

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



Thirsty?

Does this picture make you thirsty? Yeah, me too!

Wow, the power of advertising! Bet after this article, we'll all have to get something to drink :o)!

Today's Busy Woman Grace Ankles' youngest son Toby loves him some 7up. When he first started drinking soft drinks, it didn't take Grace long to realize she needed to steer him toward a lower octane drink. He needed one that didn't fuel her already "wide-open" little boy quite so much—one that didn't have caffeine and lots of sugar. He instantly took a liking to 7up.

When 7up was first created in 1929, it was sold as a mood-stabilizing medicine. Now aren't there times when Today's Busy Woman could sure benefit from some of that?!

First, her life is flying at 'break neck' speed and she is juggling many things and many people are depending on her. Her job is stressful. Being a parent is stressful. Being a caregiver to her aging parents is stressful. Then, there are stresses about her finances, health, marriage, relationships. Do you see a theme running here? Stress!!! ... the list goes on and on.

Oftentimes, this causes her to be sad, anxious, discouraged and angry. There are times when it's hard to turn that around to being happy, glad, joyous and content when the pressures keep coming in rapid succession.

To avoid being down, Today's

Busy Woman can use what I like to call "The 7up Principles". They are guaranteed to help us busy girls stay focused and to help keep us out of that hole that the devil is constantly trying to pull us down into.

1. Give UP anything that hinders our walk with Jesus Christ. Let's keep the main thing, the main thing. No support for our chaos compares to walking daily with Jesus. We have to accept Him as our personal Savior before we can have that walk. Are our prayers being heard? We should ask ourselves, are we walking as closely as we could be with the Lord? If we feel distance, it's not Him that moved—it is us. If we allow Him to, He'll be our Lifeline, our Help. Psalm 121:2 says, My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. By all means, we need to keep the lines of communication clear!

2. Stay prayed UP. Once we get those lines clear, we need to use them. When the troubles come, if we're prayed up, we've addressed little problems with God before they become big problems or even prevented problems from coming because God has already answered our prayers. James 4:2 says, ...ye have not, because ye ask not. *Duh ... why can't I remember that?*

3. Stay read UP. Reading the Bible helps keep our hearts strong and keeps us prepared for battle. Hebrews 4:12 says, For the Word of God is living and active, sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul

and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

4. Suit UP in our armor. There is divine protection straight from God's Word. Ephesians 6 tells us how to put on the full armor of God so we can take our daily stand against the devil.

5. Lift our praise UP and be thankful. When we focus on the Lord, it keeps our focus off our problems and it empowers us. Psalm 100:4 says, Enter his gates with thanksgiving and His courts with praise; give thanks to him and praise his name!

6. Surround ourselves with people who are UP and lift someone else UP. No one's better than positive Christian friends to lift us up and nothing's more uplifting when we're down than helping someone else. There are always those worse off than us—look around!

7. Look UP. Just like Peter when he walked on water (Matthew 14), we've got to keep looking up to Jesus and not look down or we can get overwhelmed and afraid and start to sink into our troubles.

Being a Busy Woman of Today is not for the faint of heart, and sometimes we need a "pick-me-up." Nothing refreshes like Living Water.

In John 4:14 NIV, Jesus says, "But whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

By Sharon Hawkins

January/February 2012

Volume 5, Issue 1, Bi-Monthly

Inside this issue:

<i>Thirsty?</i>	1
<i>2011 Tax Filing Season</i>	2
<i>Titus 2: Sisterhood of Grace</i>	2-3
<i>Forget It</i>	3-4
<i>Take Time</i>	4
<i>My Savior...I Like the Sound of That</i>	4-5
<i>Make A Difference—It Just Takes a Minute</i>	5
<i>When Life Became a Roller Coaster</i>	5-7
<i>When a Goliath (or Two) Comes Knocking</i>	7
<i>About the Ministry</i>	8

Upcoming Grace In The Wilderness Conferences: Widow's Tea—February 4; Women's Conference—Details to Follow. Both at Blue Ridge View, Pickens, SC

Matthew 5:6 NIV

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.



