

# 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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## God Rest

Grace looked at the clock by her bed for the 14th time. 2:17 a.m. Her husband's snores were keeping her awake. How could he be sleeping!?! She had shaken the bed and nudged him repeatedly for at least an hour and a half. The last nudges were becoming more like punches. Wow, this man could sleep through anything.

Grace knew it wasn't really his snoring that was keeping her awake but she couldn't take it anymore. She was coming unglued. She bolted out of bed and headed down the hall to the den. She climbed into her recliner and threw it back as far as it would go without throwing her off balance. She pulled two throws over her, tucked them both under her chin and over her ears.

Over the next hours, Grace flipped from her right side to her left side, clicked every level of the recliner, turned her heating pad on and off ... 3:23 a.m. ... 4:09 a.m.

Her mind would not be still and it would not be quiet. It was full of deadlines she had at work, worry over her daughter Gracie's new boyfriend, concerns for her parents' declining health, and uncertainty over the financial future of her family.

She climbed back into her bed, closed her eyes and drifted off ... finally. It couldn't have been more than ten minutes later

when her alarm went off. It was going to be a long day.

Too often, Grace finds it difficult to rest easy during hard times.

When will she ever stop trying so hard? Even though she knows her feeble works will never be perfect enough, that doesn't keep her from killing herself trying. She desperately needs to learn to rest in God's grace. She needs God rest.

It is described in 2 Corinthians 9:8, "And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work."

God rest comes when she is at peace with Him. It is the place where worries and guilt melt away. It comes when she is still and knows that He is God.

As a small child, Grace could never sit still. She still can't. She only allows herself to be still in Him for short periods at a time. Often she bobs around like an untethered buoy in the stormy sea of life.

God rest provides an anchor that can hold her securely no matter how rough the waves get. It is the security that she feels only when she is positively established in Christ.

God rest means trusting Him completely for His care and charge of our lives and know-

By Sharon Hawkins

ing that if we lean on Him, He will always be dependable. His love never fails us.

God rest is a place of fullness, blessing, satisfaction and peace that God offers to every woman. But she has to have faith to be able to receive it.

Hebrews 4:1-2 says, "Therefore, since the promise of entering His rest still stands, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also have had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those who heard did not combine it with faith."

Charles Haddon Spurgeon once said, "Everlasting love shall be the pillow that I rest my head on tonight."

"For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need." Hebrews 4:15-16.

He stays awake so we don't have to. Psalm 121:3-4 promises that He will not allow our foot to be moved; He who keeps us will not slumber. Behold, He who keeps Israel shall neither slumber nor sleep.

He alone provides God rest. It's up to us to choose it.

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### Matthew 11:28

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, 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 will find rest for your souls."

# The Long Good-bye

By Cathy McCormick

How long does it take to say good-bye?

I laugh thinking back to gatherings of friends or family and how it can take hours for the good-byes to wind down and for everyone to finally head off to their own homes and their own lives. No one really wants to say good-bye ... every one wants to linger a little longer. One more joke. One more hug. One more story. Then finally the time comes and we share the last hugs and good-byes and everyone departs.

It's an interesting scene played out over and over again as friends and families come together and then go their own way. We know that when we say good-bye, we only mean "so long, see you later." Why is it that we're so slow to make our leave taking?

I had these thoughts earlier this year when I and my precious stepchildren and

grandchildren gathered together to lay my dear husband and their dear father to rest. This was a multi-day affair, gathering to spread some of his ashes in his beloved skeet field and the woods that he loved to wander on his tractor; and then back to his home place in Eastern North Carolina to be laid to rest with his mother and father.

It was a grand family gathering. The cemetery that he is buried in is a small, old, country cemetery filled with his entire clan, lovely old trees, and quiet. As we got the shovels and the foot stone out of the car, two of our daughters-in-law sat on the grass in the shade of a beautiful oak tree feeding their new babies. The rest of us were working on cleaning up the site, planting flowers, placing the foot stone, and preparing to bury the rest of Len's ashes.

