She does have an occasional day of leisure too. It might be shopping with a friend...and laundry; or a movie with her husband...and laundry.

No matter how she cuts the deck, she always draws the 'laundry' card. Why is that? Could it be that all the cards in Grace's deck are 'laundry' cards? No, silly, everyone knows it's because she loves to do laundry! Yeah, right!!

Her husband loves to help her with laundry, he'll come and stand and talk to her the whole time she's doing it. The kids do their part by wearing as many layers as possible and by throwing clothes in the hamper that were worn for 30 minutes; or, better yet, clothes not worn at all (*everybody knows the old get-Mom-to-wash-it, dry-it-and hang-it-up-again-so-I-don't-have-to-hang-it-up-or-iron-it trick*).

Moms especially love that one!!! Not!!!

But laundry is not without its hidden rewards—just over the last year, Grace Ankles collected a total of \$4.12 in change (enough to buy her a box of dryer sheets in her favorite fragrance, Y-E-S!!!!), 8 Lego mini-figures, a tube of lipstick molded to the inside of her teenage daughter's pocket, and 4 slightly water-logged sticks of gum—yum!

While she definitely doesn't LOVE to do laundry, she has plenty of time to reflect on the stories it tells as she sorts, folds and hangs. Those hard to clean grass stains tell of a healthy boy able to run and jump and "wallow" on the ground. A dirty dress shirt meant a recent meeting her husband had with his boss when he got a new job promotion that won't require them to move. Her own shirt needing laundering because Gracie borrowed it, means that her teenage daughter thinks she's at least a little bit cool and their relationship is pretty tight if she's borrowing her clothes!! The fact that her oldest son's clothes are in the laundry at all is the result of his choosing a college close to home which means she gets to enjoy him a little longer before he leaves the nest. :O)!!!

There are also a lot of life lessons in a laundry basket too. Today's Busy Woman often puts too many items in her washer and when it gets off balance, it rattles and shakes

terribly. Her life's like that. She's got to keep it in balance—income with expenses, rest with work (hmmm, both hard to do). Spiritual balance is even more important. She has to balance hard times with clinging hard to God.

Hot water helps the detergent to work better. And, when we get into hot water, we discover just how strong our faith is. And just like washing a fuzzy towel with a sweater makes a fuzzy sweater; having the wrong friends, usually makes us wrong too. Letting the laundry get behind is not a good idea. And letting our problems get out of hand makes our lives harder too. It's best to keep our piles of laundry *and our piles of problems* at a manageable level. We have to keep working at it—taking each little pile to the Lord in prayer, seeking His will, asking Him to wash away our sins and heartaches. Might even make you feel like singing a happy tune while you do the laundry! Now wouldn't that be something?!!

Be of good "CHEER", we can find peace in the piles with the one who gave His "ALL!" Jesus can wash our sins as white as "IVORY SNOW." If you don't know him, be "BOLD" and turn the "TIDE". Only through Him, can we "GAIN" heaven. One day He'll return and "WISK" us away who are saved to live in Heaven with Him forevermore to "SURF" on clouds of glory. And that's something to "SHOUT" about! And, how "FAB!"—NO MORE LAUNDRY, YIPEEEEE!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

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Watch for photos of our recent Grace In The Wilderness Conference for Teens on our GITW Facebook Page

Psalm 51: 2, 7

Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin.

Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.

By the time you receive this newsletter, many of you will have already begun to stress over the upcoming holidays. Fall has arrived and we usually jump start the list by attending Fall Festivals or celebrating Halloween, then we squeeze in Thanksgiving before shifting into high gear for Christmas, which is quickly followed by New Years, then we're all red for Valentine's Day, then green for St. Patrick's Day, and before you know it Easter has arrived with Mother's Day and Father's Day on its heels before a brief summer vacation, then we're Back to School ... and it starts all over again. I'm tired just thinking about it all... and to this list we must add numerous birthdays, anniversaries, weddings, baby showers – you get the idea. Whew. Whose heart rates are up now?