Financially Speaking: 2011 Tax Filing Season

By Diana Kilgore

With the New Year comes a new Tax Season, so I thought I would

share a couple of pieces of pertinent information. I hope you find them helpful. Those who like to put a “religious” spin on our government’s tax system often refer to Mark12:17 where Jesus said, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s.” May I just encourage you to be honest? Remember that the only thing worse than paying income tax is not having to pay income tax.

Dates:

Generally you can file your 2011 tax return on January 1, 2012 if you have all required documents (i.e. Forms W-2, 1099, etc); however, if you file an electronic return (e-file) you will be able to submit your return to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) on January 13, 2012. It is important that you realize, you cannot e-file your tax return until you have a correct Form W-2, W-2G, or 1099. Tax preparers are unable to accept final check stubs as verification of income. IRS conducts monitoring visits to ensure compliance with Revenue Procedure 2007-40.

The traditional tax return filing deadline is April 15 of each year, but since April 15, 2012 is a Sunday and April 16, 2012 falls on Emancipation Day in the District of Columbia, the Tax due date has been moved to the next working day – April 17.

In most cases if you e-file and use direct deposit, the IRS estimates that you should receive your federal refund between 8 and 14 days after they accept your return. If you do not select the electronic deposit option, getting a paper check mailed to you adds about a week. If your return is filed by mail, then your refund can take up to 6 weeks from the date the IRS receives a complete and accurate return.

Changes:

Standard deductions, for those who do not choose to itemize, have been increased to \$5,800 for Single/ Married filing Separate; \$8,500 for Head of Household, and \$11,600 for Married filing Joint.

Exemption allowances have increased to \$3,700. (This is the allowance for each individual claimed on your tax return.)

Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) has increased to \$464 for taxpayers with no children, \$3,094 for one child, \$5,112 for two children, and \$5,751 for three or more children. Unfortunately, there are many people who abuse this credit, which cost the IRS \$16 billion last year. In light

of this significant loss, tax preparers must complete extensive due diligence in 2012. For you, this means a lot of personal questions and the production of receipts and documentation verifying your claim to the credit.

The Child Tax Credit (CTC), a maximum of \$1000 (based on taxpayer’s income) per child will be extended for 2011-2012. This credit is for taxpayers who claim children, under age 17, as dependents on their return.

South Carolina Residents:

South Carolina provides individual taxpayers with a deduction for a special needs child, The deduction is \$2,000 per child per year for each adopted special needs child who is under 18 at the time of adoption. The adopted child must qualify as a dependent on your Federal return.

I wish you a Happy New Year and successful tax filing experience. If I can be of assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Diana L. Kilgore, EA – Compu-Counting Tax and Accounting Office, 212 N. Poinsett Hwy., Travelers Rest, SC 29690 or (864)834-5622.



Titus 2 Wisdom for Women: Sisterhood of Grace

By Cathy McCormick

I’ve been studying Beth Moore’s “Stepping Up: A Journey Through the Psalms of Ascent”. A

lesson that really stuck in my mind was about enjoying the blessings.

“How happy is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways!” Psalm 128:1

One of the blessings that I have found on my journey to Zion are my Grace Sisters. What is a Grace Sister? She is any woman who is on her pilgrimage to Zion (to a closer relationship with Christ). What’s so important about Grace Sisters? They are important because they come from God. God gives them to us to help us along our path—to laugh with, to cry with, to get encouragement from,

to give encouragement to—to please God when he sees a merry group of pilgrims working their way to Him! Who are your Grace Sisters?

I have always valued the importance of girlfriends, or BFFs, as they say today. But, over the years, my definition of a girlfriend has changed considerably. As women, it’s easy to find other women who are sensitive to our needs and moods; who are willing to listen and understand what we’re saying; to hold us tight when our heart is breaking; to agree that we were right and he was wrong!

Today I find that I really don’t need girlfriends as much as I need Grace Sisters.