It was sublime. It was surreal. It was

blessed. In this day and age, it is amazing to think that this small family could gather, lay their beloved to rest, pray, sing and thank God ... all by ourselves ... no officials, no strangers ... just us.

As we prepared to leave this incredible gathering, we tarried. No one wanted to leave. No one wanted to say good-bye. But, of course, we did.

How long does it take to say good-bye? I guess forever. It's been three years now and I've learned that there is no good-bye ... there is only ... so long and see you later. In heaven. In God's time.

*Hebrews 11:10*  
*For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.*

# Is Your Bed Too Hard or Too Short?

By Sammy Richards

While sitting in church listening to the preacher one Sunday morning, God gave me the title. I jotted it down and some time passed before looking at it again. I remembered two words that captured my attention during his message—enough and sufficient. He was stating that if all you have is God, then He is enough and sufficient in your life. How true this is!

Growing up we have family time, togetherness and God. My home life some might say was poor and an old fashioned way of living. My mom was 14 when she married my dad who was 26. They had their first child when she was 16 and her last when she was 42. The last child was me. All together there are six of us.

Growing up I felt I had the smartest parents in the world. They shared their life experiences with us. From those experiences we learned so much. They also shared many things like old sayings that had been shared with them by their parents--maybe old wives' tales. Some I never understood but they made me think.

One that stands out to me is what my mom used to say to us. "If you make your

bed hard, you'll have to lay in it." As a kid, I pictured all kinds of things, like who would want to lie on a hard bed? Why would someone make their bed hard when they could make it soft? I'm not going to make my bed hard, I thought, a child's way of thinking. This is so true to life, as we grow from a child to an adult.

We put I, or me, first in all we do or say. We try the world. We try to make our way through life on our own. Someday we reach the point where we realize our bed is made hard and it's too short for us. No matter what we do, it's not enough. This is when life gets great! We realize the world has nothing to offer and we realize we need God.

Isaiah 28:20 "For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it."

If you have tried it your way and your way is not working out for you and you realize your bed is hard and too short and the world has nothing to offer you, TURN TO GOD. He is enough and He is sufficient!!!

Psalm 63:6 "When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate on thee in the night watches."

My parents were so smart. I didn't understand as a child that they had planted that seed. God used that seed to grow in my heart so that I could realize that if we have made our beds hard by following the world and using I and ME have made it come up short, we can turn the I and me over to God through whom all things are possible. He can then make our beds the perfect fit for us. God first, then me, makes us. God is enough!

Psalm 139:8 "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there."

We have a choice: a bed that's soft and the right size or a bed that's hard and too short. I pray that, while you read this, you stop and think and also apply it to your hearts. God is enough! My bed is just right because God has my life. He has all of me!

Psalm 63:3 says, "Because thy loving kindness it better than life, my lips shall praise thee."



## Out of My Hands

By Kathy Elrod

I wrote this poem on June 9, 2010, as I was facing a job change at my school. I'd been asked to move from first grade to the position of reading intervention teacher. I remember crying and not wanting to leave the grade that I so dearly loved. I just didn't feel in my heart like it was God's will for me to do that.

Little did I know that in April of 2011, I would face a life-threatening illness, followed by very serious surgery a few months later. Again in 2012, I faced another surgery that was due to complications from the previous surgery.

And in October of 2013, I would lose my precious son, Brent Elrod, in a hiking accident at a waterfall. When I came across this poem a few weeks ago, I read

it and thought about how God always knows best, even when we don't understand what's going on in life. He always does! It's during those times that we must simply TRUST HIM.

*Out of my Hands*

*Not for my good  
But for Your glory,  
This is understood.*

*It's all about You  
And not about me.  
I know this is true.*

*Though I don't understand;  
It doesn't make sense.  
I trust this is in Your hand.*

*You know the plans that You have for me,  
Plans for a future and a hope.  
So I will trust, oh Lord, in Thee.*

*It's out of my Hands  
And out of my control  
It must be part of Your plan.*

### Proverbs 3:5-6

*Trust in the LORD with all your heart,  
and do not lean on your own  
understanding. In all your ways  
acknowledge Him, and He will make  
straight your paths.*

## Even Now

By Brenda Horne

... yet even now, when there seems no hope, God reigns.

