

Strengthening Families Across The World

ABOVE RUBIES

www.aboverubies.org

Issue: Eighty-Nine



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Taking three of our grandsons out for their birthdays, Crusoe Johnson, Bowen Barrett, and Arden Allison.

The joys of family life. God's idea of family life is happiness—family togetherness, family feasts, family fellowship, family celebrations, family parties, family weddings, and family birthdays and on it goes. It seems as though we go from one celebration to another here at our home. And if it is not a huge family celebration about something, our *Above Rubies* helpers and grand-daughters are cooking up some fun thing to do such as tea parties, dress-up dinners, or dance nights where they enjoy dancing to the lovely music they play. Since Thanksgiving until now it seems that one party has rolled into another.

There are no new babies and no weddings in sight at the moment,

but we keep praying for them to happen. Did you know that God loves weddings? He delights in weddings and babies coming into the world. When God's blessing is upon the land we will hear "The voice of joy, and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom, and the voice of the bride, the voice of them that shall say, Praise the Lord of hosts" (Jeremiah 33:11). Whereas when God's judgment is on the land He takes away the voice of the bridegroom and bride and the

voice of mirth and gladness (Jeremiah 16:9 and 25:10).

As I write this editorial today we celebrate the 50th birthday of our eldest son, Wesley. We'll be having a family celebration for Wesley this weekend.

Does this mean that we live the "perfect" life? No, life in this world is not perfect, and never will be. And we'd have to be transported to the eternal world if all our relationships were perfect, too. We have to work at it, especially when each one is very opinionated, outspoken, and wants to have their say with a "loud" voice! You certainly wouldn't get bored for a moment if you lived around here. Even with loud and dogmatic voices, we still have to keep soft and tender hearts, always being willing to say sorry and eat humble pie. Who finds that easy? No one. But, it's God's way to harmony and unity.

Perhaps you are facing difficulties in your life, or even in your family situation. Maybe your head is spinning and your stomach tied up in knots. How do you get out of this turmoil? God gives an answer in Isaiah 26:3, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in Thee." The answer is to STAY your mind upon the Lord. IMMOVABLE! UNWAVERING! That's easier said than done, isn't it? Your thoughts quickly go back to your problem and you begin to worry again. We must learn to get into the habit of STAYING our minds upon the Lord, leaning upon Him and His promises, and trusting Him.

The word "stay" also means to be fixed, not swaying back and forth. Not



At our Thanksgiving last year each one had to come dressed up as someone who had impacted history or the world today. I wish I could show you everyone. There were some amazing personifications. They also had to get up and speak about the person or enact them. Here is our son, Rocklyn soliloquizing as Albert Einstein.



Breeze dancing in her princess dress at "Breezy's Ball" (Aunt Vange and AR Helper Callie sewed the dress just in time for the evening). Serene decided to have a Ball for Breeze for her 4th birthday as every day she loves to put on a princess dress and dance. Serene told all the mothers and daughters to come dressed for a ball, and the guys to come in a manly dress up. The dress ups were amazing and it turned out the most amazing evening. It certainly wasn't like a four-year-old birthday party, but a wonderful Family Ball.



Evangeline and Howard arriving in style at Breezy's Ball. They sure know how to dress up. Evangeline came as a Russian Countess and Howard as a knight. He made the iron shield just before he came.

giving the problem to the Lord and taking it back again. He can handle the situation far better than you. When you keep your mind upon the Lord, He keeps you in perfect peace, or “double peace” (the word in Hebrew is plural).

Another thing we have to watch when going through trials is our confession. If we brood and talk about the problems we are going through (which is what we usually tend to do), we’ll stay under the problem. However, if we confess our trust in the Lord (especially when we CONFESS OUTLOUD), we’ll walk in victory even as we continue to go through the difficulty.

God gives us a wonderful promise in Isaiah 43:2, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.” I hear many women confess how they are going through deep waters, or going through a fiery trial. This may be true, but there is a greater truth. God promises that when we go through the deep waters, that “I WILL BE WITH YOU.” When we are enduring the fiery trial, He says, “YOU WILL NOT

BE BURNED.” We have to change our confession, “Oh God, I thank you that you are with me in this trial. You are bigger than this problem and I trust You!”

Your confession determines how you come through your trial. You can come out in victory, or with the smell of the fire upon you.

Keep your eyes upon the Lord as you seek to daily build and strengthen your family.

NANCY CAMPBELL,

Founder and Editress of Above Rubies

www.aboverubies.org



Chalice jumping from ruins at Caerphilly Castle.

Our Above Rubies girls and our grand-daughters love celebrations. This is Valentine’s Day where they enjoyed a girls’ party—dressed up, talked, debated, danced, laughed and did each other’s nails (As I type this tonight we have 10 girls here—dancing, laughing, and enjoying one another. It is wonderful to see them having such wholesome fun together.) In this picture: Meadow (granddaughter), Callie and Leah (AR helpers) and Rashida (granddaughter).



Before Colin and I got into our speaking schedule, we visited friends in Wales. Chalice (Serene and Sam’s daughter) came with us this trip and here we are at Caerphilly Castle, the largest castle in Wales. It began in 1268 with Gilbert de Clare, known as “Red Gilbert” because of his red hair!

ABOVE RUBIES

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Above Rubies is a magazine to encourage women in their high calling as wives, mothers and homemakers. Its purpose is to uphold and strengthen family life and to raise the standard of God’s truth in the nation. The name has been chosen from Proverbs 31:10 AMP, “A capable, intelligent and virtuous woman, who is he who can find her? She is far more precious than jewels and her value is far ABOVE RUBIES or pearls.”

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FRONT COVER: Brandon Loudon (14) delighting in his baby brother Benjamin. (Jim and Vera are expecting baby No. 12 this fall). They live in Beausejour, Manitoba, Canada.



Little Haven dressing up as a princess, too.

Our little grandchildren run to the Dress Up Box when they come. They love to dress up and use whatever bits and pieces they can find—Saber and Sahara Johnson and Breeze Allison.

The Heart Strings of Your Children



We live in a world that prides itself in being “connected.” Most adults have at least one “smart” gadget: phone, tablet, laptop, etc. We are constantly being interrupted by sounds of alarms (Time to feed the dog!), jingles announcing telephone calls and voicemails (“Hi Kate—got your e-mail. Hope my call helped you to find your phone. Again.”), buzzing of text messages (Cn U rd ths?) and trumpets announcing the sound of e-mails being delivered again, and again, and again (Free shipping through midnight!). Our attention is being pulled in twenty directions at once, all because of the technology that is supposed to help us stay connected. Plugged in to the lives of our friends and family.