Comfort alone is not enough. Now don’t get me wrong! I still need comfort—a meaningful hug, a squeeze of my hand, a wink and a nod. But I find I need some-

thing much deeper. What I need at this stage of my life is a sister in Christ who will not only support me but will help keep me on the path. Who will encourage me, who will help foster and nourish my faith, who will remind me of God’s promises, who will get down on her knees with me in pain and in celebration. And, maybe most importantly -- to be a model of what it looks like, sounds like, and feels like to be a woman living in God’s Word.

Yes, that’s it! To me, a Grace Sister is a woman in whom I recognize God at work! She is a role model. She isn’t necessarily speaking the loudest, or citing the most Bible verses. No, for me in fact, there is something about her actions that draws me to her.

Sisterhood of Grace (Cont'd)

By Cathy McCormick

Who are your Grace Sisters? I know you have some in your life. You may not have thought about her in that way, but if you think about it, you'll know her. I have found that God continues to put specific women on my path and that almost instantly I recognize that there is something "special" about that woman. Something about her draws my attention, something that I admire, maybe something that says, "Gee, I'd like to be like her."

Goodness, as women we grow up with all sorts of role models to choose from. Unfortunately, all of the role models available to us are of the secular

world—models, stars, Barbie dolls, shall I go on? I guess what really catches my attention is meeting a woman who you just know in your bones IS living a Christ-centered life. She's not just talking the talk; she's walking the walk!

So how is the Sisterhood created? It's easier than you might think. First of all, remember that God is putting these women in your path! It is not an accident.

What I do when I meet a woman and feel God's presence in her is I introduce myself. Because God has put us on the same path, the connection and the purpose of

our meeting is self-evident and things just start to happen. The Sisterhood of Grace is created when each woman of Christ connects to another woman of Christ, and on and on and on.

Who are your Grace Sisters?

Proverbs 27:17 NIV

*As iron sharpens iron,
so one man sharpens another.*



Forget It, I Don't Need This!

By Brenda Horne

You are lying on your bed, tears flowing uncontrollably. Your heart is hurting and you are emotionally wounded. You don't understand why life has to be so hard.

You haven't done anything wrong, really. You are a good person—maybe not perfect but still a good person. You are a Christian, you love the Lord, go to church, and try to live right.

So why are you lying on your bed crying your eyes out? Why do you have to go through this? Doesn't God care about you at all? If God cares then why doesn't He do something about it? Sometimes you feel like giving up, you want to say, "Forget it Jesus, I don't need this!"

I give up!"

Well, the truth is, life can be hard at times (no, let me rephrase that) the truth is, life **will** be hard at times. You will cry. You will hurt. Your heart will be broken and sometimes you will suffer more than you thought possible. You **will** want to give up. And it is your choice whether to give up or not.

But here's the thing. When you finally say, "Forget it Jesus, I've had enough.

I'm not doing the 'Jesus thing' anymore!!!" ... then what?

Where do you go from there?

You can walk away ...but to where?

The world? It has a lot to offer—drugs, alcohol, partying, friends, sex—it's all out there for the taking. It will be fun and it will get your mind off your troubles...for a while...but when the darkness returns and the partying is over, who's left?

If you remove the light of Jesus then all that's left is your darkness.

Once you decide to walk away, I promise there **will** be an inescapable void and although you continue to try to satisfy the emptiness, it will consume you.

Listen to me closely. When you believe in Jesus Christ then you have hope, you have that light shining in your darkness. Maybe you brought this sorrow on yourself, maybe you didn't. Either way, Jesus longs for you to want Him. When you are lying on your bed, broken and hurting, Jesus is there holding you. He feels your tears. He hears your cries. His heart breaks with yours.

This overpowering darkness that you are fighting should make you cling tighter to your Savior, longing for His understanding, His compassion. Don't push Him away. Don't give up on the One who truly loves you!

The disciples asked also, "To whom shall we go?" John 6:67-68 NIV

"You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve.

