

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

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Leaning

By Sharon Hawkins

The Leaning Tower of Pisa has been leaning for over 800 years. Ever wonder why?

Finally, in 1999, the final project to stabilize the tower was completed. Through a series of many painstaking steps, the earth beneath the tower's foundation was excavated and removed, forcing the tower lower and reducing its vertical incline. In a nutshell, they sunk the tower.

Well, wonder no more. I checked into the matter. I read that it was leaning by the time that they finished the second floor because they built it on a thin foundation on soft soil. They adjusted by building taller columns and arches on the third floor.

As they continued to the 4th floor, political unrest halted their construction for about 100 years. When they started back, it was leaning in the opposite direction. They made another adjustment on the fifth floor by building a thicker floor on the leaning side, which made it lean even worse because of the added weight. Imagine if it hadn't already been settling for 100 years.

Through the years, there have been many efforts to try to help the leaning problem to no avail. They put lead counterweights around the base, used steel cables and drilled a network of angled holes into the foundation and then filled them with a cement grouting mixture.

Worrying that the Tower would fall, the Italians evacuated it. They vacated the buildings in its path too. And even though it is the Cathedral of Pisa's Bell Tower, it became "bell-less" as they prepared for the worst.

Even so, it's still leaning a little to this very day. At this point, even if they could, would they completely correct it? After all, what tourist would want to go see the "Straight Tower of Pisa"?

Today's Busy Woman Grace Ankles is no tower, but she knows all about leaning. She can easily be pulled off balance by the weight of her problems and responsibilities as wife, mom and daughter just to name a few. And the more she tries to make adjustments herself to straighten up, the more she seems to lean.

The Lorax said, "A tree falls the way it leans. Be careful which way you lean."

When life's pressures push against her and she feels she is going to topple over, it is such a comfort to know that she can always lean on God.

Deuteronomy 33:27 reminds us, "The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms..." That means He holds us up with His mighty arms that never give out, never let go and never let us down. The more we depend on God, the more

dependable we find He is. The tighter we cling to Him, the more we realize that it is not our grasp, but His, that makes all the difference!

Although His arms are all-powerful, Isaiah 40:11 paints a beautiful picture of a loving Father who comforts us tenderly with His warmth and embrace. "He will tend his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms..."

Through it all, we are never defeated unless we give up on God.

*What a fellowship, what a joy divine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms!
What a blessedness, what a peace is mine,
Leaning on the everlasting arms!*

*Leaning, leaning safe and secure from all alarms.
Leaning, leaning on the everlasting arms.*

*Oh, how sweet to walk in this pilgrim way,
Leaning on the everlasting arms!
Oh, how bright the path grows from day to day,
Leaning on the everlasting arms!*

*What have I to dread, what have I to fear,
Leaning on the everlasting arms?
I have blessed peace with my Lord so near,
Leaning on the everlasting arms.*

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Our 5th Annual Empowered Jesus Girl Teen Conference is November 2013.
Info coming soon.
www.wildernessgrace.org

Psalm 18:10

The name of the Lord is a strong tower. The righteous man runs into it and is safe.



Hurry Up and Relax

By Diana Kilgore

There are 165 new emails in your inbox, your new pants are covered in scalding coffee, the kids are already 10 minutes late for school and your son's favorite t-shirt is still in the dryer. In other words, it's the perfect time to relax; however, if you're like most women, you may have forgotten how to relax.

Although experts say some stress is good for you – it can sharpen your mind and senses – too much stress is bad for your mental and physical health. Relaxation can do wonders to restore balance to your life so I have compiled a few tactics to help add some calm to your confusion.

CHOCOLATE – 1.4 ounces of dark chocolate can calm your nerves. It regulates levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, and stabilizes metabolism. So, grab a “kiss” and tackle a new day.

HONEY – taking a teaspoon full of honey reduces inflammation in the brain. In addition to being a natural skin moisturizer and antibiotic, it fights depression and anxiety.

GUM – chewing gum for a few minutes reduces anxiety and helps lower cortisol levels. It is a quick and easy way to beat stress so enjoy your favorite flavor of gum and relax.