But does it help us stay connected?

Have you glanced around a restaurant recently while waiting for your food? More often than not, whole families can be sitting together (dinner together is good), each one staring at their laps while their thumbs do the talking to those who aren’t present (ignoring each other is bad). When we allow gadgets to become glued to our hands, we allow our hearts to become unglued from the real people in our lives.

Mothers are the queens of multitasking. We were designed by our Creator to be able to hold a baby on one hip, brown beef with the other hand, direct the toddler to share his trucks with our voice, shoo the dog from the kitchen with a toe and hear the buzz of the clothes dryer announcing the beginning of the Race Against Wrinkles. In a flash, we can pull the meat from the heat, grasp the boy’s hand, traipse down the hallway, sit the baby in the laundry basket full of clean, warm clothes, and hug a toddler in our lap while we fold. Where does a “smart” gadget fit into this scenario? It doesn’t.

Mobile Phone Bad Behavior (MPBB) is on the rise, and it calls for drastic measures. Restrict gadget time! Cut MPBB from your life!

As Mommas, we need to make sure that our babies know that they come first in our hearts, in our minds, and in our lives. When we are constantly only glancing at them over a shiny gadget, love is not the message we communicate. We should behold our babies as the apples of our eyes! And too often, we give them a distracted “in a minute” response, while we answer a text or send just one more e-mail.

Grown-ups often overlook babies. Have you ever watched adults when they are addressing a family? Most never speak to the youngest children. And they very rarely make eye contact with babies. They speak over their heads as if they are not even present. I try my best to smile directly at every baby I have the chance to talk to. Did you know that, more often than not, a baby will return your smile when you genuinely smile at him or her?

Babies are some of the best studiers of non-verbal cues of any people on



Austin and Kate with their children. Current ages—Elizabeth (11), Emmanuel (Emma) (10), Jubilee (8), Hosanna (7), Ezra (5), Iona (3), Geneva and Berea (turning 2) and baby #9 due the first week of May, 2014.

earth. They can feel the tense muscles of the arm that holds them. They notice immediately if there is a smile lacking on the face that hovers over them to change a diaper or offer a bottle. Babies know instantly if your eyes are on them, but your thoughts are elsewhere. When we allow our hearts to become distracted, it shows in every feature and in every muscle of our bodies. And our babies see it and feel it. And they become troubled and fussy as a result.

The very first verse of the Love Chapter, as it is so called, declares that if one speaks with the tongues of men or angels without love, anything beautiful that might be forthcoming is only loud and ear-splitting, like a cymbal that is out of step with the rest of the orchestra.

When we finally put down our gadget and truly engage with our children “when they are old enough to know the difference,” we don’t want to find that after years of being second (or third or twelfth) in our thoughts . . . our children have effectively tuned us out. Just as we have tuned them out for so long. We become a cymbal clanging in their ears, rather than a voice of love and wisdom, guiding them through the paths of their lives.

Our babies have a right to expect the undivided attention of their Mommas. Would we ever expect to be taken seriously in our adult interactions if we never maintained eye contact with those we spoke to? Of course we wouldn’t. Why would we expect our babies to instantly feel connected to us when we choose, occasionally, to make them the focus of our attention? Our children do not come with on/off buttons. They are “on” all the time, observing, learning, and surveying the world they live in. We need to reassure our little ones that they are a million-zillion times more important than anything that could flash across the screen of our gadgets.

Technology does have its place. I’m writing this sentence on a computer. I own a shiny smart phone. But God has given me a shiny new baby to love and cuddle and teach and raise for His glory . . . and I’m choosing to make that baby (all my babies!) my priority, above social networking and “connectedness.” I’ve learned to keep my phone where I can’t hear it most of the day. I keep the sound off most of the time. I have carved out half an hour in the morning and another half an hour in the evening for gadget-ing and answering e-mails. Truth be told, I don’t miss anything I can’t catch up on later. There was a time before instant messaging—about 5,000 years, to be exact—when people spoke with each other face-to-face, without the help of miniature screens. They wrote to each other with real paper and ink, without acronyms, the dropping of letters, and send buttons. People invested in each other, rather than the latest new gismo.

God has given us all the “smarts” we need to fulfill His calling for us on this planet. And to conquer the quests He has called us to. By allowing



a “smart” techno gadget to think for us, we are turning off the brain He has given us to engage and leaving behind a world of real, flesh-and-blood relationships for the artificial imitations. Those closest to us suffer the most from our disconnected and disjointed communication. Gadgets can be great tools, but all too often they become tyrants that steal one of the most precious and irreplaceable commodities that the Lord has given us: time.

Our babies are only with us for a very short time in the whole-life view of things, and if we spend the majority of their childhood with our eyes tracking on a screen rather than on them, we are in danger of severing one of the most precious gifts God has given to us as parents: the heart strings of our children.

KATE COLLINS

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Eric and Jessica with their children—Jerica (17), Rebecca (10), Ethan (8), Carra (5) and Timothy (3).

Motherly Freedom

I had already finished three loads of laundry, and mopped and cleaned the kitchen. On the fly I decided to take my two smallest children to town, enjoy lunch together, stop by the post office, and pick up a few things on the way home.

I don’t take this lightly. I think about my freedom. Freedom to choose—to teach, to work, to freely go here and there, etc.

But wait, I thought us stay-at-homes were supposed to be oppressed! What a sad lie the enemy has sown! There is truly no greater liberation than to be a keeper at home. I am not tied down to a demanding schedule or a check list from a company bossing me around and making sure I do the job precisely.

Yes, I still have my husband to care for and serve, but he trusts me, because like the Proverbs 31 woman, I will do him good and not evil all the days of my life! He knows this, and with his leading, I am free to be myself.

He lovingly leads me and encourages me in motherhood and the godly fruit is joy, peace, and harmony in the home. I am most grateful for this calling bestowed upon me.

Some days are super busy. Other days are more relaxed when I can take the children for a ride down the back roads, stop for a picnic, or play at the park. The choices are not limited, I am free to choose.