Simon Peter answered Him, **"LORD, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."**

1 Samuel 12:21-22 NIV says, "Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. For the sake of His great name the LORD will not reject His people, because the LORD was pleased to make you His own."

Proverbs 31:24 NIV

Be strong and take heart, all you who hope in the LORD.

Our prayer is that the new year will bring health, happiness and hope for you and your family!!!

*May God Richly Bless You in 2012,
Grace In The Wilderness Ministries*



Take Time

By Celeste Hebert

After hiking several miles I stopped at the bottom of the tall peak. The basket in my left hand felt way too heavy, so I moved medicine bottles to another bag to balance the weight. It had been several years since I hiked straight up the mountain.

I turned to a young man. "I need to treat patients in the village on top of the peak. How far is it?"

"Two miles." He shook his head and frowned. "It is a very difficult climb even for us."

I ascended higher and higher as I took in more and more breaths. Forty-five minutes later I met another man. "How far to the top?"

"It is only five miles."

After two more hours of putting one foot

ahead of the other going straight up the mountain, I asked a passerby. "How far to the top?"

He frowned. "Seven miles."

I considered myself in good physical condition since I trekked to many villages, but still I leaned forward and lifted one foot painfully in front of the other. My chest rose and fell faster as I pushed myself upward. It was much farther and higher than I remembered. Still I kept going, even out of breath and in need of oxygen. All my energy was concentrated on making it to the clinic.

Reaching the church, I thanked God and breathed in the crisp clear air until my heart rate slowed to normal. I sat down on the ledge and scanned the magnificent view. The emerald mountains, clear blue skies and russet trails on the nearby hills had been worth the climb. But I could have enjoyed that sight all

the way to the top had I not been so focused on reaching the peak.

We can get so busy running the race of life, we no longer pay attention to the daily joys surrounding us. We can get so distracted and lose our breath walking the steep, winding trails we don't even notice the blessings of family and friends. Other times we can get so caught up in tasks that we forget to speak kind words to others. Or we may get so focused trying to make it through another day, that we no longer see any beauty. Let's not wait until our race has ended, we have retired or our lives are terminated to enjoy God's presence. Take time out today to be with the Lord, enjoy the places and people along the way.

2 Timothy 4:7 NIV

I have fought the good fight. I have finished the race. I have kept the faith.

My Savior...I Like the Sound of That

By Amanda Seawright



I am a 29 year old woman who was raised in church and gave my heart to God at an early age. However, I didn't always live for the

Lord the way I should.

I can remember at age 5, sitting there listening to the preacher talk about going to hell and what a bad place it was. I sure didn't want to go. So I asked my parents what I could do about it. The good, godly parents that I have led me down the path of salvation. What awesome parents I have. I'm very blessed.

As I grew older I sang in church, went on mission trips, to youth camps and retreats, but I was pulling away from God. I got involved in things a child of God has no business doing. When I'd go to these camps and places, I'd always feel God and rededicate my life, meaning it at the time. However, when I would get back to the real world I'd slip right back to the way I was. I never had peace and I couldn't understand why I was angry all the time.

At age 17 God got my attention through a traumatic incident in my life and it would forever change the way I viewed life. I started growing closer to God

again. Even though life was hard, God was there to carry me through this situation. He made me stronger than I had ever imagined I could be.

At age 21, although the devil made me doubt it for so long, I nailed down my salvation. I never could get over the sin I had committed. Notice I said "I couldn't" but, you see, God had already forgiven me of those sins and forgotten them. Now I had to forgive myself.

At age 23 I was young, healthy and living for God. Then I was diagnosed with thyroid cancer; but with God in my life I said, "He can handle it." I didn't let it get me down. I knew God would heal me and 6 years later, here I am. God has brought me through too much to let this world drag me down.

At age 25 I got married to someone who I thought I would spend the rest of my life with, have children with, go to church with, and live 'happily ever after' with. You guessed it. There was no 'happily ever after' for this princess. You know, I actually believed that. You see, the devil plays mind games with us. If he can get us to believe his lies, then he can destroy our walk with God and our testimonies. But, ha ha, what he doesn't realize is

that when we fall it only builds our testimony and helps us realize how much we need God and that we're not perfect – only God is.