His faith is strong, but his burdens are stronger. No job, no money, bills past due, his father dying of cancer.

Not having a job was wearing on his natural desire to provide for his family. Helplessness ate at his inner being. His struggle with self-worth was deafening as Satan constantly whispered, "You are a failure."

He and his estranged father have just recently reconciled and now cancer has ravaged his father's body. He longs to be with his father on his last days, but that may not come to pass. There is just no money for the trip. The thought of losing his father without seeing him one more time cuts deeply.

As the bills mount and the wolf bangs at the door, what's a husband, a father ... a man to do? Yet even now, when there seems to be no hope, God still reigns.

I hear him singing in the next room, "Because He lives, I can face tomorrow.

*Because He lives, all fear is gone. Because I know He holds the future and life is worth the living ... JUST BECAUSE HE LIVES."*

Even now, as his walls crumble ... he has hope ... even now; as his uncertainty continues ... he has hope.

His song becomes more powerful as his doubts fade. His confidence in Christ builds and his assurance can be felt through the walls. The truth of the song gives him the strength he needs to endure.

When he comes to the last verse his voice does not waiver. "And then one day I'll cross that river, I'll fight life's final war with pain. And then as death gives way to victory. I'll see the lights of glory and I'll know He lives."

And the weight is lifted, he is reassured. With or without a job, with or without money, with or without the hospital visit, he knows ... his God reigns ... even now!

### Hebrews 11:1

*Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*

### Joel 2:12

*"Even now," declares the LORD,  
"return to me with all your heart,  
with fasting and weeping and  
mourning."*

### Psalms 46:1-2

*God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. So we will not fear when earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea.*





## The Power of Tears

By Marie Pritchett

As women we cry in response to pain, hurt, disappointment and heartache

but we also cry in response to joy, love, celebration and rejoicing. Have you ever just needed a “good ol’ cry”? The death of a loved one, the loss of a job, a wayward child or the end of a marriage are all things that cause pain so deep that we feel helpless and our body cries out with tears. I have said many times, when my son made his journey to heaven, the tears I shed (and continue to shed some days) would fill an ocean.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.” Revelation 21:4

You have recorded my troubles. You have kept a list of my tears. Psalm 56:8

The urge to cry may also come when you hold a new baby in your arms, when your child obtains goals that you never thought possible, when you witness a miracle or experience belly jerking laughter. The day I married my high school sweetheart, and when I held my children for the first time, the tears were unstoppable.

Some of my best praying was done while I was crying. I completely opened myself

up to God and he drew me into his arms and comforted me beyond anything I could ever imagine. I’ve learned a good cry can renew and refresh us. It can cleanse us of even the most negative emotions. It is a healthy form of release to our soul and is an important part of our healing process when we are hurt or suffer a loss. Sometimes when I cry, I feel so much better afterwards. Tears are a precious gift from God. Luke 6:21 says, “You are blessed when the tears flow freely!”

So ladies, the next time you feel tears spring to your eyes, don’t try to contain them. Allow yourself to have a “good ol’ cry”!

*Every Woman is Beautiful*

—Author Unknown

*A little boy asked his mother, “Why are you crying?” “Because I’m a woman,” she told him. “I don’t understand,” he said. His mom just hugged him and said, “And you never will” ...*

*Later the little boy asked his father, “Why does mother seem to cry for no reason?” “All women cry for no reason” was all his dad could say.*

*The little boy grew up and became a man, still wondering why women cry.*

*Finally he put in a call to God; when God got on the phone, the man said, “God, why do women cry so easily?”*

*God said, “When I made woman, she had to be special. I made her shoulders strong enough to carry the weight of the world; yet, gentle enough to give comfort.*

*I gave her an inner strength to endure childbirth and the rejection that many times come from her children.*