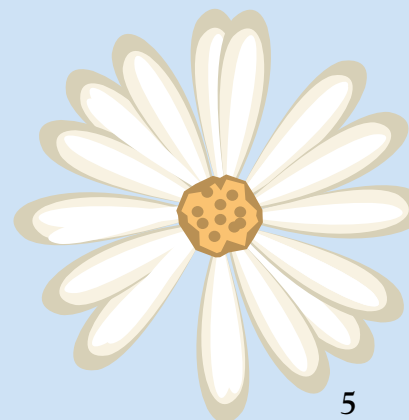
Life’s too short to let the hours, days, and years slip away. Therefore I say to the mother feeling a little overwhelmed and out of sorts. “Enjoy your liberation. Stop, breathe, smile, and go do something fun or adventurous. That’s your freedom.”

Enjoy today and all its endless possibilities. Car windows down, refreshing breeze, and your hair blowing! Taste the FREEDOM.

JESSICA CAMPBELL

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We Did it as a Team

Little did I know, carved into the big picture of my life, how much living with dementia would affect my family. It began in 2000—a few odd words or out-of-the-ordinary quirks. We discovered these oddities were from a TIA, transient ischemic attack that affected my mother's brain—a mini-stroke.

We plodded along in life enjoying each day with her. Every camping trip we took, she joined us. Little things along the way gave us clues to her changing—



opening up the back door for me to come in at 2 am, a couple of driving altercations, or taking out a “yield” sign on the way home from the grocery store.

In 2006, she chose to have hip surgery. It was the hardest time in my life

being her support person and advocate as she went through the journey from surgery to rehab, to home again. General anesthesia doesn't do any favors to the brain of an elderly person. After the surgery, we saw more visible signs of change in her thinking. After a month of my staying overnight with her, my children took over, two-at-a-time, so she didn't have to be alone. It gave me peace of mind that someone was there if she needed something.

We spent each day in and out of her home (she lived nearby), keeping her company, bringing meals, and giving nutritional supplements to help her stay healthy.

In January of 2008, she fell and fractured her knee—Velcro cast, three days in the hospital, then two weeks of rehab at a local nursing home led to bringing her home to live with us. I had always promised her she would not end up in a nursing home.

When we brought her home, my eldest son said, “Ah, we're all home!” We approached the care of Grammy as a team, a family unit of eight people caring for one elderly. We quickly found the tasks for which each of us was gifted. My son walked her with a gait belt. My daughters crafted delicious, nutritious meals for all of us. The girls helped her dress, morning and evening. Each one had their own special way of interacting with her, making bright spots in her day. We regularly polished her

fingernails and toenails. We washed her hair in the kitchen sink, setting it in pink rollers so she looked nice for my brother and sister's weekly visits, as well as our Sunday at church.

As part of the dementia, the roles reversed and she called me “Mom.” She had brief times of anger at how her body was changing, unable to toilet herself anymore, and needing assistance walking.

As her daughter, I shed many tears along the way as I watched her body change from confident abilities to gradual inability in all areas. It was a gradual letting go along the way. In the beginning of the three and a half years at our home, she read her Bible, peeled garlic, folded washcloths, and helped stir up cookies with a spatula. Gradually, her amount of food intake decreased and she began to sleep more. In the last six months of her life, her circulation slowed markedly. Her head drooped, showing signs of losing strength in the neck. It was a tearful time the month before she passed.

Dementia is a sad thing that many elderly face. However, I look at those three and a half years of her being in our home, with all the children involved in loving and caring for her, as a great blessing. It was a restoration of all the hurried years of our earlier lives. We count it a privilege to have helped her age gracefully 'til she crossed over into the loving arms of our Savior.

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Roger and Jackie's children are Ben married to Martha, Beka married to Justin, and Anna (26), Caleb (20), Rachel (16) and Lydia (13).

A-B-C

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Tears of Grief and Tears of Joy

David and Jill with their family: Nurie (14), Timothy (13), Kaylee (12), Renee (11), Phillip (10), Samuel (9), Gabriel (7), Tessie (6), Hannah (5), Olivia (2), and baby Sadie (now 5 months).

*M*y husband proposed to me in a horse and buggy in Central Park, NYC and we were married on October 4, 1997. One of the things God impressed upon our hearts at the beginning of our marriage was to let God control my womb and to welcome as many children into our home as God wanted. I was 18 years old when we married and we were excited that I conceived right away. However, a couple of months later, I had a severe miscarriage. Grief and tears flowed heavily as we experienced what it was to lose an unborn child.

Seven months went by and we thought God was NEVER going to give us any more children, but nine months later we had a beautiful baby girl! As I held her for the first time I could not help thinking what an absolute MIRACLE she was. This time my husband and I cried tears of joy!

Five Children in Four Years!

A little short of eleven months later, we had a boy. Sixteen months later we had another girl. Eleven months later another girl. And 13 months later another boy. Our oldest had just turned four years old and we had five children! How we rejoiced that God had shown us mercy and given us the desire of our hearts!

However, with practically five babies in the house and my husband working long hours, the work on my shoulders was immense. I didn't normally mind

the "challenge" of it all. However, one Christmas we packed our bags to visit family. I remember rising from the spare room's bed to wash, dress, and care for all the children before we went out to the kitchen for breakfast. The children had been battling the flu and I was also feeling lousy! My whole body ached and the sick children were cranky. I felt like collapsing onto the bed, but duty called. I had five children that needed help unwrapping gifts and messes to be cleaned up, etc.

Forgetting the Dream!

By the time I fell into bed that night, my husband and I looked at each other and had a heart-felt talk. Could we both go on having MORE and MORE children? We convinced ourselves that five children WAS enough despite our original plan to have as many as God wanted us to have. We began the short journey for a couple of months to do natural ways of preventing me from becoming pregnant. One night, we did not guard ourselves, and with mutual peace knew that God would take care of it all and would NOT give us more than we could handle.

Nine in Nine Years!

Sixteen months later, I gave birth to another boy. Eighteen months later another boy. Thirteen months later another girl. Then, 14 1/2 months later another girl. We now had nine beautiful children with our oldest being nine

years old. What a blessing they were and what joy they brought into our home! I turned the age of 30 years old and did not conceive another baby until our youngest was 18 months old (our longest gap so far).

At that time, God called my husband into full-time ministry. I remember the day that we were officially going into the ministry. I was outside doing yard work and all of the sudden felt a "P-O-P!" I never babied myself very much during pregnancy and did not think much of it. However, I went inside to the bathroom, wiped, and saw blood! Oh No! I panicked and called my husband right away.