At age 26 I started going through a divorce. Wow, that's hard to say. Never did I think it would or could happen to me. I went through a downward spiral off a cliff and hit rock bottom. What I mean is, I threw my hands up and said, "I'm done God! I'm mad at you. You let this happen to me after all I've been through in my life. Haven't I suffered enough? Don't you love me, God? Why?! Why?! Why, Lord?!" So, I stopped praying, reading my Bible and going to church. Boy, that was a big mistake! I had no idea there could be so much of a sinful nature in me. Wow! But, you see, there were people in my life that never stopped praying for me and God did love me. He didn't give up on me.

I kept feeling the tug on my heart, of God saying, "Please, my darling little girl, please come home. I love you and miss you and need you."—words I needed to hear, because my heart had been shattered. It took me 3 years, but I came home. Never has there been a greater

My Savior...I Like the Sound of That (Cont'd)

By Amanda Seawright

peace than coming home to my Savior. My Savior—I like the sound of that!

I went through the rebuilding stage and I'm still a work in progress. God heals us if we let him. I couldn't forgive myself for walking away from God. I still struggle with it, but when I do I think of the words my Lord spoke to me, "I forgave

you!" If God can forgive me, then surely I can forgive me.

We never know what someone is going through. If God places someone on your heart, pray for them, send a card, or go see them. You will never know how much it means, even if they act like it doesn't mean anything. Remember,

they're hurting and a small act of love, God's love, is just the medicine they need.

1 Corinthians 13:8 NIV

Love never fails...



Make a Difference—It Just Takes a Minute

By Sharon Hawkins

This past November, I went into a local chain drug store. They had their Christmas advertising up, but I didn't see the word "Christmas" anywhere. I walked down the aisles and everywhere the ads said, "Holiday Savings!," "Holiday Specials!," "Are You Ready for The Holidays?" It occurred to me that we are losing the fight to keep Christ in Christmas and, in fact, keep the name of Christ in our nation.

Is this because we as Christians just go ahead and buy the "Holiday Specials!" and turn our heads to what's going on around us and don't say a word? Definitely, our complacency has cost us greatly and contributed to the moral decline of our society. TV ads are a prime example.

Sex is everywhere, even in the ads for little children's cartoon programs. What's up with that? How did that happen? ... It happened because somewhere along the line, Christians stopped standing up for values and decency. Just like Adam didn't stop Eve from eating the apple; we haven't stopped the removal of Christ or the increase of indecency in our society. Shame on us!

Would you like to make a difference but don't know how? Do you think it takes lots of money which you don't have? While making donations helps tremendously, it is not required. If you have a computer, you can still make a difference. Below are some internet services that use their millions of subscribers to make a difference in our world.

It's very simple. They email alerts of concern to you and each have petitions that you can sign, phone numbers you can call and pre-written emails directed to executives and politicians who have the power to change things. I love getting a follow up email about how together we changed things for the better, how we pushed back against the moral decay of our society. And all it took me was a few button 'clicks' and just a minute of my time. Here are just a few.

OneMillionMoms.com—Subscribe to an online community of mothers and grandmothers aimed at stopping the exploitation of our children, especially by the entertainment media. (television, music, movies, etc.) (*If you're just going to pick one, Moms, I'd pick this one. Tell dads about OneMillionDads.com too.*)

ACLJ.org/register—The American Center for Law and Justice is committed to ensuring the ongoing viability of freedom and liberty in the United States. They are dedicated to the concept that freedom and liberty are universal, God-given and inalienable rights that must be protected.

AFA.net—American Family Association informs, equips, and activates individuals to strengthen the moral foundations of American culture, and give aid to the church here and abroad in its task of fulfilling the Great Commission.

EagleForum.org—Eagle Forum invites you to build a better educated, safer, stronger America based on traditional values. Pro-family movement since 1972

It's easy. As Christian Activists, we can change our world one 'click' at a time.