*I gave her a hardness that allows her to keep going when everyone else gives up and take care of her family through sickness and fatigue without complaining.*

*I gave her the sensitivity to love her children under any and all circumstances, even when her child has hurt her very badly.*

*This same sensitivity helps her make a child’s boo boo feel better and shares in her teenagers’ anxieties and fears.*

*I gave her strength to carry her husband through his faults and fashioned her from his rib to protect his heart.*

*I gave her wisdom to know that a good husband never hurts his wife, but sometimes tests her strengths and her resolve to stand beside him unflinchingly.*

*And finally I gave her a tear to shed. This is hers exclusively to use whenever it is needed. The beauty of a woman is not in the clothes she wears, the figure that she carries, or the way she combs her hair. The beauty of a woman must be seen in her eyes, because that is the doorway to her heart, the place where love resides.”*

*Every woman is beautiful.*



## Amos, the Strong-Willed Dog

By Liz Rampy

After my sweet dog of thirteen years died, I needed some puppy therapy. There is nothing like that sweet puppy smell and fat puppy belly to lift your spirits. However, the last thing I needed was

to actually bring home a puppy. My schedule wasn’t conducive to devoting the time that a new puppy needs. I did talk about getting another dog one day. When I did, I said aloud, it would be a carefully chosen sweet dog that could go with me to my counseling practice.

Shane, on the other hand, thought I

wanted a puppy. After being a four-dog family for most of our marriage, we were down to only two. There are a lot of details involved, but in short, after a “Let’s just go look” trip, we ended up with a new dog. This could be a story about communication in marriage or avoiding temptation. Instead, it’s about an aggravating dog named Amos.

When we met Amos, he was thought to be a mastiff mix. Mastiffs are gentle giants and are often used in therapy work. His brindle coloring made him strikingly handsome. And, he was medicated. He had undergone surgery the day before. We were told to handle him with care

and not to put him on the floor.

We were so taken with this pup that we must have temporarily lost our minds. If you know anything about dogs, you aren’t going to believe this. Since we were handling him so carefully, we didn’t think to turn him on his back to see if he would expose his belly. That is covered as the first thing you do in practically every dog temperament article on the internet.

We should have known he was on pain medication but didn’t put it all together. At the time, Amos was snuggling in Shane’s lap like it was his only purpose in life. Well, we got him home. The next day, the medication wore off. The True

## Amos, the Strong-Willed Dog (Cont'd)

By Liz Rampy

Amos emerged as the strongest-willed dog I have ever met. He was fearless. He snapped at me when I got close to his food. He didn't like to be petted. He didn't have time for that. He had other things to do. He had food to look for, pillows to attack, an older dog to harass, and a need to express his shrill bark incessantly. Can a dog be diagnosed with ADHD? He had no time for long, sweet puppy naps. When he did settle down at night, he would fall asleep on top of my back. I dared not move for fear of winding him up again.

I was miserable, but we are not "take the dog back" people. I work with skittish strays, pick up homeless dogs on the side of the road, and do everything I can to reunite lost dogs with their people. When Shane and I look at houses for sale, our first question to one another is, "Where would we put the dogs?" We immediately discount a house that is too close to a busy highway. We make vacation plans based on who can take care of the dogs. Our lives greatly center around our furry family members.

After just a few days with Amos, my heart was sick. Things weren't getting any better. I had a thought that had never entered my mind before. Maybe we really should take him back. He came from a vet who takes in strays, so I knew he would be taken care of. I also knew that if he was going back, it would have to be soon. With each day of aging, his chances of being adopted would decrease.

I just couldn't do it. He had become a part of our family the minute we signed on the dotted line and pulled away. Even though he didn't sit still long enough to be petted, he did want to be close to us.

He followed us from room to room and barked when he was away from us. We had committed to his care. I didn't think it was fair to make him adjust to a new family.

I kept scouring the internet to study dog temperaments and behavior. I discovered through my research that Amos is a Plott Hound. Plott Hounds are recognized by their shrill bark. They are also described as "tenacious" bear hunters that can keep a bear at bay for hours. A dog that intimidates a BEAR! That is hardly therapy dog material.