String of Miscarriages

He came home and we called our mid-wife. We went to the hospital the next day to see on a sonogram a perfect 12 week old baby with NO heart-beat! We chose to have the pending miscarriage naturally at home. We waited a couple of days and I went on with my mothering duties and piano recitals, etc. I cried and waited some more. Finally, the intense bleeding and miscarriage began and my husband rushed home. I bled heavily, like a faucet, for hours! After losing another huge surge of blood, I passed out. I remember my husband calling my name, but I was too weak to open my eyes or respond. He quickly called the mid-wife and 911.

The ambulance came and rushed me to hospital where they continued to let

me hemorrhage for another eight hours. I passed in and out and they offered me blood transfusions. I refused at first, but slowly grew weaker and whiter. I was so weak I could hardly move. I KNEW something had to be done. They finally called the doctor and rushed me in for an emergency D&C. The reason for all my bleeding was that part of my placenta was stuck in utero. I lost over 60 percent of my blood so they administered four units of blood through transfusion and wanted to give me a fifth, but I refused. I was still weak, but knew that I would live, praise God!

I became pregnant two more times after that and lost both of those babies! People counseled us to be DONE! How much more could I take? It was better for the nine we had to have a Mama than to lose her while trying to have another baby! The criticism bothered us sometimes, but by God's grace, we remained firm in our decision and continued to trust God Whom we KNEW was capable of handling all of this in His own perfect way!

I got pregnant again (now my 14th pregnancy) and we were THRILLED to have a full-term birth to a beautiful baby girl. Our youngest was now over three years old. This new baby felt like SUCH a miracle to me. During my labor and delivery, I got to 10 cm and the midwife discovered that the baby was in an "undeliverable" breach position. My water had already broken, so it was VERY hard to turn the baby. After two hours later of intense pain and the baby's heart-rate

dropping very low every time I had an contraction, she was delivered! Hallelujah! We cried when we held her in our arms!

During all this time, my husband had given up his jobs and was now in total full-time ministry. We had moved from NY State to West Virginia and were excited to pursue God's perfect will for our lives. Our faith was greatly tested in so many ways! Not only from the heart-wrenching loss of our babies, but trusting God to provide for our every need! There were times we got discouraged (and still sometimes do) but we have seen God prove Himself to us so many times, that how can we NOT trust Him?

When our littlest was seven months old, I got pregnant again. We were so excited! Now that I had had a good pregnancy after the string of miscarriages, I felt confident that all would go well this time. I had spotted a couple of times, but that stopped and I tried not to worry. However, at 14 1/2 weeks, I went to the bathroom only to experience that heart-sinking sight of blood on the tissue. Our worst fears were confirmed again as we gazed at another precious baby with NO heart-beat!

FIVE miscarriages! Why was this happening to me? I had so many questions. We had given our ALL to God and it felt like we were being punished. I examined my heart and found a LOT of pride. I was "Super-Woman" who could "do it all" and boast to others of how many children

I had! I fell to my knees and begged for forgiveness. I was reminded of how many women cannot even have children! "Oh, Lord, please cleanse me of pride and self-will. Help me remember that this is not only a journey of accepting healthy babies into our home, but also trusting You in times of loss!"

Sixteen Souls for Heaven So Far!

I conceived again and was riddled with worry. Surely I would lose this one too! God convicted me to STOP worrying and TRUST HIM! It was then that PEACE came! We delivered another beautiful baby girl on November 27, 2013. We now have eleven healthy children (seven girls and four boys) on this earth and we eagerly await meeting in Heaven someday the five we lost.

God has kept His promise to me in 1 Timothy 2:15, "Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety." I know not what lies ahead in my journey of life, but I know Who marks the way. I can trust Him, even in hard times.

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Jill does a weekly radio broadcast to encourage women on WVG (West Virginia's Gospel Voice) each Saturday at 11 am and Sunday at 2 pm. If you can't get this station, you can tune in online at wvgvradio.com.

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GOING FOR THE GOLD

About a month after the birth of my eighth baby, I read a story about a 47 year old woman who asked God for a ninth child, and God gave her a son. I decided to do the same and God amazingly gave me another baby. I could not believe it.

I realize that now my childbearing years may very well be over, and I am preparing myself for this reality. Yet, I still pray that God may see fit to bless us again with another child. Why not? He is my Abba. I can ask. At the same time I am asking God for strength and humility to surrender to whatever He may have in store for my later years. I learned early on that having babies is temporary. In one short year those babies grow from little puddles in your arms to hefty toddlers in your cupboards.

I've often heard people say when they see our large family, "You must have so much patience! I could never do what you are doing!" They assume that parents of many children are somehow more equipped to handle the challenges that come with raising a large family. On the one hand, God does give more grace when we are faced with greater difficulties.

He is overwhelmingly generous that way. On the other hand, I have rough edges and besetting sins, too numerous to count, and it seems they all want to rear their ugly heads at various times of the day as I deal with the different relationships that happen in our family. Eleven people give us 65 relationship combinations. That's a set up for a lot of love and a lot of conflict. I have thrown my hands up in despair a few times and wondered what in the world I was doing—and why in the world I was doing it!

The missing piece is VISION. Am I happy? Am I fulfilled? Do I have what I want? I'm cross-eyed with shortness of

vision. But when I open up God's Word and view my life from His vantage point, everything changes. I have to catch my breath, first of all, because the view is staggering. It goes on and on. Forever. And the way it meanders at first makes no sense; but then, as my vision adjusts, things clear up, and it dawns on me that I get to play a small, but significant part in the drama of history (His story).

Called to Die

Like Christ Himself, I am called to die in



Joe and Natalie with their family—Samuel (20) and engaged to be married to Tess in August, Phillip (17), Aimee (14), Timothy (12), Stephanie (10), Katie (8), Jennie (6), Peter (3) and David (2).

order that I (and others) might find life (Mark 8:35; John 12:24 and Romans 12:1). If you think these verses don't apply to raising children, then you either 1) haven't experienced children yet, or 2) haven't meditated on these verses long enough. The day I got married I gave up the rights to my own life, my own way, on my own terms (or at least, that was the idea). So did my husband. When we added children we watched the last trickle of autonomy slip away. Raising a family is a death to self-ness. But it is also a finding of our identity in something greater than self: God.

