

# 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

November/December 2014

Volume 7, Issue 4, Bi-Monthly



### Rocking Baby Jesus

By Sharon Hawkins

Being a mom is one of the greatest joys in the life of Today's Busy Woman is . When a new baby is born to first-time parents, it is an exciting, wonderful time.

But it can also be a frightful time. One look into a fragile, precious, new baby face can strike fear into the heart of the bravest men and women.

When my oldest son was born and I held him for the first time, of course my first thought, was how blessed my husband and I were. Other thoughts quickly followed. "What do we do now?" "How do we take care of him?" I wanted only to give him the best and to do my best for him as his mother. I felt so inadequate as a first-time parent.

Can you imagine how Mary and Joseph must have felt when Baby Jesus was born?

They didn't have all the nurses around to help sanitize the stable, to check Him out or tell them He was healthy, to provide care for Mary. No epidural. (Okay, I'm a wimp—I can't even imagine this part.) And no doctor to deliver Baby Jesus, the most important baby ever to be born in the world, PERIOD. The King of Kings.

No, they were on their own--a young girl and Joseph, her husband, the carpenter. What did they know about delivering or taking care of a baby? And He wasn't just any baby, He was the Lord of Lords. Wow, talk about feeling under qualified to

parent a child!

Max Lucado tweeted, "Mary didn't know whether to give Jesus milk or give Him praise, but she gave Him both since He was hungry and holy."

To think that the God of the Universe would humble Himself, first of all, to come to earth to become a sacrifice to save man, then to think that He would allow Himself to be born to us in such a fragile, weak, lowly, unprivileged, dependent way should be so overwhelming to us!

His ways are higher than our ways. It speaks volumes of who He is. It's so like God for Him to show His love for us and His servant's heart in this way.

Mary had very little to offer this baby in the way of comfort except to wrap Him in some cloth, give Him milk, her warmth, her love, her praise, her heart. She was so unworthy but God blessed her to be the mother of His Son.

She swaddled the Great I Am. She kept warm the Light of the World.

She fed the Bread of Life. She cuddled the Lamb of God. She got to rock the Rock of Ages.

I'm sure her lullaby must have been a praise song of thanksgiving for the Messiah's coming and for His safe delivery. Emmanuel ("God with us") was alone there shivering in the dirty stable

that night with Mary and Joseph. Not because they were great, but because He was.

While Mary and Joseph had little to offer Jesus, He had everything to offer them and all mankind—life, healing, provision, grace, mercy, peace, joy, forgiveness, love, not to mention, eternal life.

During His life on earth, He would heal the sick, restore sight to the blind and speech to the dumb. He would raise the lame to their feet and the dead back to life.

He would feed thousands spiritual food as well as bread and fish from one little boy's lunch. He would walk on water and calm the sea. And he offered all these things willingly.

That holy night Jesus began His life in preparation ultimately to lay it down at age 33 to take on the sins of the world. This was only because of His great love for us. It was so much and so great a work He came to accomplish! All that would come, in time.

But for that night in Bethlehem, He was a holy, precious, fragile newborn, and Mary was His mama. And she was rocking her sweet Baby Jesus.

Isaiah 9:6 For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.

#### Inside this issue:

<i>Rocking Baby Jesus</i>	1
<i>Strength For The Journey</i>	2
<i>The Book</i>	2-3
<i>Dos and Don'ts Of Relating To Those Grieving</i>	3-4
<i>All It Needed Was A Little Love</i>	4-5
<i>Journey of God's Plan (Part 2)</i>	5-6
<i>Something He Can Use</i>	6
<i>Scars</i>	7
<i>About the Ministry</i>	8

Visit [www.wildernessgrace.org](http://www.wildernessgrace.org) for more information about our Grace In The Wilderness Christmas Brunch for Moms Who Have Lost Children at Blue Ridge View Baptist Church, Pickens, SC on December 6, 2014.

#### John 3:16

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

# Strength For The Journey

By Linda Byce

Do you know what Total Exhaustion feels like?

Before our family's Journey began on December 25th, 2006, I only thought I knew what that phase meant. I had no idea what my body and mind could withstand until this Journey began. In these 8 years, I have been awake, "On Call" 24/7 every day and night except for 98 nights. Each of those nights was a gift from someone. Most times Trammell, our precious son, who took over the care of David so that I could SLEEP through the night.