I started thinking about finding a new home for Amos once again. And that is when I knew that I really did love him. The reason? Because I realized that God may have designed him to be something other than a family dog confined to a fenced in yard. He was made to hunt. Perhaps it was unfair for us to keep him. Maybe it really was best to give him away to someone with acres and acres of land. My friends and I all started praying for the best home for Amos.

I reached out to my friends who go hunting. None of them could take him, but they said they would help me find someone who would. I wasn't sure about giving him to someone who may have a different pet parenting style than me. What if he ran loose and got hit by a car? What if they didn't take him to the vet when he was sick? What if he got on their nerves and they gave him away? I couldn't stand it.

As a final effort, I took Amos to a respected trainer for an evaluation. She gave him several tests and he passed them all. Although strong-willed, he was

a good dog at heart. He wasn't an aggressive dog. He just didn't have a lot of social skills. I continued to work with Amos and continued to pray. When I followed the advice of the trainer, Amos became a better dog. It was me who needed to change.

How often is that the case with the people in our lives? It is up to us to remember that God made them. We need to look at them through the lens of His love. Really loving them means we do what's best for them, even if it conflicts with what we want. It means accepting that they may do things that get on our nerves. It's not about making them who we want them to be. It's about helping them be the person God wants them to be.

Amos is now a little over a year old. He continues to be quite vocal when he wants something. He still likes to sleep on top of me. He's sixty pounds and stretches across the length of the king sized bed. It is also not that unusual for me to hear him getting into something he's not supposed to from across the house. I'll yell, "AMOS!" to stop him in his tracks. He usually comes running while wagging his tail. He even lets me rub his ears when he gets to me. I'd say that is unconditional love on his part. I'm thankful that our prayers for the best home for Amos were answered. He's right where he needs to be.

### *1 Thessalonians 5:11*

*Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing.*

## Remembering Matthew With Hope

By Lori Worley

March 10, 1986 was by far one of the happiest, most exciting days of my life because ... that was the day my husband and I welcomed our first baby into the world!

Even though Steve had just finished college and hadn't found a job yet when we discovered I was pregnant, we were thrilled! We didn't quite expect to start our family so soon, but God had other

plans! I had concerns that I would have a difficult time conceiving due to extremely irregular cycles, so I was overjoyed that my dream of becoming a mommy was about to come true!

I had a healthy, uneventful pregnancy. However, my labor and delivery experience was quite an adventure! My water broke at home, so I went straight to the hospital. Once admitted, a nurse told us to try to relax since labor usually pro-

gresses slowly for first time moms.

Well, my labor progressed much more quickly than expected. The only obstetrician at the hospital was performing an emergency C-section on another woman, so he was unavailable to help me. The nurse was telling me not to push, which is not easy when a baby is ready to come!

While a thunderstorm raged outside, Steve and I tried to stay calm, and I was

# Remembering Matthew With Hope

By Lori Worley

trying my best not to push. Then a man we had never seen before came scrambling into the delivery room. He quickly introduced himself. We were very thankful that he was a doctor and that he had made it to the hospital in the nick of time to deliver our baby.

So, our firstborn son made his entrance into the world early on the morning of March 10, 1986. Holding that sweet baby boy in my arms was like experiencing a little piece of Heaven!!! The love I felt for him was overwhelming. The name Matthew means "gift from God" so we felt it was the perfect name for our precious blessing. Life was sweet!

Matthew was a very happy, easy-going baby. He was always quick to smile. He enjoyed God's creation from a very early age. He used to watch the squirrels play from the window above his crib, and he loved to look at the moon and stars at night.

He grew into a very bright and inquisitive toddler. He had an especially sweet nature about him. He became a big brother at the tender age of 19 months. He was always kind and gentle with his baby sister, Melodie.

By 1st grade, he became fascinated with weather. He loved reading books on storms, and he loved watching videos from the Weather Channel about tornados. He said that he wanted to become a meteorologist when he grew up or a storm chaser.