Ephesians 6:14 NIV

Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place.



A Garden In The Wilderness: When Life Became a Roller Coaster Ride

By Marie Koth

Anyone who has served as a caregiver for an elderly parent knows how exhausting and difficult it is - juggling family responsibilities with providing care, spending hours in doctor's offices, managing all the medications from all the specialists, and let's not forget all the trips to the ER (that's good for 6 to 8 hours per trip). But what can be learned on this journey through the wilderness? How can we grow in our relationship with God? How can we make sense of the suffering we witness our loved one endure?

I'm going to tell you about my journey and how it changed my relationship with my Lord, Jesus, and with my mother. My prayer is that the lessons I learned will help another caregiver in their wilderness journey.

My trek through the caregiver wilderness began nine years ago when my mother moved from Miami to live with me and my husband. She arrived in May and by August she had had emergency surgery to reattach her retina, caused by a fall before she moved. In September, she suddenly got short of breath when walking. The diagnosis was atrial fibril-

lation, resulting in a pacemaker and meds to get her heart's rhythm to return to normal. The best medication was a beta blocker. The problem was that my mother's body was very sensitive to meds and did NOT like beta blockers. We were still adjusting to having her living with us and overnight I found myself doing everything for my mother. The beta blocker took away my mother's ability to think or do anything, including feed herself, bathe herself or dress herself. I was NOT prepared. The med was eventually changed, but this first hike through the wilderness lasted three months.



...a Roller Coaster Ride (Cont'd)

By Marie Koth

I was frazzled! I knew nothing about this world of doctors and meds and wasn't thrilled about being thrown into it. My world had been turned upside down! I'm the kind who can't sit still. I went from being very physically active to being in the house 24/7. Patience has never been one of my virtues and it was REALLY being tested. Thankfully, patience is one of the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-23) and I didn't have to come up with it on my own. God was beginning His work in me. You're probably wondering by now about the title and how a roller coaster fits in this wilderness journey. Here's the rest of the story.

A little background is needed before we get to the roller coaster ride. My mother was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis (RA) in 1994. It's an autoimmune disease in which the immune system attacks the joints, as well as major organs, causing severe inflammation and destruction of the areas affected. Her body didn't tolerate any of the drugs used to slow down the progression of the RA. After her bout with atrial fibrillation, she started taking Bextra for the inflammation. It worked with no side effects. The RA still progressed, but she was able to function and enjoy life. Then, due to some serious side effects that Bextra could cause, it was removed from the market. There was nothing else she was able to take. This is where the roller coaster ride begins.

It took six months for the Bextra to leave her system. When it did, there was nothing to lessen the inflammation and pain. Each time her immune system attacked more damage was done. In October of 2008, my mother fell and had a partial hip replacement. She was recovering well until mid December when she aspirated something in her sleep. On Saturday she kept saying how much better she was feeling. Sunday morning when I went in to wake her, I found her unconscious and near death. What a shock! EMS rushed her to the hospital where I was not given much hope that she would survive. An infection had filled her lungs and spread to her bloodstream. Her heart was beating erratically and her kidneys were failing, but God wasn't through with her yet. Ten days later, on Christmas Eve, she left ICU and on January 2nd she moved

across the street for three months of rehab to regain her physical functioning.

Remember my struggles with patience? God was about to work on it big time! The three antibiotics my mother was given by IV messed up her taste and I couldn't get her to eat. She was living on nutritional drinks, but not very well. After she came home I discovered that one of the drugs she was taking was causing nausea. It took several months of trying different drugs before finally reaching a workable combination. About this time she started to have constant pain and difficulty breathing whenever she moved. The RA was marching on and had damaged her lungs. Another drug was added to her long list of meds. I was exhausted and overwhelmed, trying to juggle all the specialists and meds and take care of her. I prayed, "Lord, how am I going to keep doing this? I don't have anything left." His answer was, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." (2 Cor. 12:9) Grace in the Wilderness? It was, and I learned to rely on His strength and wisdom, not my own. God reassured me through this scripture.