MUSIC – statistics show that 30 minutes of listening to classical music may have the same calming effect as 10mg of Valium. I Samuel 16:23 reads, “*And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a harp, and played with his hand: so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.*” If it works for kings, it should work for moms.

TEA – drinking herbal tea, especially green tea, helps relieve anger and stress with L-Theanine. Remember, as with tea bags, our true strength and character come out when we are put in “hot water.” Jesus reminds us in Luke 6:35 that “*out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh.*” So, have a nice cup of hot tea and relax then you can return to your task of mom, wife, or co-worker refreshed.

LAUGH – laughing is the only exercise your liver gets, so keep a book of jokes in your purse or on the microwave in the kitchen or on your desk at work and have a good laugh every once in a while. Proverbs 17:22 tell us, “*A merry heart doeth good like a medicine.*”

CRY – crying or shedding tears is a healthy emotional release for anyone experiencing deep pain, sadness, anger or stress. Crying serves as a safety valve that allows you to blow off emotions that have built up too much pressure. Studies show that the benefits of crying increase significantly when you share the experience with another person (parent, spouse, sibling or friend). So, invite the ladies over and have a good cry from time to time and rejoice that God tells us, through John in Revelation, that He “will wipe away all the tears from our eyes.”

COUNT – our hands can be used for so many things (a loving touch or swat of discipline) so try using them to count. I am not recommending that you start balancing the checkbook or anything but when stress increases, try counting backwards. Some people start at 10. Some have to start at 50. Either way, counting backwards makes the brain concentrate fully on the counting and thus not allow your mind to think about what was bothering you. It's difficult to worry about a messy kitchen or stained blouse when you're trying to remember what number comes before 37.

COLOR – coloring has proven to be therapeutic. It allows a person the “vent” their feelings and frustrations. It is a peaceful activity that helps release harmful chemicals from your brain. So, buy a coloring book and break out the Crayolas and relax.

BUBBLES – when you blow bubbles, notice that they are each different. As you observe these differences, remember that Job 10:8 reads, “*Thine hands have made me and fashioned me round about.*” God created you for a specific purpose that only YOU can fulfill. No one else can accomplish the task God has for YOU. So, blow some bubbles, relax and remember that you are special and unique.

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Titus 2 Wisdom for Women: Standing On The Promises

By Cathy McCormick

For those of you who have been following my journey, you know that four months ago

I turned over all decisions about where the next chapter of my life should be written. I had been lost in a swirl of endless questions: Where should I live? What should I do? What am I supposed to do now that I am alone? ... and on and on and on!

I kept asking God, pleading with God, to tell me what He wanted? “What do you want me to do? Where do you want me

to be? And what is my purpose here on Earth?” One day it occurred to me that I was so busy trying to micromanage my life that there was NO WAY I could ever hear God speak to me. I wanted God to lead me, BUT I still had both hands tightly on the wheel of my life, hanging on for dear life! Amazing.

We women of faith “believe” that God is in control. We “believe” that He has a plan for us that is for our good. We “believe” that He is always with us, looking out for us, guiding us, keeping us safe.

Yup. We “believe” that, but do we “ACT” it? For me, the answer was NO. I was not acting my faith, I was talking and praying my faith. I made up my mind that I was going to ACT my faith. I surrendered all of my desire/need/want to determine the answers and turned all of those decisions over to God—knowing that He would lead me to exactly where and what He wanted from me.

I packed up my earthly belongings and put them in storage. I packed up the things I needed the most—some books



Standing On The Promises (Cont'd)

By Cathy McCormick

(including, of course, the “Good Book”), some photographs, some clothes, and my trusty companion, Harry the Poodle Dog—and headed to a rented home in Southwest Florida. I knew I needed to detach from the home my husband and I had built and get someplace quiet and peaceful in order to quiet my mind enough for God to talk to me and answer the millions of questions I was unable to answer on my own.

Well, as you might know, God did speak to me—He used my sweet sister to get His message through to me loud and clear. He led me to a lovely cottage by the sea that I had dreamed of, but could never imagine living in. I know the rest of His plan is going to continue to unfold

for me as I continue to practice my faith by acting on His promises.