Matthew was a voracious reader. He loved books of all kinds. He especially had a great love for history.

For various reasons, we began to home school our two children when Matthew and Melodie were in late elementary school. It is a choice that I will never regret, because home schooling was a huge blessing to our family. We were able to travel with my husband to some fun places during the school year, and I am so thankful for the fun memories we made.

We had what we thought was the "perfect" family and we felt very complete and very fulfilled. But again, God had other plans! Matthew was 12 and

Melodie was 10 ½ when we were blessed with Mark.

As a young teen, Matthew grew into quite a computer "geek." I share that with the utmost affection. He was my tech guy and could always help me with all technology-related issues.

As an older teenager, Matthew expressed a strong desire to join the military. He wanted to serve our country. He wanted to make a difference in this messed up world. He had a heart to serve people.

Steve and I appreciated our son's heart to serve our country and help people, but we also had our concerns as to whether enlisting in the military was the best choice for him. Not only were we concerned about his physical safety, but we were concerned about his spiritual well-being. He had only been a Christian for a short time, and we wanted to see some spiritual growth in him before he took off to join the military. As we sought God's wisdom as to how to best guide him, we felt strongly that He led us to encourage Matthew to go to college first. So, my husband discussed it with him, and, thankfully, he followed his dad's advice. God opened doors in amazing ways for Matthew to attend Southern Wesleyan University on academic scholarships and grants. He had decided to pursue a double-major of business and history.

While attending SWU, Matthew took two mission trips to Bayou LaBatre, Alabama to help with relief efforts following Hurricane Katrina. Those two trips were life-changing for him. And his desire to serve and help others only grew stronger.

We were enjoying life with our two young adult children and our seven-year-old son. We thought our family was complete. Yet again, God had other plans. In 2006, He blessed us with another son, Micah.

After three years at SWU, Matthew took a break from college to work and save some money--and to re-group. He had decided to pursue a career in law enforcement. He was very interested in military security, and hoped to be a part of that area of service one day.

But, God had other plans for Matthew ... He took our firstborn son Home on July

26, 2009. He is in God's Army now--but he is safe there. He is not in any danger, as he would've been as a law enforcement officer or a soldier or a military security officer. I am so thankful to God for His protection over Matthew. I truly believe in my heart that God rescued him from the evil to come (Isaiah 57:1).

At the time of his departure from this earth, Matthew was 23 years old yet he had lived a very full life! He loved life so much and he loved adventure!

His last job on this earth was in landscaping. He loved being outdoors and he enjoyed God's creation so much. He once told me that his favorite thing about his job was driving up in the mountains to deliver mulch because he had no radio signal and no cell phone signal in some areas—so he was able to have his special quiet times with God since there were no interruptions or distractions!

He also had just finished a volunteer job for our church (Mt. Moriah Baptist in Powdersville, SC) as a night security watchman while our new building was under construction at the time of his passing.

Matthew loved our church and church family. He was faithful to attend all three services at Mt. Moriah each week even at times when the rest of the family could not attend.

After his departure, we were so blessed by the many stories people of all ages shared with us about Matthew. Two words people used the most when describing him were: faithful and encouraging.

Faithful: Matthew was not only faithful in his church attendance, but he was a faithful friend and "big brother" figure to many. Everyone that knew him could count on him if they needed a helping hand—day or night. He often burned the candle at both ends, so to speak.

Encouraging: Matthew was a great encourager. His heart was very tender and compassionate toward others. He always knew just the right words to say



## Remembering Matthew With Hope (Cont'd)

By Lori Worley

to lift up a person whose spirits were low.

Matthew's warm, joyful smile and sense of humor are remembered fondly by all who knew him. He had the ability to make even the grumpiest person laugh!!!