That leaves 2,728 NIGHTS that I have cared for him. A few years of that I was up with him and Trammell right after Trammell was paralyzed and in a wheelchair. It's All a Labor Of Love. BUT My body aches from exhaustion. It's so hard to function because my mind is sometimes like a fog. And my memory is non-existent.

BUT Still I carry on. I know without a doubt that the ONLY Reason I am able to carry on is by THE GRACE OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

There is No Other Way.

HE gives the strength to continue to crawl out of bed all during the night, every night to check on David, change his diapers, bed pads or shirt and calm him when he's scared and confused or having bad dreams.

HE gives me the strength for my feet to hit the floor running at 6:30 each morning and face another NON-STOP, NEVER A DULL MOMENT Day. Day after Day after, Year after Year.

I, like so many others, dream of a time when life will be Calm, Peaceful and Restful.

I dream of a time when I will get to lay down at the end of an exhausting

day, close my eyes and go to Sleep, knowing that I don't have to get up until morning.

But I know with all my heart that this Journey we are on is part of GOD'S Plan. And GOD'S Plan is Always The Best Plan. When we submit ourselves to GOD'S Plan, HE Will carry us through. HE Will give us the strength and the courage we need to finish the race. And in those times when we fall and are so exhausted we can't get up, HE lifts us up and carries us in HIS Loving Arms until we are able to walk again.

### Psalm 37:23

*But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.*

## The Book

By Brenda Horne

The Preacher stood there with a giant black book opened in his hands. Raising it high, he spoke loudly so the entire congregation could hear ...

"The names of those who believe on the Lord Jesus Christ are written down in the Lamb's Book of Life. And those names, one day, will be called out!" He stepped down from the pulpit and slowly walked down the aisle, holding the open book in his hand.

"I don't know if the names will be in alphabetical order or if the names will be listed by date. I don't know how "big" the book will be or the color. There are many things I don't know about the Lamb's Book of Life but there is one thing I DO know ..."

He steps back up into the pulpit and raises the book high once again ... "When the King of Kings writes your name in the Lamb's Book of Life it can never, ever be removed!"

"Amen's" were heard throughout the sanctuary. He placed the black book back

on the pulpit and continued, "It is written that we will all, one day, stand before the throne of God and be judged. Great and small will have to come face to face with the God of the universe. We will be held accountable for the decisions we have made in our lives." He raised the black book once again. As he did, I wondered ... "What *will* Judgment Day be like?"

Will I cower in fear at being in the presence of the Lord God Almighty, Jehovah? At that moment, will it become crystal clear how the entire universe and all it holds **truly is** at the mercy of the Most High God?

Will I think of my loved ones? And will panic strike, as I remember the ones I never told about the saving power of the Lord Jesus Christ? And what of the loved ones I did tell, but they chose not to listen?

I wonder if my anxious heart will pound uncontrollably as I witness each person take their turn before the throne, facing their judgment. Watching them ... one

by one ... acknowledge the choices they have made in their lives.

What joy will I feel for those who *did* choose to believe? Oh, the celebrations that must occur as they enter into the gates of heaven! And will I be able to contain my excitement at seeing my loved ones enter into those same gates?

Then ... will that joy turn to unimaginable horror at the fate of those whose names are *not found* in the Lamb's Book, those who must confirm they had the chance to believe yet chose to reject Jesus?

Will I have the ability to close my eyes and quiet the sounds of the screams when they realize the Bible was true ... and now knowing what awaits them? Now, because of their decision, they will spend eternity in hell, tormented and tortured in darkness ... alone ... forever ... without hope ... without Jesus.

How will I feel when the time arrives for **my** final judgment? Having to acknowledge the decisions I made in **my**

## The Book (Cont'd)

life ... for all to see and hear. I cannot imagine my shame when I come face to face with Jesus and see the scars *my sins* put on Him! Knowing full well the magnitude of the sacrifice He made for me when I deserved nothing!

How badly will I tremble as I stand before the Lamb's Book of Life? Remembering the very second I asked Jesus to be my Savior and now having the enormity of that decision right before me?

I wonder how fast my heart will beat ... as the pages flip one by one, my eyes glued on the Book ... my ears acute to every sound ... listening .... waiting ...

until suddenly .....MY NAME ... is read loud and clear...echoing throughout the heavens!!