Most of you are familiar with the cliché "when you fail to plan, then you plan to fail." This phrase quite appropriately describes the sentiments of the upcoming holiday season. So, let's set up a strategy to survive this season with sanity intact. 1 Corinthians 14:33 tells us that "God is not the author of confusion," so I've compiled a list of 15 "Don'ts" that I hope will assist you during your holiday preparation and help avoid future chaos.

1. Don't wait until the last minute to do your shopping. You may be more tempted to purchase higher priced items if you are in a hurry. Comparison shop. If you spread your shopping out over several weeks or months, you won't have to come up with so much money at once.
2. Don't be unorganized. Make a shopping list and stick to it. This will help insure you do not overlook someone and it will help you remain within your budget.
3. Don't set unrealistic expectations. Know your limits personally and financially and stick to them rather than over-extend and create more stress. Instead of trying to keep up with the Joneses, keep up with the sentiment and the real 'reason

for the season' instead. There's no need to get the biggest or most expensive gift.

4. Don't shop during peak hours. Avoid crowds. Shop early or late. Crowds create stress and confusion and divert your focus from your game plan usually leading to impulse buying and overspending.
5. Don't always pay with cash. While doing your shopping, I suggest wisely using a credit card, especially for more expensive purchases for several reasons: only credit cards provide consumer protection—under federal law your liability for fraudulent or disputed charges is limited to \$50 and you have the right to withhold payment while these charges are investigated; if your merchandise is damaged in shipping or delivery, you have the right to return it and refuse payment; and many credit cards require merchants to exchange or replace defective merchandise, protect against no-return policies and extend manufacturer's warranties.
6. Don't get cash advances. The fees with these transactions are significant and you do not receive the benefits mentioned above as with a regular credit card purchase.
7. Don't succumb to high pressure tactics. Know what you're looking for before you enter a store. Be patient and look for bargains. The bad economy means that retailers are marking down their merchandise. Shop around at different stores or online. Chances are you will find what you are looking for at a lower price.
8. Don't apply for store credit cards. It is best to not apply for credit during the holiday season. It gives the false impression that you have more money than you actually have and you tend to overspend.
9. Don't buy extended warranties. I would suggest buying the product with a credit card that offers double the warranty period and other benefits.
10. Don't pay for all your purchases with a credit card unless you already have the means to pay it off immediately. Offers of

"buy now and pay later" sometimes have hidden clauses allowing interest to accrue until your first payment. Read the paperwork before signing it, ask questions if you do not understand. If you cannot afford a particular item, look for something similar, less expensive or search for an alternate present.

11. Don't go overboard on decorations. It's not just the Christmas tree that must be decorated. The rest of the house will too and many of us go overboard. Peruse the neighborhood dollar stores. They sell Christmas decorations in all shapes and sizes—silk flowers in holiday colors, kitchen towels, holiday glassware and plates, and serving accessories. Buy a plain wreath and add little trinkets to it, it's lots cheaper.
 12. Don't overspend on food. Obviously food is a very important part of most celebrations. The main reason for celebrations may not be food, but many of the good times we have center around it. Choose one of two of your special recipes to share then buy in bulk and cook in bulk. This saves time and money.
 13. Don't forget incidentals such as cards, candles, stamps and mailing packages. Consider creating a holiday budget. Each category can pertain to a different area of spending. For instance—food, gifts and parties.
 14. Don't throw away your receipts. Most return policies are printed on the back of receipts. If you need to return something later, having your receipt will speed up the process and give you a better chance of getting your money back.
 15. Don't neglect yourself. Be mindful to not over-indulge. Eat well, get plenty of rest and exercise to stay balanced and reduce stress. Take time to enjoy the fruits of your labor.
- As we approach each upcoming holiday, let's follow Christ's example Who "came not to be served but to serve others." (Matthew 20:28)



Titus 2 Wisdom for Women: Rule #3

By Cathy McCormick

Years ago I read a sweet, rich, little book entitled, *If Life Is A Game, These Are The Rules*, by Cherie Carter-Scott. I'd like to share some thoughts from this book as at its heart, it is all about living in faith, not fear.