Faith is like a muscle—it needs to be exercised to be strong. Lip service alone will not build that muscle—action is the only thing that works.

Why is it that we so often doubt His faithfulness, His love for us, His promises? I have pondered that question over and over again for the last few years. I think the answer is simply that it is so hard for us to comprehend that our God IS FAITHFUL, that His promises are true and they are kept. I believe in the faithfulness of my God. Now, when I'm facing what seems to be a daunting decision or problem, I sing this song and ACT on my

faith by turning the problem over to my awesome God.

Standing on the promises of Christ my King, Through eternal ages let His praises ring, Glory in the highest, I will shout and sing, Standing on the promises of God.

Standing, standing, standing on the promises of God my Savior; Standing, standing, I'm standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises that cannot fail, When the howling storms of doubt and fear assail, By the living Word of God I shall prevail, Standing on the promises of God.

Standing on the promises I cannot fall, List'ning every moment to the Spirit's call, Resting in my Savior as my all in all, Standing on the promises of God.



God's Way, Not My Way

By Debbie Reeves

I am someone who likes routine. Doing laundry on Monday, buying groceries on Saturday, you get the picture. Some would call it boring.

Trials can really change and disrupt our routine, our lives. In October of 2012, I noticed a lump right above my left leg. I made an appointment with my family doctor. She then scheduled me to have an ultrasound. It showed a mass, but they didn't know what it was. The doctor referred me to a surgeon. He did a needle biopsy and said we would just wait two months for me to come back. If it grew or if I had any problems before then, I should call back.

Here is how God works. My husband's cousin works for the credit union at a hospital. She knows someone who works for a cancer doctor right beside where she works. She got him to show my tests to the doctor. He made an appointment for me a week later. When the doctor examined me, he said that he thought it was a lymph node and that whatever it was, it wasn't supposed to be there. This was in December. He went out into the hall and scheduled surgery for a week and a half later on December 18.

He removed the lymph node. I went

back to the doctor on the day after Christmas. He told me that I had cancer and that he needed to find the primary site, where it started at. Everything was spiraling out of control. The month of January was filled with appointments and tests. A lot of times, I think that I can fix everything. But I knew I couldn't fix this.

I had surgeries in January and February and was in the hospital for five days in February. I had to see the doctor twice a week after I came home for a while because of the risk of infection. I was scared and didn't know what to expect. And I didn't have health insurance. My routine was now doctors' appointments and tests but God gave me strength and helped me. I wasn't in control but God was.

I have always tried to fix problems for my children. He showed me that I don't have to be in control or fix everything. He has shown me that He doesn't promise to deliver me from the storm, but He does promise to go through it with me. God helped me through radiation and chemo beginning in March for five weeks.

He has shown me a lot. I not only thought I could fix everything, I thought that when things were problem-free in my life, I would be doing good. I now know that my life will never be problem free in this sin-sick world. My children will never have perfect lives, as much as I want

them to. I will continue to face life's problems here on earth. But I have found out that I don't have to wait for my life to be problem-free to have the peace of God—to not only have that peace, but to enjoy it. I have so many blessings that I can see everyday, even in a storm.

My husband has been strong when I wasn't. My family has been awesome, my little grandsons, such a joy. And my friends and church family have been a blessing.

When the storms of life come, we may comfort ourselves by turning to the areas of our lives that seem most under control. I have done this many times. God is the only reliable stronghold where I can find shelter and comfort during times of uncertainty.

If everything is going great in my life, that doesn't provide true peace, only God does. Our circumstances change and are unpredictable but God remains the same. Trusting in circumstances is a false hope. When things are not going so good, I am learning I need to trust God anyway.

Each trial, although I don't like it, can become an opportunity to trust Him even more. I don't have to understand to have peace. It is possible to glorify

God's Way, Not My Way (Cont'd)

God and see Him more brightly in the dark.

Praise God, my CT scan showed up clear in July! Although the doctor said that the cancer can recur, I'm very thankful

for this great news. I have a test in September.

I don't know what the future holds, but I know Who holds the future and He's in control.