Psalm 46:1 NIV
**God is our refuge and strength,
an ever-present help in trouble.**

He knew that I needed to learn these lessons to get through what was coming next, for this is just the beginning of the roller coaster ride.

A year after my mother came home from rehab and was starting to eat and regain her strength, the RA hit her really hard. The atrial fibrillation kicked back in and, because she couldn't tolerate an increase in meds, my mother had an ablation. It wiped out the communication between the upper and lower parts of her heart and her pacemaker was set to beat her heart for her. We thought that would fix her weakness and getting out of breath when walking. She recovered but still couldn't breathe. She took more prednisone and was starting to improve when the RA slammed her again. This is where the ride gets wilder.

The 28th of June, 2010, when I got back from my own doctor's appointment, I found her worse. I called her doctor's office to get an appointment for the next morning. When I went to tell her she

was unresponsive. Off to the ER again. We had already discussed getting hospice and I let the ER doctor know that's what we wanted. However, the ER being what it is, there to save people, she was given IV cortisone. After a couple of days she awakened. Hospice was called in and all the meds were stopped, except meds to keep her comfortable. She got worse and went from the hospital to the hospice house. The RA didn't take her. After five months, and a few more times of nearly dying, my mother used up her time at the hospice house and had to leave. We moved her to a nursing home under hospice care. For a total of 13 months my mother was bed bound and the RA hit her ten times. Each time, she would almost die, it would back off and the next day I would find her sitting up in bed, talking and eating (or having one of her shakes as she got weaker). This was the hardest part of the roller coaster ride. I would prepare myself for her death and then she'd come back. Each time it was at a lower level – she would have more damage to her heart and lungs – and she would be disappointed that she was still here.

I had a lot of talks with God. My mother and I didn't understand why He was leaving her here, continuing to suffer, in pain and struggling for every breath. I tried to focus on Romans 8:18 – "I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us." I would sing to her, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in His wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace." I also sang *The Joy of the Lord is My Strength*. We never did understand why, but God had a reason in His perfect plan. Finally, the eleventh time, on August 4, 2011, my mother made her journey home to her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ – what she had desired for so long.

I have had several months to reflect on the journey through the wilderness and the roller coaster ride. Although I'll probably never know God's purpose in all that we went through, I know that my mother and I grew even closer and that we both grew closer to our Lord. God knew that if she had died the first time, it would have been much harder on me. Even though those 13 months were very hard, God gave me time to rebuild my life with my husband in our home

...a Roller Coaster Ride (Cont'd)

By Marie Koth

without my mother there, getting me used to her absence before taking her home. Also, as I've thought about those difficult 13 months, I'm thankful I didn't know what the future held, that I only had to deal with one day at a time. I've also thought about what it was like for Jesus, God coming to earth as a lowly human being, knowing beforehand all the suffering he would endure and the

horrible death on a cross he would die and still willingly going through it for me (Philippians 2:8). I can't begin to comprehend how hard it was for Him in the Garden of Gethsemane as He faced it all, knowing what He would endure. What love! More than our finite minds can begin to comprehend!

My love for my Savior and my desire to

be obedient grew as a result of this journey. If you find yourself a caregiver, I pray, as Paul did in Ephesians 3:17-19, that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge – that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.



When A Goliath (or Two) Comes Knocking

By Sharon Hawkins

On June 8, 2011, I received news that every woman dreads—breast cancer. My mother received this same “knock-the-breath-out-of-you” news in December of 2004, just three years and four months before she died from cancer. Mom wasn't the only one. Counting aunts and cousins, there have been five of us on Mom's side of the family, and three of us on Dad's side of the family, to receive this dreadful sentence—breast cancer.

So, after doctors' visits, much prayer, tears and gnashing of teeth, my husband and I began the journey of accepting that I was going to lose my breasts in this fight to save my life. I was overwhelmed by how this touched me and rattled me at the core of my existence. Fear gripped me at my most tender places, where I'm a wife, a mother, a woman.