Our recent snowstorm brought back memories of a snowstorm we had the first of March, 2009, just four months before Matthew's departure. On his way home from eating lunch with friends after church, he encountered several stranded motorists. Of course, he stopped to help them. I am not sure how many cars he pulled out of ditches on that snowy Sunday, but he blew his Jeep's engine out! I was more concerned about him than I was his Jeep, though. He was soaked to the bone because he had helped people out in the snow--even though he was wearing only a long-sleeved dress shirt and khaki pants without a coat or jacket! But, that is just one example of how he didn't think of himself; he put others first. Matthew was a Good Samaritan!

Well, March 10 is now a bittersweet day for our family. This year will be our 5th year to celebrate Matthew's earthly birthday without him. We miss him more than words can begin to express, and always will this side of Heaven!

Another bittersweet day for our family is July 26, because that is Matthew's departure date from this earth. Yet for him, that date in 2009 was his best day ever, because he woke up in the presence of his loving Heavenly Father! I can only imagine his smile when he met Jesus face to face! The Bible tells us that for the believer, the day we die is better than the day we were born (Ecclesiastes 7:1). I have no doubt that Matthew agrees!

As we celebrate Matthew's earthly birthday in March, and also as we mark the five years since his passing in July, we remember him with hope--because we do not grieve as the world grieves (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

We miss Matthew not only on his earthly

and heavenly birthdays; we miss him every single day. But God is faithful to meet us in our darkest moments. He is the God of all comfort (2 Corinthians 1:3). I am so thankful for how He has carried us through each day, especially the extra hard ones when we felt as if we would be swallowed up by our grief. And I am so thankful for each and every sweet "God Kiss" that He gives us to bring comfort to our hurting hearts!

We thank The Lord for Matthew's life, and that we were blessed to be his parents for 23 years on this earth. We learned so much from him while he was here, and we continue to learn from him since his departure. My prayer is that, as a result of his life, my heart will always be tender and compassionate. I pray that I will always serve and help others. And I pray that I will always be faithful and encouraging, just like Matthew!



## Squandered

By Cathy McCormick

This morning I was cleaning out my jewelry box—a chore I've been putting off for a long, long time. As I pawed through its contents, I found way too many mismatched earrings—one of the pair long lost somewhere along the way; long-forgotten pieces of jewelry from my mom and grandmother; and earrings so out of date I had to laugh!

I have a tendency to put important (or seemingly important at the time) papers in my jewel box as well—my passport, an important receipt, and such. As I was unfolding some of these papers, I came across a letter my precious husband had written me back in 2000, before we were married.

The letter took my breath away. First of all, my husband seldom wrote letters and, secondly, this letter was written at a time when we were apart. He spoke from his heart about our relationship and the treasure we shared. The letter spoke of a cassette tape he had recorded and enclosed with the letter. He said he

hoped the tape would speak to my heart and say the words he was having trouble saying.

At the mention of the tape I broke down in tears. I realized that I had NEVER listened to it! I was so angry at the time he sent it that I probably just threw the cassette away.

Then it hit me—I had SQUANDERED something that I would give anything and everything to have today!

How much time, love, opportunity do we SQUANDER? I'm afraid to say that when I look back on my life, I see so, so, so many times I have SQUANDERED so many of the gifts that God has given me. I guess it's easier to see how much we've wasted as we get older.

Growing older provides us with a wonderful, and often overwhelming, wisdom. Wisdom is why we can look at our children at times and feel so broken-hearted when we see all that they are squander-

ing; all that they are taking for granted. It's an age-old problem.

"If I could do it over." Boy, how many times do we wish we could have a "do over"? To have the chance to react differently? To say something nice? To take back the words we said? Hundreds and hundreds of times is the answer.

There is no "do over" for me today. That tape is long gone, as is my husband. I guess he can sing me those songs when I see him again in heaven.

Psalms 90:12 sums this up for me: "So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom."

This is my prayer today. I pray that I will look on each moment of my life, each interaction with the people I love with a heart of wisdom that KNOWS that my days are numbered and precious!

Thank you, God.



## Grace In The Wilderness Ministries

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This morning I was

### 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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cleaning out my jewelry box -- a

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*A great deal of talent is lost to the world for want of a little courage. -Sydney Smith*

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