John 16:33

These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye may have peace, in the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Say That Thing You Always Say

By Sharon Hawkins

My heart was so heavy. It was all I could do to carry it into my house at the end of that terrible day. My mom had just been diagnosed with colon cancer and it wasn't good. This was after her bout with breast cancer just the year before.

That night I drug myself to my husband's waiting arms, drenching him with my tears as I sobbed uncontrollably into his shoulder. Scott's love and support have always been a huge comfort to me through hard times.

Like with everybody, there have been many trials through the years that we have been married. Business partner changes. Infertility struggles. Loss of his job. Struggles with our special needs child. My dad's Parkinson's disease and declining health. My mom's three year cancer battle and then her death. Two embezzlements by my employees (one a close friend). My diagnoses with breast cancer and melanoma, followed by three surgeries in 5 months and then a painful nerve illness that I still live with every day. And the list goes on and on. I'm sure you have a list too.

During one of these difficult times, years ago, I went to Scott and told him I

needed him to do something important for me. "Put your arms around me," I said. He did that. I drew strength for my weary heart from him as he hugged me.

Then I said, "Repeat after me ... Don't worry about a thing! I'm going to take care of everything!" As he spoke the words, my stress lessened and then we both began to giggle. We knew he couldn't take care of everything for me any more than I could take care of everything for him. Still, to hear him say it, made me feel better. It broke the tension and eased my stress.

Since that first time, when I am feeling overwhelmed by a heavy burden. I hug him and whisper into his ear, "Say that thing you always say." Without hesitation he always says, "Don't worry about a thing! I'm going to take care of everything!" I know he wants to take care of whatever my burden is and it's enough for me.

I am so blessed to have two rocks in my life. Scott is my little rock and God is my Big Rock. While God uses Scott as my husband to encourage and strengthen me, God alone is our real source and He is Who we go to for strength and comfort.

Hebrews 4:16 says, *Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.* Psalm 28:7 says, *The LORD is my strength and my shield; My heart trusted in Him, and I am helped; Therefore my heart greatly rejoices, and with my song I will praise Him.*

Here is what He has to say on the matter in 2 Corinthians 12:9: *"And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness."*

These words of God hugely comfort me during hard times. The promises of His Word are always real and current for whatever we are facing today. Any time when life gets too tough for me, I can go back to this scripture and I can pray and ask Him to flood my heart with His strength, provision and comfort.

Dear Lord, No matter what I face, I know that You are bigger and stronger. I know that You love me more than I can comprehend. Please comfort my weary heart and help me to look to You no matter how hard and scary life gets.

Lord, please hold me close today and ... say that thing You always say! Amen



As Good As It Gets

By Brenda Horne

Another birthday has rolled around and the weather outside is awful; it's dreary and depressing, which matches my mood. Happy birthday grumpy pants!

I'm supposed to be aging gracefully with lovely laugh lines slightly extending from the corners of my eyes; instead wrinkles have attacked my face like cracks in the pavement! And let me tell you, there is no moisturizer (or iron) that will straighten out this mess!

I can't recall "wrinkled" as being one of things I wanted to be when I grew up! Why is it that men become dignified with age and women get old?

You know, when I think about it, I'm pretty sure I was supposed to be a princess when I grew up! I mean, my goodness, as far I can see, there should be a tiara on my head and servants at my feet. Of course I am lacking a few qualifications, like no royal blood line, no land to rule, no money and no dashing good looks, other than that, "I'm *in* sister"!

But seriously, with this aging thing, I have come to realize there are things I had planned for my life that don't seem to be panning out too well, dreams that may never happen.

For instance, taking a trip to Europe to see all the ancient castles (castles I should own, by the way, remember I was supposed to be a princess) or buying my very own two-story house, right here in town, on top of a hill with a white picket fence. And then there is this beauty thing, how am I suppose to have "smooth-as-a-baby's butt" skin and su-

As Good As It Gets (Cont'd)

By Brenda Horne

per model curves when I can't afford a cosmetic surgeon. And back to the house thing, I'm thinking the probability of having a pool in my back yard is looking pretty slim also. (Although I did manage to accomplish the "blow-up" kiddie pool in the back yard but my husband doesn't fit in those, so that doesn't count!)