*Then hearing Jesus Christ my Savior acknowledge my name before God the Father and proclaim that I belong to Him!*

I'm drawn back to the sermon and hear the preacher asking loudly, "Is your name in the Lamb's book of life?"

"Because there *will* be a day when the last name is written and time will be no more. Please do not wait!" Holding the black book up high, silence fills the sanctuary, then he slams the book shut.

### *Revelation 3:5*

*He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the **book of life**, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels.*

## Dos and Don'ts Of Relating To Those Who Are Grieving



In January of 2014, a new Grace In The Wilderness Support Group for Moms Who Have Lost Children was

launched called "The Grace Girls".

Kathy Elrod and Lori Worley are the coordinators of this group, and it typically meets every couple of months at a restaurant in the Easley, SC area. Our Grace Girls' private facebook page membership has grown to 95 members. It is a safe place where moms can encourage and be encouraged by those who understand what it means to suffer the loss of a child. If you would like more information about becoming a part of this group, please contact Grace In The Wilderness (contact info on the last page of this newsletter).

Our 5th Annual Grace In The Wilderness Christmas Brunch For Moms Who Have Lost Children will be held at Blue Ridge View Baptist Church in Pickens, SC on December 6, 2014 from 9:30am to 1pm. Tickets are no charge but registration is needed-www.wildernessgrace.org.

The holidays are an especially difficult time for those who have lost loved ones. Kathy Elrod, Lori Worley and Marie Pritchett are moms who are walking the

difficult journey of having lost a child. They share their helpful advice of dos and don'ts of how to encourage and support grieving families.

Don'ts:

Don't say you "were" his/her relative. You still are their relative. Just because someone is in Heaven doesn't mean they cease to be your relative.

Don't say that they are in a better place. Although we know they are, we don't want to be told that when we want them with us.

Don't ask, "Are you better yet?" We will never be better, this side of Heaven.

Don't tell someone to move on. We will never move on. That day changes you forever. We must move forward, but nobody has the right to tell us it's time to move on.

Don't say, "Everything happens for a reason." Even though we know God has His reasons for everything, this comment does not help someone who is grieving.

Don't say, "Just think. God probably spared him from something far worse than this." I've been told that numerous times. Though it might be true, only God would know that.

Don't casually ask someone who is grieving, "How are you doing?" just for the sake of making conversation. Do ask, "How are you doing?" if you are willing to take the time and truly care to hear the real answer (which may not be easy to hear).

Don't tell family members that they have to be strong for other family members. They are grieving too.

Don't avoid us. I had people who would see me in the grocery store and try to go the other direction or hide. They didn't know what to say or were afraid of upsetting me. Tears are now a part of our lives. It's ok!

Dos:

Even though no one feels like eating, take food. Be there when everyone else has gone, just to listen. Come and do the little things—laundry, clean the house, etc.

Offer to help while the family is receiving friends. We were given water and reminded to drink after every 10 or so people came through. Crying causes dehydration. I guess I never thought of that until my niece reminded me. Offer to sit at the house while the funeral is going on. Sadly, criminals do watch for funerals and sometimes break into houses while they know people are gone.

## Dos and Don'ts Of Relating To Those Who Are Grieving (Cont'd)

Remember that your friend who is grieving will be traveling this journey for a long time. Stay in touch. This can be as simple as sending a text message just to let her know that you are thinking of her.

Try to remember those extra hard days such as the child's earthly birthday and departure date. Remember a mom on Mother's Day. This is one of the hardest days of the year for grieving moms. And be sensitive on special occasions. Her child does not get to be a part of them since they are no longer here (i.e.: family birthday celebrations, family reunions, graduations, weddings, etc). Know that this mom's heart is hurting because all special occasions are bittersweet for her after the departure of her child.

I would like to share a good example of something to do, that was modeled by my

pastor's wife. Kerry would lightly put her hand on my shoulder when she asked how I was doing and she looked me right in the eye. She didn't try to avoid eye contact, as some people do who are uncomfortable with even being near a bereaved person. I could see in her eyes that she really cared and wanted me to tell her how I was really doing. She didn't want me to say, "I'm OK" just so she could move on with her day.

Talk about our child. Another thing is to say our child's name. We want to hear it, and it lets us know people haven't forgotten them. We love hearing other people talk about them.