Rule #3: There are no mistakes, only lessons. As growing Christians we know that NOTHING happens to us by "chance." We are all part of God's grand plan, we are all students in the school of life. In her book, Cherie says, "Human growth is a process of experimentation, trial, and er-

ror, ultimately leading to wisdom." I'd like to modify/amend her statement and rephrase it to read: Spiritual growth is a process of experimentation, trial, and error, ultimately leading to a closer connection with God and the wisdom He endows us with.

Rule #3 (Cont'd)

By Cathy McCormick

I don't know about you, but sometimes it's hard to keep that perspective on life events. At my core, I want to believe that each lesson is leading me one step closer to wisdom, but sometimes it's hard to believe that I'm doing more than going around in endless circles. Sometimes our actions produce grand results; and at other times the results are far less than fabulous.

The question is – what do we do with the seeming defeats? I don't know about you, but I often feel great disappointment, anger, frustration, and failure when my well-intentioned decisions don't pan out the way I expected. It's easy to jump to this depressing conclusion. However, jumping to this negative conclusion only impedes our ability to progress with our life lessons.

Bottom line: There Are No Mistakes, There Are Only Opportunities To Learn. As Emerson said, "Every calamity is a spur and a valuable hint." The fact is...every situation in which we feel we have not lived up to our capabilities is an opportunity to learn something important about our own thoughts and behaviors. That's all fine and good, but how do we make the shift from negative

judgment to receptive student. How do we move into a state of grace as we muddle through the school of life?

Compassion. When we feel we've made a mistake, or behaved in some way we are not proud of, or failed to live up to our own expectations, we tend to judge ourselves. Instead of negative judgment, we need to express compassion, for ourselves, so that we can open up to the lessons that are waiting rather than closing down in self-contempt. God shows us compassion every second of our lives ... we need to love ourselves, to be compassionate to ourselves, just as our Heavenly Father is to us.

Grace/Self-forgiveness. We must be compassionate toward ourselves and release the situation to God so that He can guide us. It's easy to blame others, to rail at God, or to berate ourselves when things aren't going the way we want. We've all been there, done that, and by now we have to know that it is a giant waste of time and effort. When we shower ourselves with compassion and self-forgiveness, there is a stillness that allows God to come back into our hearts and minds and allows wisdom to enter.

And What Is The Lesson We Learn?

Ah, the lesson has become so very clear to me. It is so very simple. When I make decisions based on MY preferences, my demands, my desires alone, I ALWAYS make the WRONG decision. However, I am learning that when I make decisions based on GOD's word, laws, and truth, I ALWAYS make the RIGHT decision.

I am sure that as we continue to grow in faith and in knowledge, "our" preferences will become more like God's. I pray that as I continue my walk with Jesus, I will not have to ask, "What Would Jesus Do?"... I'll know it!

But for now, as I stumble along my path to Zion, I find myself singing Carrie Underwood's great song at the top of my lungs – Jesus Take The Wheel!!!!!! I know through trial and error that when faced with a challenge, with a decision, the very first step I take is to yell --- Jesus Take The Wheel ... I can't do this on my own. And you know what, Jesus always takes the wheel!

There, my sister, is the lesson ... always remember, we are each a precious child of God in whom He is well pleased. When facing a decision, a challenge, don't ask Jesus for the answer; ask Jesus to take the wheel!

By Jo Ann Case



Wiggle Room

Ever worn a pair of shoes or pants that were too tight? Do you pull on the new fangled version of a girdle in hopes of looking more attractive? How many of us have tried a really crazy fad diet in hopes of losing a few quick pounds. Nothing wrong with nice teeth, but do we think sparkly whites are somehow going to make us a better person? What happened to the day when it was ok to embrace your age with a genuine smile brightening the wrinkled face full of wisdom and grace?