Called to Love

Like Christ, I am called to love unconditionally, bravely, freely, unreservedly, with longsuffering. Don't miss that word, LONG! (Ephesians 4:2; 1 Peter 1:22 and 1 John 4:7).

Called to Disciple

Like Christ, I am called to disciple souls. The souls of my children are my first priority, with other souls following as God leads and time allows. Jesus worked with twelve. I have nine. The number is irrelevant, but I need to be focused on that mission and courageous to do it regardless of what the rest of the world does or says. In fact, if I don't disciple them, the world is more than happy to do it for me. No thank you.

This calling to die, to love, and to disciple, is the highest, and ultimately, the most rewarding calling of our lives. Will we take up the challenge and run the race God sets before us? Will we keep the prize in focus as we move forward with vision and purpose? Will we surrender our comfortable chair on the sidelines for the heat, the burn, the work of the race? Will we cross the finish line and be able to look back and know we truly lived our short lives to the fullest?

Called to Pray

Having babies is one thing, but ultimately my deepest desire is to see them all saved by the blood of

Jesus Christ. Since that day I found out I was pregnant for the first time, I have prayed almost daily:

"Father in Heaven, SAVE the souls of every single one of my children. Save them for eternity. Make them Yours. May you keep them in the palm of Your hand and never let them be plucked out. May each one seek to know and love You, the greatest Treasure in the universe, more than the plastic baubles of this world. May they truly see, with spiritual eyes, Your worth and beauty, and may they desire it more than anything else this

world has to offer. Do not only save them, but save all of my posterity. Let there not be one black sheep among them, but let them all belong to You eternally, fulfilling the purpose for which you created them.”

It is my privilege and joy to pray this for them when I tuck them in at night as well as when I am drifting off to sleep in the privacy of my room. I cannot save my children, but He can. So I teach my children the Truth and I ask Him to do the saving.

Called to Humility

The key to a healthy family and healthy relationships, I’m convinced, is humility. It is the willingness to admit sin, repent of it, and ask for forgiveness. The families I know that practice this are just like every other family in that they sin against one another. But, they maintain emotional and relational health because the individual members grieve over their sin, say they are sorry, and ask for forgiveness.

The families that struggle are the ones that have difficulty admitting sin. If the parents are prideful and refuse to admit wrongdoing, blaming other family members, or making excuses for the ways they hurt others, the family as a whole will suffer in untold ways. Let me be clear. Healthy families are not sinless. All families sin, and they do it every day in numerous ways. We can make a difference for eternity by simply humbling ourselves before our family members and learning the art of saying sorry and asking forgiveness. (Just saying we’re sorry, by the way, doesn’t cut it. The key is to ask the person we’ve wronged for forgiveness.)

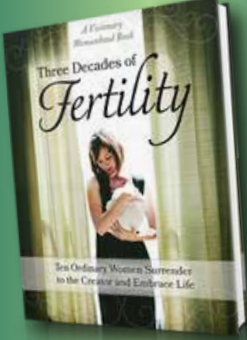
I’ll never forget a testimony I read in which a young lady shared that her father would gather their family together once a week and ask if he had done anything to hurt any of them that week. If anyone shared a hurt, that father would immediately repent and ask forgiveness of that person. This young woman testified that because of his example, the hearts of the children and the parents were knit together in a special way.

I’m not raising my large family because I can handle it, I am a super mom, it is easy, and it’s loads of fun. I’ve had babies because I decided many years ago to trade my freedom for eternal dividends. I’m your run-of-the-mill selfish Wemmick, and I’m not doing

this for nothing. I’m going for the gold. My dream is to stand around the throne of the Living God one day, hand in hand in a huge circle with my children, children’s children, and their children, taking our marching orders (it’s going to be fabulous) for our future productive, creative lives in eternity. All of us together. With Him. Forever.

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The above testimony is reprinted with permission from the book, *Three Decades of Fertility*.



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Fertility
Compiled by Natalie Klejwa


Each one with a different story, shares honestly of their joys and hardships and how they learned to trust God through every trial. You will learn and be encouraged.

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YOUR CHOICE

You can always find things to complain about. However, you can also find things to be grateful about, too. Life is all in how you look at it. You will enjoy life if you are filled with gratitude and thankfulness. You will be miserable if you groan and complain. You choose.

~ Nancy Campbell



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Ten Year Wait for Baby

I was 17 years when I asked the Lord to send me a godly husband and I met him about four months later. Between a one year courtship and two year break-up we were married in 1998. My husband and I wanted to have at least 12 children. However, we decided we “just wanted to have fun first,” and I went on birth control for two years. We figured we would be ready in a couple years.

Instead, it was another 10 years of waiting before our son was born. It was heartbreaking to find out every month that I was, again NOT PREGNANT. I cried to the Lord, “If I can’t get pregnant, I no longer want to go on living.” I felt His reply, “I need you to go through this, and it will be for My glory, but I will never leave you nor forsake you.” I endured infertility for another six years after this.

In the meantime, still not content to let the Lord do his work, our marriage started struggling. It became a dry and barren land. But, God was working behind the scenes. We sold our house, and moved into a 35 foot trailer. We left one church and started attending another one where the pastor and wife were our age. My pastor’s wife had also endured the struggle of wanting children, yet she continued to pray for a child, and one day God blessed them with a girl who brings joy to everyone around her.

This encouraged me to finally be brave enough to ask people to pray for God to “open my womb.” But, there were still three more years of disappointed waiting.

Two years prior to finding out I was pregnant, the ladies of our church attended a Beth Moore conference. One of the ladies in the vehicle was pregnant with her sixth child and had them all at home. During the long eight hour drive I picked her brains about home births.

We sat next to each other while at the conference, and this was not by choice or chance. When the speaker asked those in need of encouragement to please stand up during an invitation, both of us did.

It was then I saw Beth Moore coming towards me. My heart pretty much stopped as she asked, “The Holy Spirit has led me to pray for you. What can I pray for?” Immediately I poured out, “I have been trying for eight years to get pregnant and have not been able.” She then asked what she could pray for my friend who replied, “I’m pregnant, and having a hard time.” That’s when I knew God had a sense of humor! We became friends and I even met with her midwife.

After the long wait, eventually I

became pregnant and on January 27, 2011, Joshua Nathan Black was born. I gave birth to him at home, surrounded by my husband, pastor’s wife, my friend who was now pregnant with her seventh child, and her midwife who is now my midwife.

STEPHANIE BLACK

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Amazing news! God is blessing Stephanie with a new baby July 2014. How great is our God!