And please remember our surviving children. They feel very left out. People tend to think parents losing a child are the only ones who suffer. Our other children struggle to make sense of not only losing

their sibling but losing the parents they once had. Our lives will never be the same, so we have to discover a new normal with our families.

Above all, the best thing that you can do to help those who have lost a child or other family member is to pray for them. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. (Psalm 147:3)

### 2 Corinthians 1:4

*Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.*



## All It Needed Was A Little Love

By Liz Rampey

Merry Christmas Tree Farm to get my live tree the day after Thanksgiving. Always.

Last year, I just couldn't get it together. I was just sick about it. That's the ugly truth. I kept telling myself that it wasn't about the tree. I don't do a lot of decorating otherwise, so for me, no tree means no Christmas spirit. The heart of the issue was that I let myself become too busy to celebrate this special time of year.

My tree is never a Martha Stewart tree, but it's a time to be reminded of years past. After dragging out everything from our storage building, I'll push the button to hear the "Snoopy Song" and "Hark the Herald, Angels Sing" on my Hallmark ornaments. I'll pull out each ornament and remember where it came from. I have the ornaments that I got at a discount when I worked retail at Christmas (which, hopefully, I'll never do again.) I have ornaments from our first married Christmas, ornaments from loved ones,

friends, and former students. I have several ornaments that are handmade or "worth" only pennies, but they were given in love by people who felt I had helped them. Those are some of my favorites.

So, I did finally at least get a tree from Lowe's. They have nice trees for a reasonable price. Going to a chain store with a large parking lot and long lines does not have the same ambiance as going to a farm with crisp, fresh air, but a tree is a tree. Once I got it home, it sat in the stand for two weeks undecorated. More business got in the way. I did feel better about at least having it.

I put some lights on the tree one day. Then I added a snowflake made out of a coffee filter. I was trying to make some for a door decorating contest at school, but failed miserably. Most of them turned out square with the exception of this one. How does that happen, anyway? A round coffee filter ends up square? Regardless, I was proud of being successful with the one.

My favorite Linus ornament was somehow left out of the pack up process last year. It is the one of Linus on stage,

starting off with, "Lights please..." and continuing with, "And there were in the same country shepherds, abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them! And they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, "Fear not! For, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all my people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ, the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the Heavenly Host praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the Highest, and on Earth peace, and good will toward men. That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

I decided that ornament was really all that I needed. I resolved that if I didn't get anything else on the tree, it would be OK.

Then, I received a clear plastic cross on a string from one of my kindergartener students. It is meant to wear as a necklace. He picked it out for me at our school's Santa shop.

## All It Needed Was A Little Love (Cont'd)

By Liz Rampey

I decided to add that to the tree as well. What better representation of love?

Right before Christmas, on December 22<sup>nd</sup>, I made the conscious decision to decorate with meaningful items that were already in the house. Getting out all of my things at this late date, which would have admittedly brought joy, would have also caused a mess and some stress. Here is what was on my tree:

A stuffed angel on top that reminds me of my grandmother in Heaven. She loved angels. It represents all of those who have touched my life in a special way.

A straw hat in memory of our friend, Mike George, who passed away in May.

My Piggly Wiggly savings card. That was my favorite grocery store at the beach, but it closed down. Good memories.

An ornament given to me by one of my students, to represent the lives I've touched.

A box of Band-Aids, to remember all of those who are hurting this Christmas.

The blue sash off of my robe, the closest thing I have to Linus' security blanket,

to represent my relationship with my husband of fifteen years.

A Snowflake Fairy made out of paper, to represent beauty and my yearly tradition of going to the Nutcracker.

An ornament made by a Native American to represent nature and the simple things.

A dog collar to represent my furry family.

You won't see my tree on Pinterest, that's for sure, but it may be the best tree I've ever had.

## Journey of God's Plan (Part 2)

By Ashley Dykes

Well, it's been almost a year since I sat down and wrote the first part of our story, and can hardly believe what has happened during that time! In many ways it seems like a blur and I want to forget it, but then in other ways this forces me to sit down and actually reflect upon our trial and the Lord's faithfulness yet again.

We did have our tribunal court hearing on January 8<sup>th</sup>, 2014 and the judge ruled in our favour! Although we knew we had a favorable decision, we didn't know how the logistics of getting my visa in hand before my visitor visa expired on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2014 would work out. After calling the border office and the court multiple times between January 8<sup>th</sup> and March 17<sup>th</sup> (my booked return flight home), we were no closer to having a visa in hand than when I had arrived in Wales in October of 2013.