It is so easy in our media, celebrity, reality, perfection, plastic, performance driven world to move beyond looking your best to be obsessed with appearance. When we want to impress, we pull out the pointy shoes, ill-fitting clothing, and put on the mask. We say yes to things we do not feel called or gifted to do just to make a good impression. When is the last time you said no to a good thing so that you could do the best thing? Do you buy time to actually think about what saying yes will mean to you, to your family, to God? Focusing on keeping up with the proverbial

Joneses, the exterior, perfectionism or pleasing others is a miserable experience that leaves you hurting, disappointed, exhausted and even bitter. If repeatedly practiced, it can even cause health and relational problems.

We all enjoy our time in our sweats or most comfy pair of shoes. When we decide to take on a project or to relax, we generally reach for the same outfit – the one with wiggle room that allows us to breathe and get the job done. Getting rid of the excess and clutter in our lives is a good thing. When we're constantly busy, we have no down time and can even make those around us nervous.

Earlier in the year, I read about simplifying your life and having some wiggle room and creating margin in your life. What if you had time or money to say yes to the things that are truly good and meaningful? It has been a REALLY good thing to change my focus from doing (performing) to being (relationship). Now, I will admit, it has not been easy to stop performing and to clean up and out and to actually enjoy rest and down time. It has

not been easy admitting my faults and becoming transparent with people and reaching out to others. I'm still working on it and excited about the difference it is making in my life. Twice recently, I've been able to make a small donation to situations that touched my heart because there is now a little wiggle room in my budget. I've also had time to develop relationships with new people from different walks of life and age groups. It has been fun to re-cultivate a couple of friendships I had forgotten along the busy path.

Wonder why as women we don't give ourselves or those important to us the same wiggle room when it comes to our everyday lives? We tend to overload our schedule, have high expectations of our children, our spouses, friends, co-workers, leaders and even ourselves. Have we become so performance driven that we have "girdled" ourselves so tight that we can barely breathe, let alone function properly? Think back on some of the most endearing, fun times in your life. Were you all dressed up with your mask on or did you have wiggle room with no particular plan or place to go?

Wiggle Room (Cont'd)

By Jo Ann Case

Was it time spent with family and friends or time spent with people you barely knew? Was it time you spent performing for the crowd or time you spent being transparent, real and loving on others?

What if we all slowed down, let go of our perfectionism tendencies, spent some down time really talking to those we love and opening our heart to those all around us that are hurting and in need of a friend? What if we simplified our lives and our budgets leaving us wiggle room to help out that friend that is in a bind or giving or volunteering for that cause that touches our hearts? What if we took a few minutes to really think about where we're headed, what we're doing, how we're building our relationships?

Jesus spent most of his time hanging out with his closest friends and family and among the people he met along the way. He was all about relationship. He wasn't in such a big hurry that he had no wiggle room to stop and spend time with the disciples, the hurting, the sick, the seeking and with children! He also spent a

fair amount alone and away from the crowd too. He loved some quiet time in prayer in a garden or time on a boat and going fishing.

In the coming days, clean out a closet and give some stuff away; complete something on your nag list (that stuff always in the back of your mind that takes energy); call up a friend; read a book; go visit your parents or that relative you keep meaning to go see; look your/a child in the eye and really listen when they're talking; pay your spouse special attention; cook a nice meal; sing praise music at the top of your lungs; dance around the house to an old disco tune; take a nap in a hammock; go for a stroll or any number of things that bring joy. Leave the smart phone in the other room, cut the TV off, skip the mall and spend some time in prayer for those you love the most. Create some wiggle room in your life so you can enjoy the simple things. Jesus didn't mean for us to be so uptight that we can't even smile or enjoy our families. I'm convinced that building great relationships with those around you is more important than a list

of accomplishments or volunteer activities on your resume. Balance is important! Cut yourself some slack, don't be afraid to say no, let go, breathe deep, pray, spend time in the Bible and you'll find comfortable wiggle room. Those in your circle will be happy too!

Psalm 46:10

Be still and know that I am God.

Matthew 11:28-30

Come to me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my load is light.

The 23rd Psalm



The Gift

Do you always love the presents you receive? Really? How about that lovely, bright red, energy efficient vacuum cleaner

your husband excitedly gave you your third Christmas together? Or that delightful school bus yellow sweater your Mom lovingly made for you? You know the one you will have to wear or hurt her feelings, although it makes you look like...you guessed it...a yellow school bus!