Could my husband ever find me attractive again? Could I bear to not feel my children as before when I hugged them close to me? Could I overcome the feeling that I was going to be less of a woman? These questions all tormented me one night just a week before my surgery. Then God's grace and peace fell on me that night as I slept, like sweet dew kissing a tender, pink, terribly wilting daisy. When I opened my eyes in the morning, I knew He had answered my prayers. It was as though the decision had been made the night before and I knew what I was supposed to do—bilateral mastectomies with reconstruction.

From that point on, I had no fear, no worry. I knew He was going to see me through. He was taking me into a new adventure, one that would change my life forever for my good and for His glory!

So on July 5, the morning of my surgery, I ran out to meet my Goliath, like little David. God's grace was amazing, there is nothing like being in the center of His perfect will for your life. Like my Preacher says, “Peace is not the absence of the storm, it's the presence of Jesus in the storm.” I had no doubts that His grace was enough as I kissed the tears off my husband's and son's faces that day as they left my room for the long wait down the hall. While they couldn't go with me, God Himself was going into battle with me. Seven hours of surgery later and after a while in recovery, I woke up in severe pain, but nonetheless to victory. God had brought me through surgery, it had gone well and the best part, my lymph nodes were cancer free. Although cancer had killed my mother, I was sure that this Goliath was going to be defeated in my case. Praise God!

A week later, the pathology report revealed that, in addition to the 1.8 cm tumor in my right breast, there was something in my left. It was a red flag, a precursor to cancer in the left breast, something to watch (except we wouldn't have known it was there to watch). My God knew in advance what was best for me and He led me that way. Praise God!

At three weeks out, I learned that the Oncotype tumor genetic testing revealed a score of 11 on a 1-50 scale. The nurse told me it was a very low score and most probably indicated no chemotherapy would be needed. This was confirmed at my oncologist visit on August 10—no chemo, no radiation needed. Woohoo! Praise God!

This Goliath came knocking on my door, but all along this was the Lord's battle. It's not been easy! I've since been

through two more breast reconstruction surgeries and a surprise melanoma diagnosis and in-office surgery (another Goliath) in the last 5 months. I'm still recovering. I will have another surgery in Charleston in the future, another step in my total and complete restoration.

I can't wait to see what God's going to do next in my life. Whatever it is and while at times I grow so weary, I still have that same gift He gave me that night in the midst of this battle—No Fear! That's because He is there with me and is fighting for me. I know He is, I feel Him!!!

Cancer: You came against me with sickness, dread and despair, but I came against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of His children, including my mother and precious others whom you have defied. With both my cancers, the LORD handed you over to me, struck you down and cut off your sources of torment in my body. Through this, all those around me see that there is a BIG GOD in my life. Through this, they can know that it is not the surgeon's knife or medicine that saves, but God. The battle is the LORD's. He took you down and gave me victory over you! (*1 Timothy 17:45 paraphrase*)

Sometimes you've just got to step back, be still and let Him be your God! This is one of those times in my life. This battle came for a reason and I will never be the same! My earnest prayer is that when I get to the end of it, I'll have more of God in my heart than I do of me!

In the midst of all this, my Pastor sent me a quote by Tony Evans—“Sometimes we face a bigger Goliath so we can know an even BIGGER GOD!” I'd say that's exactly right!! Praise my BIG, BIG GOD!!



Grace In The Wilderness Ministries

139 Commons Way
Greenville, South Carolina 29611

Sharon Hawkins Phone: 864-380-2358
Email: sharon@wildernessgrace.org

Marie Pritchett Phone: 864-979-5281
Email: marie@wildernessgrace.org

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 newsletter. To subscribe for an free email copy or paper copy, please just call or email us.

Upcoming
Grace In The
Wilderness
Conferences:
Widow's Tea—
February 4;
Women's
Conference—
Details to Follow.
Both at
Blue Ridge View,
Pickens, SC

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

It's not the load that weighs you down, but the way you carry it. -Anonymous

Grace In The Wilderness Ministries
139 Commons Way
Greenville, SC 29611