Lights in the Window

I have three lights that have burned out in my living room window. I first put them up when our son, Jimmy went into the Navy who was part of an air crew. I worried a lot about our son and wrote a poem about how I felt and the first stanza was ...



Keep the candle in the window, Mother
And the fire blazing low,
Keep the soup on simmer, Mother
Just a few hours left to go.

Folks in the neighborhood would pass by our house and comment, "Connie, did you know you still have your Christmas lights up in your window?"

"I know they are on." I would answer. "They aren't Christmas lights but my prayer lights. I keep them forever burning even after I go to sleep at night. The lights tell me that even though I am asleep Jesus is holding my precious son, Jimmy."

Iva, at 85 years would jog by my house. One day, she stopped and asked me, "Connie are those lights in the window for Jimmy?" "Yes," I replied.

In the Old Days mothers kept a candle in the window in case one of her family was out in a dark night storm and might lose their way home. They looked for the light in the window to guide them home..

Last evening Jill stopped by. I loved seeing her and we had a nice visit. When she got ready to leave she said "Connie, your lights are OUT in the window. You should never let them go out."

"I know it. I'll get some bulbs and replace them," I promised.

The lights remind me that God's light is always shining on us. It will never go out. Jimmy did come home safely from the Navy, with many medals. But, I like to keep the candles in the window, always symbolizing the lights of home.

The lights call . . . forever call my children and grandchildren to me, and to the True Heavenly LIGHT of the world, Jesus Christ.

CONNIE HULTQUIST

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BRING HIM HOME is one of the most powerful marriage testimonies you will ever read.



FACEBOOK OR BLOG FOR FATHERS AND HUSBANDS

Colin Campbell writes a post for men each day on Meat for Men Facebook. However, for men who don't go to Facebook, they can receive Colin's powerful messages by going to: <http://tinyurl.com/MensDailyDevotionalBlog>

(TRAINING SONS FOR MARRIAGE)

Your Daughter-in-



Recently, a couple of women made comments to me about having to pick up their husband's laundry. They were not complaining, just telling me what happened that week in their homes.

One wife made a comment that her husband had come to her that week and said he had no clean clothes. Due to a situation beyond her control, she had not been able to care for her family for a month. Her children had done a fantastic job of keeping the laundry caught up so she told her husband that she didn't know what the problem was. As she looked around, she soon realized. Her husband's clothes were lying where he had dropped them when he had undressed. She had been unable to pick them up and the clothes hadn't made it to the laundry room. Normally, she always picks up her husband's clothes each morning.

Her older daughter and my older daughter heard this conversation and her daughter confided in my daughter later that she had never been mad at her dad before. However, she really struggled that day to not be angry as she did load after load of her dad's clothes.

After hearing this story, another lady made the comment that her husband takes off his socks every night and drops them by his chair. Every morning she has to pick them up.

It was just a statement, not complaining, but it made me think.

-law Will Love You!



Should wives have to be mothers to their husbands? Now before you start saying “Oh, this woman is into women’s lib and doesn’t want to take care of her husband,” nothing could be further from the truth. I am all about serving my husband and if he drops his socks or clothes or whatever, I will (happily and cheerfully, like I tell my children), pick them up. The point I am trying to make is that if we as mothers train our sons correctly, their wives should not have to pick up after them like a mother.

My precious mother-in-love, Janet Leiter, to whom I dedicate this article and whom I have thanked numerous times, taught my husband to take his clothes to the laundry room, do dishes, and clean, etc. This came in very handy a few times in our early married life when children were too small to be able to do these things. One time while he was out of work and I had to return to work, he took care of our three year-old daughter and six month old son and it was not unusual for me to come home to a clean house and supper ready.

Even now, if we are busy and running around trying to get ready, he will grab the broom and sweep the floor or wash up some dishes. Although your husband may not do this, I think you can imagine what a blessing it would be if he did. Here is your chance to make things better for you daughter-in-law.

I want to encourage you to train your sons to do some basic household jobs. It is not just women’s work and will not make them “sissies.” It is teaching them to serve their wife and family and it will pay off. They will serve you before they leave home.

I trained my oldest son to do dishes, clean the bathroom, vacuum, mop, and cook a few, simple meals. He has only been married five years and my daughter-in-law has already thanked me. She has had a few illnesses where my son had to care for her and the children and he was able for the task. Does he do everything to hers or my standard? Probably not (although she says he dusts better than she does)! The point is, he knows how to do these things and she does not have to pick up after him. She already has three little children she has to do that for. My grown son should not need a mother; he needs a wife.

This training starts young. When they are old enough to walk, they can carry their clothes to the laundry, they can help make their bed, dry dishes, or push a broom. My five year old son makes his bed by himself, gathers the garbage, and unloads the dishwasher, etc. This goes for girls, too. They need to know how to do some basic “men’s” jobs:

check the oil in the car, mow the yard, and help cut the season’s wood, etc.

My mother (who did not have any sons) one time made a comment while visiting that I made Brad do too much “household work.” He was about seven years at the time and I told her I was preparing my future daughter-in-law to love me. She laughed and admitted that if she had had sons, she would have taught them the same as well. Her mother-in-law had taught my dad to do household chores and it always blessed her.

Therefore, mother, rise to the call. Make your future daughters-in-law love you. Train your sons to serve their future wives and families by training them to serve you and their family now.

SHERRI LEITER

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David and Sherri’s children are: Amy (married to Chris with Alyssa 4, Evelyn 2.5 and Benjamin 1), Brad (married to Caitie with Olivia 4, Elizabeth 2 and Isaiah 4 months, born on David and Sherri’s 32nd wedding anniversary), and five precious children after a reversal: Sarah (15), Marybeth (13), Anna (11), Kristen (9) and Josiah (6).

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Jesus Had a Mommy

For the past five years our family has participated in the Canadian Badlands Passion Play. This year the director asked me to play the part of Mary, the mother of Jesus. What a challenge for a stay-at-home mom! Wanting to do my best, I dove into a time of Bible study and prayer and here are some of the lessons I learned.

A Mother's Teaching

One of my goals was to memorize the Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). While doing this I noticed something compelling. I was amazed at the times Jesus spoke and did things that mirrored Mary's words: "He has filled the hungry with good things" came to mind as Jesus fed the 5000. "He has scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts" jumped to life with Christ's profound, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone." When Christ knelt to wash the disciples feet, Mary's words echoed in my mind, "He exalts the lowly." Were these convictions of His mother's a part of the education of the young Christ?