It's just, on this particular birthday; there are a few things I thought I would have accomplished by now. To be honest, I thought I would have surpassed these little dreams and moved on to bigger and better dreams by this point in my life. Yet, these dreams still elude me.

So as you can see, I'm wallowing, once again, in self-pity and let me tell you ...

middle-aged, chunky women have no business wallowing in anything ... especially self-pity ... it's just not pretty!

Then I come to the startling realization, that **this** is my life and what if this is as far as my accomplishments go? "What if" the house I live in now is where I will live the rest of my life? "What if" the vacations I take, are all within my city limits? And "What if" the cracks in my face only get deeper?

What if this is as good as it gets??

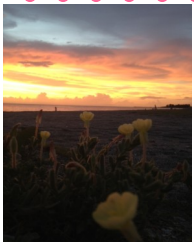
These are pretty tough questions and I had to look deep within myself before I answered. But deep, deep down ... when I broke a hole through my thick wall of

selfishness and dug under my massive layer of self-centeredness ... I found my Lord. And my Lord promised to give me life and give it abundantly.

So castles, wealth and perfect skin may not be in my future ... but I can say my life is full and beautiful and I am happy ... even if **this is as good as it gets!!**

Psalm 37:4

Delight thyself also in the LORD; and he shall give thee the desires of thine heart.



I Can Only Imagine

By Sharon Hawkins

In June, I went to visit my dear friend Cathy who had recently moved to beautiful Venice, Florida. The trip came at a time when I was in desperate need of a break. You know that time when life has you burdened, beaten down and burned out ... when you're sick and tired of being sick and tired. Worn down. Worn out. Just plain worn. I know, I know, you understand.

Some girl time with my precious buddy, Cathy, was just what the doctor ordered. She's the kind of friend that every girl needs ... one you can be real with ... one you can laugh with until you cry ... one you can cry with until you laugh. We did both during our Summer vacation together.

Since returning home, I have often thought about our wonderful week, including the beautiful sunsets that we experienced. I brought home a video of one that was especially beautiful and have watched it over and over on my phone. Muffled sounds of beachcombers set the soundtrack as my panoramic video begins. First, the sky is pale with blues, lavenders and pinks. Then the video explodes into this gorgeous molten lava yellow painting accentuated with corals and periwinkle and shades that I don't even know the names of, as it passes the sunset. Then it turns to sub-

dued pastels brightened by the sun's glow reflecting off the clouds. Absolutely breathtaking ...! The video ends with my friend who loves me so much waving, grinning from ear to ear and saying, "Hi, there!" What a blessing!

My words don't begin to describe, nor my video begin to capture, what I experienced. All I could think about was that if it was this beautiful on earth, what was Heaven like? It was like standing at the end of my imagination and using that for a launching pad to imagine Heaven. I know the vision was a gift from God that I will remember all of my life.

1 Corinthians 2:9 says, But as it is written: "Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him."

The devil goes out of his way to try to twist the good things of God in our lives. He attacks our senses—what we look at, what we hear, physical relationships, what we eat, what we drink. Our imagination is one of those areas where the devil runs wild. When things are a little bad, suddenly in our mind's eye they are really, really bad.

The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:22-23)

Our minds are definitely a battlefield and we have to fight to keep them focused on the things of God.

Matthew 6:19-21 reminds us, Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

Sometimes the devil tries to run away with my imagination with so much being thrown at me all at once. But my God is bigger and He keeps taking me back to that sunset and my imagination to how awesome heaven must be.

I can only imagine ...

2 Corinthians 10:5

Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.

Let Me, Let Me!!

By Marie Pritchett



On the first day of school, the teacher has a list of volunteer positions she needs to fill for the year. You don't see many people signing up at that exact moment and that feeling of guilt starts to creep in. So, of course, being the good mom that you are, you sign up to be the room mom, PTA President, Fund Raiser President and field trip chaperone. The teacher smiles and thanks you profusely. You leave school feeling so good about yourself.

You get home and there is a message on your answering machine. There will be a meeting at the church. All members are asked to attend. You wouldn't think of missing it. What would people think?