With an unknown future and length of separation, once again Rob and I found ourselves having to say goodbye. Had we known that the entire duration of our separation would be 5 months, I don't think either one of us could have coped knowing ahead of time. It was hard enough living through it not knowing when the end would finally come.

I returned home to South Carolina on March 17<sup>th</sup> and it was wonderful to see my family after being away for 5 months. Shortly after my return, I received a message from Sharon asking me if I would be willing to come back and work at Benefit Resources to help through the

transition of the sale of the company. Initially, I was not thrilled at the prospect of working again, but soon found that this was a way that the Lord would provide for myself and Rob while we were separated. I am so grateful for the opportunity to have gone back to work full time for almost my entire stay back home. I started working in April and finished on July 31<sup>st</sup>. This timing was absolutely perfect.

The Lord not only provided financially, but this also kept me busy and helped to keep my mind off of things while I was in SC. Meanwhile, we were dealing with continual correspondence with the UK Border. Shortly after my arrival back to SC, we were told that the UK Border was going to appeal the judge's decision to allow my visa to be processed.

Not long after, we were notified that the court would NOT allow the appeal. Well, this sort of thing continued back and forth multiple times over the following months. We were living in limbo, on a constant roller coaster being told one thing one week and the exact opposite thing the following week.

As you can imagine, Rob was especially feeling the strain of my absence as he was continuing with his internship, taking care of our dog, and keeping things going at our house in Wales; not to mention the stress of dealing with incompetent government agencies which are accountable to no one.

In June, Rob was able to come visit me

in SC for three weeks. That time was bittersweet for us. We were thrilled to see each other again and to be with each other, but the pain and uncertainty of when we would permanently be back together was ever present.

Rob was wrestling with his call during this time and the Lord was testing him to see how committed he was to the ministry in Wales. Well, it was decided that we could no longer exist in this state of limbo and that I needed to cancel my visa appeal and reapply. This was done at the beginning of July and we had received confirmation from the UK Border that my previous appeal was cancelled and that my new application was received. So, everything seemed on track as much as could be expected at this point.

Well, what do you know, I received an email from the UK Border telling me that my visa appeal was now successful and that all I needed to do was send in my passport! Only one problem with that now ... I thought it WAS cancelled AND they had my passport in their office with my second application!

Thankfully, we had a Member of Parliament (MP) corresponding on our behalf at this point and she got on the phone straight away to the Border telling them they needed to sort this out and issue my visa ASAP. It was the border's incompetence in the end that actually got my visa processed, but we still had some loose ends.

## Journey of God's Plan (Part 2) (Cont'd)

By Ashley Dykes

I received an automated email stating my visa had the wrong visa type on it due to a technical issue in their system, and they have since retracted their original promise to refund us our second application fee! We are still having to chase up these two matters, rather unsuccessfully at the moment. But alas, I am finally here in the UK with my husband and have begun the 5-year process for

permanent settlement.

I have learned many things through this whole ordeal. The truth that God does what brings Him glory and that it is for our good even when we don't *FEEL* it is for our good is probably what stands out the most. It never felt that this separation was for our good and I never understood it. But that didn't change the fact that it was.

Hebrews 12:11 sums that up nicely, *"For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it."* I could write so much more about this as it has been all consuming for us, but I'm just so thankful that I can sit here and write today, from my home in Wales, where I have been living since August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2014.



### Something He Can Use

My husband Mike and I blended our families in

1989. He was a single father of 3- and 4-year-old girls and I had 12- and 15-year-old boys. We all got along very well.

Everything was going fine. I had a dream job at Furman University and he had a great job at Sara Lee. This was the case until January 1991 when I suddenly became very ill and soon found out I had Hepatitis C. It progressed to chronic Hepatitis C and doctors told me that I had only five years to live. Until then I had followed Christ (sort of on the fence). I came to the reality that if He wanted me to live or die, I would accept either. But if I lived it would be all for His glory or not at all. Treatments failed but it did stabilize and I learned to live with the side effects.