C.S. Lewis said, "I think . . . it will do us no harm to remember that, in becoming Man, he bowed His neck beneath the sweet yoke of a heredity and early environment. Humanly speaking, He would have learned this style, if from no one else (but it was all about Him) from His mother." Mary was righteous and diligent to fulfill all the law. She would have wholeheartedly obeyed, "You shall teach them to your children, speaking of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deuteronomy 11:19).

As I studied Mary's other children I could see this same devotion to righteousness. James and Jude each penned letters inspired by the Holy Spirit. Here, too, were hints of Mary's influence.

Am I as carefully and fervently teaching my own children? I started out with such resolve, but disappointments and weariness come with the years and I am resolved to find new zeal for my task.

A Mother's Prayer

During the practices, the directors along with the actor playing Jesus, worked with me on a scene in which Mary cradles her crucified son before he is taken to the grave. Together we recreated a beautiful tableau known as the Pieta. That night at home, as I hugged my youngest daughter to myself and listened to her prayers, I was struck by the similarity of this embrace with what I had just rehearsed. An instant picture of Mary with her precious little Jesus, offering up prayer to the King of Heaven, reminded me that I was one of a multitude of mothers throughout the ages leading their little ones to the throne of God. How beautiful and how precious that we've been given this privilege and responsibility.

Mary knew how to pray and praise the Lord. Not only do we have preserved for us her beautiful Magnificat, but we see her in the upper room keeping vigil with other believers as they await the promised Holy Spirit.

Her children saw and heard her example. Eusebius said of her son, James that his knees were like a camel's because of his devotion to prayer. It was this same son who penned, "The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16). Jude, another of Mary's sons, gives us a beautiful doxology at the end of his letter. These men grew up in a home where prayer and praise were natural, everyday occurrences.

I long to develop a more meaningful prayer time with my own children, a legacy that will travel with them throughout their lives.

A Mother's Song

There is a poignant moment early in the play, after Jesus clears the temple courts and drives out the money changers. He beckons the people to prayer by singing a beautiful song: "O, Praise the Lord, all ye nations. O, Praise the Lord, all ye peoples. We will enter Your courts; give thanks to the Lord, for His mercy endureth forever."

Putting myself in Mary's place at such a moment I realized she would have taught and sung these songs with her children as they traveled to the Passover. I thought about my own days nursing my babies and the special hymns and songs I sang to them. When the children grew older and times of sickness or distress came, it was these particular songs they requested. I also recalled the story of a young man brought up in a godly home. After encountering trouble with the law, he ended up in jail for a night. Filled with guilt and remorse and terrified by the crazed man in the cell next to him, he began to sing the hymns his mother had sung to him as a boy.

A mother's song can have a deep impact, sowing truths that will bring forth fruit in the darkest times of a child's life. Once again, I am resolved to be more diligent in imparting the hymns of the faith to my children.

A Mother's Waiting

How hopeful the years are when a mother has young children. She spends her time planting seeds of faith in their lives. But for some, there are dark days of longsuffering as they wait to see the fruition of these labours. What a sorrow it must have been to Mary, after raising up her children in the way they should go, to see some of them wrought with unbelief (John 7:5). Those young men had been present to see Christ's first miracle. They had heard Mary's testimony of God's faithfulness. Yet, even with a godly upbringing and the works of God before their eyes, their stubborn hearts would not accept their mother's faith.

It was not until the Holy Spirit touched them personally that those men accepted Christ as "the Lord of glory." As mothers, we must humbly remember that "Neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:7). It is important to be faithful to what God has called us to, but only He can save a soul. It is only His grace and the work of the Holy Spirit that accomplishes this miracle. Apart from Him I can do nothing and the heartfelt desire for the

salvation of our children must compel us to prayer and a humble reliance on Him, not to guilt and condemnation for our own shortcomings.

A Mother's Humility

If there is one trait that marks the holy family it is humbleness. Mary called herself a maidservant of the Lord. James and Jude identified themselves as bondservants of the Lord. They never used their family connection to forward themselves. They may have started out their lives with the example of a humble mother, but that example was surpassed and crowned by Christ's own as they witnessed him "who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Philippians. 2:6 RSV).

My favourite part of the play is the ending. My heart swells with adoration and soars with love as I see the resurrected Christ make his way past all the characters of the show. Whether it's a Roman soldier, a villager, or a Pharisee he passes, every knee bows. As He climbs the hill that marks His ascension to the Father He passes His mother Mary. With what great joy she

kneels. She fully realizes that this life was never about her, as faithful as she has been, but about her blessed Lord, the Son of glory. With humble awe I too bow my knee, because I know what Mary knew, that living for Him and loving Him is what is truly important.

A humble heart does not start with me trying to abase myself. Rather, it is forgetting self in the presence of such a precious, beautiful, and perfect Saviour. The humble mother does not look to herself, she looks to God. When my days have been completed and my course has been run, I want to hear those words, "Well done my good and faithful servant." And when I do, I shall cast the crown He gives me at His feet, because I truly know that He alone is worthy.

CHARMAINE CONTOS

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Harry and Charmaine's children are Micahl (24), Emily (20), Timothy (17), Elizabeth (17), Robin (11).

Harry and Charmaine with their younger children, ready and dressed for the Passion Play.



Sheep Have Problems

I love sheep and grew up with them in New Zealand. My father was a world champion sheep shearer and designed the way shearing is performed across the world. I love sheep because out of all the animals in the world God calls us His sheep and His lambs.

Years ago, I read an article about a New Zealand sheep farmer who diversified to also raising goats. He noticed that the goats leave their little kids for hours while they go off to forage for food, whereas the ewes never go any further than earshot from their little lambs. I thought of all the mothers who leave their little ones to go off for hours to their jobs and careers. This is goat mothering. I would rather be a sheep mother and belong to God's company, wouldn't you?

God always calls those who belong to him His sheep and lambs, but refers to those who don't belong to Him as the goats. I am challenged with the words of Jesus, "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on the right hand, but the goats on the left ... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment" (Matthew 25:31-33, 46).

I no longer call children "kids." Words have power. The character of the goat is independent and proud. They love to stand on the highest point, whereas the sheep are a humble and submissive animal. When the shearer grabs the sheep, drags it over the shearing board, and then begins to shear off all its wool with a very sharp comb and cutter, it doesn't fight, struggle, or even cry out. It sits between the shearer's knees and submits to the shearer. Jesus Himself is likened to a sheep as He submitted Himself to the cross to die for our sins (Isaiah 53:7).