And, you're not the only one who gets disappointed, remember the look of disgust on Grandma's face as she opened that Birthday present—you know the special one you had so thoughtfully picked out for her. It was a lovely white cat snow globe, because she had had a white cat before going to the nursing home and she loved cats. You were so excited to have found the perfect gift that you were sure she would love. But love was not a word that came to mind as you watched her open her gift. She said, "What is this? Why would you give me that? That's the ugliest thing I've ever seen!"

I'm ashamed to admit this but it was kind of like my boys when they were little and they opened presents that were clothes for Christmas. "Mom, here these are for you!" Well, at least I was excited and I so appreciated them as I apologized to the givers and scolded my boys.

Sometimes in life we are given unexpected gifts that, at the time, seem to us less than ideal. We can have a heart of gratitude or we can have an attitude that stinks to high heaven. "Uh, Lord, thanks, uh, Lord, but why would you give me this? This is hardship, this is chaos, this is pain, this is not cool! Not the blessing that would make my life easier or make me happier. What am I supposed to do with this?"

It was a month after my mastectomy surgery. To say things were very difficult for me was an understatement. Having been diagnosed with breast cancer at a time I was dealing with a federal court case where one of my closest friends had stolen hundreds of thousands of dollars from me, my family and my business for over a decade, had me at an all time low in my life. The burdens were crushing!

At my surgeon's visit that Friday, I asked him what my limitations were from my surgery. He said jokingly, "Don't do any sit ups." "No, that's not exactly what I had in mind," I said. "I was thinking about something a little less strenuous, like lying on my float in the pool." He had told me to wait 24 hours after the visit, then I could. I was so excited! The next night we grilled hotdogs down by our pool and my boys cleaned up. At about 9:30 p.m., I grabbed my float and headed into the pool. I leaned back onto my float and looked up to see at least a trillion stars filling the Dacusville sky. As I lay there, suddenly there was nothing and nobody else in the world but me and God.

I felt God pour the most amazing love on me right there on my "I love Myrtle Beach" float in my pool. I felt it from the top of my head to the soles of my feet. It was overwhelming as tears spilled from my eyes. I heard Him whisper tenderly to my spirit. "Sharon, I love you! I know you don't understand why all this is happening to you, but I want you to trust me. It may not seem like it to you right now

By Sharon Hawkins

The Gift (Cont'd)

By Sharon Hawkins

but this is a gift and I want you to use this for me.” At that moment, I can’t describe the peace that descended on me and the burden that was lifted.

Honestly, if I were picking a gift for myself, it would not be breast cancer, losing my breasts and having my dear friend steal from me—all to hit me at the same time. But, I have no doubt that I am supremely loved by my awesome God and He has a plan for me. His ways are not my ways, and if He says it’s a gift, then with all my heart, I’ll believe that it is and try to accept it with a grateful heart.

His Word says that He is working all things together for the good of those who love the LORD. I believe that! Also, I know He has a plan to give me a hope and a future, also a promise from His Word.

LORD, help me to graciously accept the gifts from you into my life--gifts to grow me, change me and bring you glory—with a grateful heart, not with fear or dread. I know you walk beside me and whatever you call me to do, you’ll make a way!!! I know I can do all things through you because you strengthen me.

LORD, you don’t make mistakes, you know exactly what your gifts to us are meant to accomplish in our lives. By the way, I’m glad you didn’t give me a yellow sweater. From the start you’ve always known pink’s a color that fits me better! :O)! Amen

James 1:17

Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows.

By Brenda Horne



Out of Sorts

This is a cubism self portrait my daughter drew in art class. She did an excellent job on this piece. Of course my daughter doesn’t actually look like this but it does remind me of, well..me! This piece is exactly how I feel about my Christian life.

I try to speak like “true” Christians are supposed to speak. I try to smile like “true” Christians are supposed to smile. I try to look how “true” Christians are supposed to look. But instead of being the “Mona Lisa” of Christianity I end up a big

ole jumbled mess like the cubism of Picasso. Do you ever feel like that? Every Christian out there is picture perfect ... except you?