You drop the kids off at grandmas after feeding them at the drive thru and head to church. When you get there, the Pastor announces that the new church year is about to begin and they need some teachers and leaders. How can you say NO to the Pastor? You look at all the unfilled positions and once again begin to feel like you should do "your part".

After all, that is what a good Christian should do, isn't it? So, you sign up to teach the middle school girls Sunday School class, lead a women's bible study on Tuesday nights, organize food in time of need, and work in the youth depart-

ment. The Pastor smiles and thanks you. You leave the church feeling so good about yourself.

The next day at work your Boss calls your team together. It is time for the annual charity event and he wants as many volunteers as possible from his department to be there. Everyone starts making excuses as to why they can't attend and once again you feel guilty. Of course, you can't let him down.

So not only do you volunteer your time but you also volunteer your husband as well (for an entire weekend). It is ONLY one weekend a year surely your husband won't mind (neither will grandma as you will have to leave the kids with her!)

Your Boss asks each volunteer to bring something for the bake sale and being the wonderful person that you are, you tell him that you will bake 100 cupcakes and at least 2 homemade pound cakes too! Considering how much he loves your homemade sour cream pound cake that should score you some points with the Boss! He smiles and thanks you. You leave the meeting feeling so good about yourself.

How long does that good feeling last? Only until you realize, you have no time for your family or for God.

I am very guilty of over committing my-

self and being a complete mess. I am sure none of you ever have that problem but I most definitely do!!! I had to learn that it is ok to say no to some things and to not commit to things without praying about them first.

Let God show you where He can best use you instead of just leaping into everything. Remember, you don't have to do everything!!! God has a job for you but not EVERY job is for you!!! God should always have top priority in our lives and our family comes next. Everything else falls under that. If you remember that, it kind of keeps things in their proper perspective.

I strive every day to be the best wife and mom I can be and most definitely the absolute best Jesus girl I can be but I am a work in progress!!!

Proverb 16:3

Commit thy works unto the Lord, and thy thoughts shall be established.

Let's Go Planting: Self Confidence

By Cathy C. Whisnant



words or tear them down? Do you encourage or criticize?

Proverbs 16:24, "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the bones." Honey from the honeycomb just drips with sweetness. The words we speak are to be as sweet as honey as we strive to build our child's self-confidence. We are to be their best cheerleader cheering them on daily!

Proverbs 17:22 tells us the opposite hap-

pens when we don't sweeten our words or our disposition. When neither are honey-coated, the scripture says that it leads to a broken spirit and dries the bones. A crushed spirit caused by the negative things we say not only crushes that inner spirit, but it takes away the laughter that we discussed in our last article.

We must encourage our children by telling and showing them how proud we are of them. We must instill in their young minds that they can do anything they set their minds to do. We are never to tell our children that they cannot accomplish the goals God has in store for them.

Though our love gives our children the inner confidence that neglected children seldom get, it is of utmost importance that they know how much God loves them.

Sit your children down individually and read Psalm 139:1-8 with them. Then help them make a list of all the ways God loves them. Hang on to your list and as they grow, bring out the list and remind them of God's great love so they can live the confident life God has planned for them.

They truly are "fearfully and wonderfully made!"



Prayer In The Desert, Part 1

By Mary Elisabeth Cutliff

Do you ask the question often, "Lord are You there? Why do you allow my child to struggle? Why do you allow this pain in my family? Is this punishment?" I want to encourage you today.

I have asked these questions and still do. I grew up in a Christian home and gave the Lord my heart at an early age. Of course, I had trials but I learned early to lean on Him and He helped me.

Walking through the past 8 years has given me a reliance on the Lord. I HAD to completely lean on Him and HE had to carry me. I am thankful for the things he has taught me, the faith He has grown and the grace He has poured on our family through my special needs son.

When Samuel was born, Tim and I had been married for 7 years. We had two adorable daughters and now an adorable son. He was perfect and things were going well. I had developed diabetes, but it was under control ... I thought that was my big trial. I had other health problems, but was handling them and enjoying my children.