In 1993, I was told my gallbladder was failing and I had several pre-cancerous polyps. My weakened liver had to take over the work of my gallbladder and life went on. My oldest son moved to Atlanta and married a wonderful girl. After graduation, my youngest son moved to Atlanta to be near his brother.

In 1996, I was told I had fibromyalgia. With the Hepatitis C and the fibromyalgia, I could no longer work so I became disabled and so embarrassed because I could no longer work. (But God was working in it all.)

The year of 1998 was filled with surprises. My oldest son and wife (Jason and Kim and Mackenzie) moved to California. I was diagnosed with stage 2 melanoma but after surgery I was cleared of all cancer. Praise the Lord!

My youngest son married (Joshua and Heather) and in May 1999 had Madison (who we have raised). This was a troubled marriage from the beginning. When Madison was 8 months old, her mother, Heather, took her on a cruise with another lady. Madison was badly burned and air lifted to Miami then to Emory for treatment.

From then on, Joshua and Heather separated many times. I barely got to see my son or Madison. In August 2000, my daughter-in-law called and asked if I would keep Madison for about a month while she went to Colorado. One month turned into 3 months. Joshua and Heather got back together several more times and she called one day to say she was expecting twins. They were born very early with many problems. She soon got on drugs. DSS was involved. My son stopped coming to see Madison but said he was taking care of the twin girls. Actually a friend was keeping them. I had been keeping Madison and started keeping the twins. Early in 2003 that "friend", who had been keeping them, came to my house with her attorney and a bouncer and got the twins and left Madison and we have not seen them since.

When Madison started 4K, we had to get custody because we had not seen her father or mother in about a year and a half. We rarely see Madison's father or mother and they are not a part of anything that Madison does.

I have another granddaughter, Zoe, who is 8 years old who we have never met. I cling to Romans 8:28 because I know all this will one day pass and He will get all the glory.

By Janice Baxter

On November 9, 2012, I fell down twelve steps inside our home. I had so much trauma to my leg, ankle and foot that I could not move to a phone. God was in control that day also. My husband just happened to be off work and the satellite person came to the door to do a repair. I was lying just two feet from the door and was able to tell him to get my husband from the barn. I was in the bed for the next three months or in my wheelchair. God used this time to refresh my mind and teach me what is important. (I think I have to be busy all the time.)

I'm happy to say my oldest son, Jason, lives in Hickory with his wife and two children. He owns a Carrabba's restaurant and his daughter, Mackenzie is a freshman at UNC. We still don't hear from my youngest son and Madison's father, Joshua, but that's in God's timing. My oldest daughter, Alana, her husband and daughter Morgan live in Greenville and she teaches third grade. My youngest daughter, Ashley, her husband and son Liam live in Greenville and she has a great job at Greenville Hospital System. My granddaughter, Madison is now 15 years old and is a great barrel racer. In a couple of years, she will be leaving and a new stage in life will be starting. What that is I don't know, but God is in control.

I write all this to say that God is at work in my life and everyone's life. We can dwell on the bad stuff that has happened or turn it over to God and He will make it into something good that glorifies Him and build us into something He can use.



## Scars

By Sharon Hawkins

October has passed again—the month that I both love and hate. It's Breast Cancer Awareness Month.

On the one hand, it's a wonderful thing. Each October, everything turns pink and lots of money is raised to help in the courageous breast cancer fight that affects 1 in 8 women. Everyone remembers and honors those who have courageously fought and those still fighting.

The problem for me is that I remember too—I remember all that I've gone through and continue to go through, and all that this disease has taken from me.

I was brave when I first learned I had breast cancer three years ago and I was faced with the decision of having a lumpectomy or having one or two mastectomies. Six other family members, including my mother, had fought breast cancer and I knew my odds to defeat cancer after a lumpectomy were not great. I did not want to battle cancer for the rest of my life, so I chose radical double mastectomies. I could do this for me. I could do this for my family. When the post-surgery labs showed pre-cancerous cells also in my left breast, I knew I had made the right decision to have both of my breasts removed.

Praise God, I'm cancer free now! I'm not waiting for my hair to grow back from chemo. I never lost it. I'm not battling for my life. Why can't that be enough for me, especially when so many others have not weathered this battle nearly as well as I have?

It's because I'm still battling. I'm battling to be a whole woman again. Breast cancer is no pink ribbon.

51 inches of scars across my chest and stomach, deformities and continuing nerve pain remind me every day that my body is not what it was before my mastectomies. Many days I wish there could have been a different outcome.