I find myself praying, “Lord, I just don’t have it together like all those other Christians! I’m broken with random angles, shallow uncertain spaces and non-coherent depth. How could I ever be of any use to you?” Understanding my insecurities, Jesus softly reminds me, “Your imperfection shows **my** perfection, your weakness shows **my** strength, your inability shows **my** ability!”

So even though I look misshapen and my efforts to live for Him seem muddled, my heart belongs to Jesus. And with that, the Master Painter, in His perfection, continually paints me into His cherished Masterpiece.

2 Corinthians 12:9

And he said unto me, my grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.



Taking Care of Me During The Holidays

By Donna Tingle, M.Ed.
Licensed Professional Counselor

The holidays are upon us and it is vital that we find the importance and ability to take care of ourselves. Are you like me, in that by the time the New Year’s confetti is on the floor, you often feel much like it looks? Tattered, trampled on and unappreciated once it’s all over? We, as busy ladies, often exhaust ourselves, frequently unable to enjoy the holidays and lose our sanity in the chaos and demands. Here are a few simple recommendations from the Word of God and the Word Made Flesh, Jesus Himself, that can help us to take care of ourselves during the busy holiday season.

Take a Break from the Crowd. Jesus served others yet He had to separate Himself at times in order to regain peace despite the crowds who needed His attention. In Mark 3:7-10 we find this exam-

ple: Jesus went off with his disciples to the sea to get away. But a huge crowd from Galilee trailed after them...swarms of people who had heard the reports and had come to see for themselves. He told his disciples to get a boat ready so he wouldn’t be trampled by the crowd. He had healed many people, and now everyone who had something wrong was pushing and shoving to get near and touch him.

During this holiday season, let us take some time to separate ourselves despite the needs and demands of our family and friends, shopping lists and cooking to avoid being “trampled by the crowd.” Even though Jesus was divine and able to meet every need, He knew the importance of taking time to avoid getting overwhelmed by the needs. So should we.

Rest. Again, our hectic schedules include important activities for the people we love including late-night baking, endless piles

of dishes and clothes, decorating for company, wrapping gifts, on and on the lists go. However, with the never-ending “to-do” lists comes the inability to find joy and peace for ourselves. Jesus knew this feeling as well and He also knew how to occasionally take a nap despite stress all around Him and the criticism from His friends.

In Mark 4:35, we find the following story: Late that day he said to them, ‘Let’s go across to the other side.’ They took him in the boat as he was. Other boats came along. A huge storm came up. Waves poured into the boat, threatening to sink it. And Jesus was in the stern, head on a pillow, sleeping! They roused him, saying, “Teacher, is it nothing to you that we’re going down?”

Many times, I have had last-minute requests from my children: “Mom, don’t you care that I don’t have a gift for [a really special friend they forgot]?”

Taking Care of Me During The Holidays (Cont'd)

By Donna Tingle, M.Ed.
Licensed Professional Counselor

or “Mom, don’t you know how embarrassed I will be if you don’t...?” It is important that despite the criticisms, demands and pressing requests that we realize the importance of a little rest, a tiny little nap, no matter how big the storm rages around us.

Quality Time. Holidays can be so rushing that we often find that we have not spent quality time with those we love. Jesus knew that feeling and He made sure that He took extra effort to make it happen. We read in Mark 3:13 when He climbed a mountain and invited those He

wanted with Him. They climbed together. He settled on twelve, and designated them apostles.

Now, I’m quite sure that climbing a mountain was no easy task but it was a great way to get away from the crowds, the noise and chaos that had surrounded their daily life. We sometimes have to take extra efforts like cutting off the TV, blocking a night off the calendar for family night and maybe letting go of an event or two to make it happen, recognizing that it will be worth it when we get that “warm fuzzy feeling” that only comes

from being with the ones we love for special, intimate moments that will make lasting memories.