When Samuel was a baby, he was fussy. He didn't smile very often, but I thought he just had a serious personality. He did have reflex, but lots of babies do. When he was 6 months old, his head started to fall to the side easily, He could not sit up and was not babbling. The pediatrician sent us immediately to the neurologist. Things became very scary and we didn't know what was wrong with our baby. He had the most beautiful blonde curls and blue eyes that he spoke volumes with. We started seeing many more doctors, going to therapies and trying different medicines. He did learn to prop sit for a little while when he was one, but quickly lost that skill. He loved to sit in the bumbo seat or in his highchair and play with his blocks and trains. He was a delight and our world was full of loving these three children and we were always on the go with Samuel's appointments.

We even had baby #4, Micah, and feared that he would also have problems, but he did not. Samuel eventually got an awesome wheelchair that supported his body

and grew with him. He also started to aspirate and get pneumonia, so he needed a feeding tube and eventually could not have any food by mouth. These things were so very difficult, but Samuel was much happier and handled everything with strength and determination.

You see, he couldn't talk with his mouth, but he communicated with his eyes, so he used an eyegaze machine or he would stare at what he wanted until I brought it to him. He also could answer yes and no questions by moving his head to the left or right. The therapists became our best friends and help.

Our sweet boy couldn't do many things, but we could help him and he lived life to the fullest! We took him everywhere we could and did everything we were able to. He "Made a Wish" and went to Disney and to "Give Kids the World Village"! He went to Camp New Hope, Carowinds, water parks, riding horses, camping, fishing, swimming, Bible school, church and even on a pontoon boat! Things are not always easy to do with a wheelchair, feeding tube and suction machine, but while we could, we did it. Some of my favorite memories are of just being silly together ... enjoying the moment.

Samuel loved to play chase, so Tim, my husband, would push him around and chase us and Samuel would stick his legs out to try and tag us and start his sweet little giggle. Sponge Bob was tabooed in our house, but my sister came over and told me that Samuel's best buddy, Knox, thought he was hilarious. So I said we could see what Samuel thought. Well, after about 1 minute Samuel started laughing ... and I decided that if that made Samuel laugh, then Sponge Bob was ok.

Also, the Lord gave Samuel the sweetest friend. He and Knox were one month apart and his mama is one of my best friends. Knox was a regular little boy with a precious heart that always made Samuel feel special. He would come over and sit by Samuel and read to him, or hold his hand or help him play a game. He would talk to him and treat him as normally as possible, even though Samuel could not talk back. Samuel would

sometimes try to get Knox by hitting his arm and Knox would just grab his hand and hold it. God gave my little boy and me a special gift with that friendship.

Samuel's siblings were also amazing. They were always giving and loving to their brother. They learned to love children with special needs ... and that is something you cannot teach.

Annaleigh was Samuel's little nurse. At 7 years old, she could help with everything, including feeding tube issues and therapy. When we started to have to have nurses come to our house and help, they had to pass the Annaleigh test before they could take care of Samuel. She is 12 now and wants to be a therapist and work with special needs kids one day.

Gracie is our entertainer ... she would just start acting silly and fall on the floor and Samuel thought that was so funny. She is 13 now and loves animals and wants to train dogs to visit hospitals and would really love to train horses and do therapies for special needs children.

Micah is 5 now and has a heart full of compassion. He is comfortable around everyone and one of his best friends is 14 years old and has Down's Syndrome. Micah has always been part of the special needs world and he thinks it's awesome to go to "therapy" and play with the cool toys or go to parties and get special treatment. He could barely walk and wanted to push his brother everywhere in his wheelchair and Samuel loved it! They were always together and enjoying each other. One of their favorite activities was to play the Wii. We would help Samuel and he loved it and they were able to have so much fun together! He is an awesome kid and I am so blessed to have this amazing family. If Samuel had not been special needs, then what would our family be like? Our whole world would have been different.

There are so many things that I wish I could have changed, but so many things I would never change. One day we will see the big picture, but right now we are so close that it's not clear.

I know I have to rest in knowing that the Lord is working everything out for His good.



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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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Our 5th Annual Empowered Jesus Girl Teen Conference is November 2013.
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Until you value yourself, you will not value your time. Until you value your time, you will not do anything with it. -M. Scott Peck

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