My reconstruction surgery to transfer the tissue from my abdomen to my chest area was meant only to get it to live, not to shape me. I was supposed to have another surgery to do that three months

later. Three years later it still has not happened due to my pain illness.

I had a personal goal to have the remaining reconstruction surgery by the end of 2014. My pain doctor told me recently again, "Don't do it." Then my oncologist echoed, "Don't do it." So here I am, still broken. The scars of October run deep.

Yes, I admit I'm the biggest hypocrite of all. I'm always encouraging women and teens that beauty is not what the world says. Beauty comes from the inside, from Jesus shining in our lives and through our hearts. I believe this completely. It's not the perfect body, the pretty face or the gorgeous hair. That's not how we should be measured.

Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, right? But who are we allowing to measure us? How are we measuring ourselves? 1 Samuel 16:7 says, "... For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." Often my sweet Lord whispers to me, "You're beautiful."

Shortly after my mastectomies, I was crying and I told my husband, "But my breasts were my best asset." I will never forget his reply. "No, your best asset is your heart." He paid me the greatest compliment that day. I do not doubt he loves me unconditionally. I know he mourns this loss but only in a different way. He is still a man.

Recently, I found myself in tears as a beautiful woman in a revealing top sat behind my right shoulder in a restaurant on display for my husband's eyes all through dinner. I wanted to take her to the bathroom and drop kick her in the face. Not very Christ-like, I know, but I feel better now that I've admitted it.

The gentle, beautiful commercials of October portray a whole other woman than the one I see in the mirror. I know I am not alone in my perception as many have suffered in the path of this disease, and feel, as I do, that we do not quite measure up in a world where women are measured by their bodies. As much as I do not want it to be, this is my new normal. As much as I do not want to, I am ashamed to admit that too often I focus on who I am not.

Then Christ reminds me of who I am. He will not let me wallow in my self pity. I am His child. This cancer did not come as a surprise to Him. My scars serve as a remembrance of His grace and mercy toward me and His provision in my life. I could have been born in a different time when surgery was not an option. I could have lost my battle with cancer all together and not be here.

He has a plan for me and for that I am truly grateful. He has done so much for me. How can I not tell others? Hmmm. That was part of His plan all along, wasn't it?

Maybe you deal with scars too. Maybe yours are physical, maybe they are emotional. We have all been hurt in one way or another. Our scars remind us of what He has brought us through.

Sometimes He wants us broken so He can heal us. Sometimes He wants us empty so He can fill us. Sometimes He wants us lonely so we will turn to Him. And no matter how private and difficult, He wants us to share our stories and our scars with others so that they will see Jesus and His work in our lives.

Jesus understands all about scars. After He was resurrected, He showed his scars to Thomas to help him believe.

God could certainly have made our bodies where they would heal without scars. But He chose to allow us to have scars as reminders, not of who we are, but of who He is. They are not to remind us of our failures, but to remind us of God's victory over sin and whatever we face. Nothing is too hard for Him. Scars are precious keepsakes of His love for us and how He has made a way for us through it all.

### Isaiah 53:5

*But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him; and with His stripes we are healed.*



## Grace In The Wilderness Ministries

139 Commons Way  
Greenville, South Carolina 29611

Sharon Hawkins Phone: 864-380-2358  
Email: [sharon@wildernessgrace.org](mailto:sharon@wildernessgrace.org)  
Follow Sharon's cancer journey at [www.caringbridge.org/visit/sharonhawkins](http://www.caringbridge.org/visit/sharonhawkins)  
Twitter: [SharonYHawkins](https://twitter.com/SharonYHawkins)

Marie Pritchett Phone: 864-979-5281  
Email: [marie@wildernessgrace.org](mailto: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. Visit [www.wildernessgrace.org](http://www.wildernessgrace.org) to subscribe for a free email copy or please call or email us for paper copies.

*Visit our [Grace In The Wilderness Facebook Page](#) and "Like us" to receive updates about our newsletters and conferences. Also, check out our website at [www.wildernessgrace.org](http://www.wildernessgrace.org)*

*Check us out on Facebook—Grace In The Wilderness and at [www.WildernessGrace.org](http://www.WildernessGrace.org)*

*Love is not what you say. Love is what you do. —Unknown*

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