A Few Other Thoughts. Jesus focused on relationships with those He loved, not the “stuff.” This holiday season let us focus on the relationships, not the gifts, or the messy room or the negative issues that come from chaos. He also took time to be with our Heavenly Father so let us also spend time in prayer, seeking His will during the season that celebrates the gift of His Son. After all, it is the reason for the season.

From Someone Who Found Hope In The Wilderness

Hebrews 12:1

Since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.

Turning 40 was not what I thought it was going to be. I truly thought that by 40 I would have reached my potential; reached my goals and maybe even have gained a greater perspective on God’s purpose for my life. I thought my life was pretty much set and that I had learned from where I had been, knew where I was going and exactly how I would get there. I had always been goal oriented, ambitious and hard working. I finished college in 3 years; paid my dues in corporate America and soaked in every possible opportunity to learn from anyone I thought had successfully traveled the road before me. I was living the American dream. I was married to my high school sweetheart; owned a couple of successful businesses; had two wonderful, healthy children; lived in a beautiful home; and was surrounded by close family and friends who loved and supported me.

Between 40 and 45, my nephew was killed in a tragic car accident. I was diagnosed with malignant melanomas 5 times resulting in multiple surgeries. Each of my parents battled cancer and other health issues. My niece was in a horrible ATV accident leaving her with a serious brain injury that would take

years to heal. Our real estate related businesses suffered four blindsiding blows with the mortgage crisis, the recession, a business partner (and primary investor) filed for bankruptcy and a long-term employee stole valuable business assets with the help of other trusted business associates we thought were our friends. Many of our employees lost their jobs. We employed several family members and they lost their jobs too. Our savings were depleted, our 401k was cleaned out and our children’s college funds were gone. Our home went into foreclosure, our car was repossessed and by all outside appearances our lives were falling apart.

I cried out to God and begged for answers. I knew and believed in the one and only living God; in His Son who gave his life for my salvation; in His plan and purpose for my life. So how could this happen? And more importantly, WHY?

And although I still haven’t found all the answers, I have certainly learned some things along the way. I’ve learned that life isn’t always what you expect it to be. I’ve learned to be more careful about the people around me because just as God uses Christians to touch the lives of others, unfortunately we have an enemy that will do anything to stop us from making a difference for the Kingdom. 1 Peter 5:8-9 says “Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour. Resist him, standing firm in the faith, because you know that your brothers throughout the world are undergoing the same kind of sufferings.”

So I’ve learned that keeping my faith during times of trials as well as in the good times strengthens me. James 1:2-4 says

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

And that’s why I had to say, “yes”, when I was asked to share my story with all of you. Grace in the Wilderness is more than a newsletter to me. It’s more than a once a year conference that I attend. You see I have truly lived to see God’s grace in my own wilderness. And through it all I have found peace that surpasses understanding and I have hope because I still believe in God’s perfect plan for my life. Romans 8:28 says “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose.”

I wasn’t sure what God wanted me to share or to say to people when they asked how we got through such a difficult period. But I knew in the depths of my heart that I had to use my journey to give God glory. I knew that I would have to overcome the embarrassment that some people might think would keep me from sharing my story. But God didn’t bring me through this to keep it to myself. He brought me through it so that I could encourage others that his plans for us are so much more than we could ask or imagine. He didn’t make any of these things happen, but He has never left my side. He gives me peace and comfort when the world is coming down all around me. He has been faithful to me and I owe it to Him to FIGHT back and win victory over the attacks of our enemy.

From Someone Who Found Hope in the Wilderness (Cont'd)

By the time you read this I will be celebrating my 46th birthday. I am determined to make the last half of my forties a lot better than the first. I will not allow fear to rule my life. I will not panic when bad things happen.

And I will survive. I am a survivor, I know that now. I am a child of the King and so are you. I have chosen not to focus on what's happened to me but instead to focus on what God has done for me. I will learn from it and I will share it with anyone who needs a message of hope.

I began 2011 with a 21-day fast with my church. I decided to read my Bible every day at the start of my day. I watch Joyce Meyer every day for encouragement. I praise and worship at a wonderful Church and share a mission to reach non-believers with one simple message; there is a true and living God. He sent His Son to die for your sins and mine. He loves us unconditionally and his grace is enough.

His grace is enough for you too. So whatever you're going through right now; whatever your trials and tribulations; whatever challenges you are facing, don't

let fear open the door for Satan to steal your joy. Praise God through it. **EVEN WHEN YOU DON'T FEEL LIKE IT!**

Turn on praise and worship music in your house, in your car and in your head. Your joy is your strength. Choose it. Make time for it. Plan around it. And never, ever give up!

Romans 15:13 "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.



Walking By Faith

By Robbie Gravley

Do you know the legend of the Cherokee Indian Youth's Rite of Passage? His father takes him into the forest, blindfolds him and leaves him alone. He is required to sit on a stump the whole night and not remove the blindfold until the rays of the morning sun shine through it. He cannot cry out for help to anyone. Once he survives the night, he is a MAN.

He cannot tell the other boys of this experience, because each one must come into manhood on his own. The boy is naturally terrified. He can hear all kinds

of noises. Wild beasts must surely be all around him. Maybe even some human might do him harm. The wind might blow the grass and earth, and shake his stump, but he sits stoically, never removing the blindfold. It would be the only way he could become a man and while he is puzzled that his father would leave him in so much danger he also does not want to disappoint him.

Finally, after a horrific night the sun appears and he removes his blindfold. It is then that he discovers his father sitting on the stump next to him. He has been at watch the entire night, protecting his son from harm.

We, too, are never alone. Even when we don't know it, God is watching over us, sitting on the stump beside us. When trouble comes, all we have to do is reach out to Him. Just because you can't see God, it doesn't mean He is not there.

Psalm 138:7 says, "Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life. You stretch out your hand against the anger of my foes; with your right hand you save me." 2 Corinthians 5:7 says that we walk by faith, not sight.

Remember that God is always there for you in good times and bad. And especially in times of need, you have a loving Father right there with you.



Salt

By Celeste Hebert

"You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men." Matthew 5:13

Salt enhances the flavor of foods. It's a unique substance with a characteristic taste to season or preserve food. A pinch makes an unsavory morsel delectable.

My African assistant, Miss Titi was the salt of the earth. When our taxi broke down miles from a village, she tied the larger baskets together, lifted them to her head and began walking. No complaints. No grumbling. Hiking along the trail she told funny, pleasant tales as she pointed out plants, good for food and medicine. Her upbeat attitude made us all forget the arduous climb up a mountainous path or over a treacherous river.

Joyful, she always spoke of the good God provided, even if it felt like we had nothing. Faithful, she prayed, read the Bible, came to work on time, never missed a day and performed her job faultlessly. Humble, she went about doing God's will to treat the sick, never taking credit for an excellent job. Loving, she allowed the presence of the Holy Spirit to flow through her to help and serve others.

Her pleasant attendance, like salt turned every unsavory situation into a unique, delightful experience. Overwork became a memorable day. Sickness was a time to rest allowing God to heal. Hunger and thirst. Christ himself was hungry and thirsty, so a little deprivation must be good for us. In the three years she worked with me, she never reproached, shouted, became angry, impatient or complained about anything.

She spiced up everyone around her with good taste, common sense and laughter. The Holy Spirit flowed through her to season and improve each one of us. Wherever she was, the appealing atmosphere pulled strangers into the presence of God. The Lord in her became the superior spice added to our everyday lives.

As Christians, we are the salt of the earth to flavor and enhance people and situations around us. We should be a tasty seasoning in every circumstance and place.

A little salt mixed into a dish of food gives it a zest. So when you reach for the salt to season the turkey, potatoes or vegetables, remember that you are the salt of the earth. God's presence in you flowing out to everyone around you should flavor them with Christ's love.



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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).

This is a bi-monthly email newsletter. To subscribe for an electronic copy or paper copy, please just call or email us.

Watch for photos of our recent Grace In The Wilderness Conference for Teens on our GITW Facebook Page

Check us out on Facebook—Grace In The Wilderness and at www.WildernessGrace.org

Imagine how happy you would be if you lost everything you have—and then got it right back. -Anonymous

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