However, although sheep are such lovely animals, they do have problems!

1. Sheep Go Astray Easily

If a sheep gets lost, it has no way of finding its way back home. It is completely bewildered. A dog, cat, or most other animals have a homing instinct. Often they can be lost for days but eventually turn up again. Not the sheep! It's lost until the shepherd finds it. That's why they need a shepherd.

Our children (our sheep and lambs) also cannot survive on their own. They need a shepherd mother to watch over them. God created mothers to care for children just as He ordained shepherds to watch over sheep. It is interesting that the two greatest leaders God raised up, Moses and King David, were shepherds (Exodus 3:1; 1 Chronicles 17:7 and Psalm 78:70-72).

Motherhood is the greatest vocation God has given to women. Rather, it is who we are. It is who God divinely created us to be, innately and physically. God proclaimed the status of motherhood before there was ever a mother in the world. It was already in His heart and plan (Genesis 2:24 and 3:20).

Dear mother, do not be lured away by the humanistic voices all around you, in the church and in the world. Listen to God's voice. Listen to your heart. You are needed for your children. No one else will ever love and care for your children like you do. No one else will ever be sensitive to their physical needs and especially their innermost needs as you will. Someone else can always replace you in your career, but no one can adequately replace you as the mother of the children God has given you. You were born for this mission. It is your destiny. You are in the perfect will of God.

Zechariah 11:17 tells us that the shepherd who leaves his flock is a worthless shepherd.

2. Sheep Cannot Protect Themselves

Sheep are defenseless. That's why New Zealand is such a big sheep farming country. There are no predators in the whole of the country—no coyotes,

cougars, mountain lions, or bears. Not even a snake! The Middle Eastern shepherd watches over his flock all through the day and guards his sheep fold at night.

Mother, you also are the guardian of your little flock. In fact, you have a greater task than the shepherd of the sheep. He guards their lives, but you must guard your children's spirit, soul, and body. It's a 24/7 job! You can't watch over them too much. 1 Peter 5:8 tells us we must "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." He wants to devour your children. He wants to get hold of their minds and infiltrate them with subtle deceptions against God and His truth. He wants to mar their spirits and take away their purity. He wants to destroy their souls.

This is why Satan hates mothers being in the home. They stand in his way. He wants them out of the way so he can do his work. He wants their children in day cares and the public education system that is becoming more and more foreign to everything that is biblical. King David cried out that if we want our sons to be like plants grown up in their youth (mature and steadfast) and our daughters to be strong and beautiful like the pillars in a palace we have to get rid of all that is foreign to God and His Word (Psalm 144:11-13).

Paul's prayer for the Thessalonian believers is a great vision for your children. Pray and make it your passion that their "whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

Mother, you have to be both tender and courageous. We lovingly nurture our children, but if an enemy comes to attack them, we will fight tooth and nail to save them. This was the heart of David as he shepherded his flock. If a lion or bear tried to steal one of his lambs, he'd bravely go after it with a club and rescue it from its very jaws, and yet he was tender towards the flock he loved (1 Samuel

17:34-37). We need this same kind of spirit.

3. Sheep Cannot Find Proper Food

Sheep spend most of their day eating, but they'll eat anything they see, even poisonous weeds. This is why they need a shepherd to lead them to safe, green pastures. The Middle Eastern shepherd not only "feeds his flock," but "waters his flock." Sheep can't find water for themselves, either. If a well dries up, the sheep will stand and stare at the dry mud until they die! They must have a shepherd to lead them to quiet springs of water.

It is the same with mothers. Our children will eat all the junk food they can get if we don't provide nutritious and wholesome food for them. They'll also eat poisonous weeds of lies and deception if we are not constantly on guard.

One of the biggest tasks of a shepherd is to provide good, green, and healthy pasture for his flock. This is also one of our biggest mothering tasks. Each new day we have to plan, prepare, and provide wholesome food for children's bodies. It is a negligent mother who does not care what her children eat. It is an ignorant mother who thinks that endlessly cooking and preparing nutritious meals is wasting her time. It is a powerful part of her mothering.

It is just as important to plan and prepare food for their souls and minds. It is a careless mother who lets them have unlimited electronic access and does not lead them to food that nourishes and stimulates their minds.

However, most important of all, she must plan, prepare, and provide fresh food each day for their spirits. We are responsible to feed our children three nourishing meals each day, but what about their spirits? Are we faithful to nourish them as well? Or, are our children growing tall in body, but with tiny starving spirits? Making Family Devotions happen each day in your home will provide opportunity to nourish their spirits. Did you notice I said, "Making it happen"? Yes, it doesn't just happen. You as the mother of the home have to make it happen. You prepare the way for your husband to

read God's Word to your children.

Ezekiel 34:2 says, "Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?"

4. Sheep Cannot Keep Themselves Clean

Cats, dogs, and most other animals keep themselves clean. Not the poor sheep. They haven't got a clue. Sheep have to be docked (their tails taken off to help them keep clean), dipped to prevent insects and ticks which negatively affect their health, and crutched (shearing the wool from around their tails to save them from becoming flyblown).

Would your children bother to clean their teeth if you weren't around? We not only have the responsibility to keep their bodies clean, but their minds and spirits, too. Once again, we need to daily wash them in God's Word. Ephesians 5:26 tells us that "He cleanses us with the washing of water by the word."

5. Sheep Do Not Function Independently

Sheep have a flocking instinct. A sheep on its own is sad and cranky. If a sheep gets separated from the rest of the flock, it becomes distressed. It will run up and down the fence bleating or agitatedly walk around and around in circles (and if a ewe is separated from her lamb, she becomes VERY distressed, and vice versa). When the shepherd finds the sheep and brings it back to the flock, it becomes happy, secure, and contented again.

We also are not born for independence. God planned for children to be raised in families. Just as a flock loves to be together, so He wants us to live our lives together in peace and harmony.

Ask a child what they would like? They may want a toy they have seen advertised on TV, but what they really want is another baby brother or sister—a friend for life. Another sibling to add more joy and strength to the flock. Have you ever seen a 1.8 flock of sheep? Or even two or three? We need a few more to make a flock, don't we?

Psalms 103:41-43 says, "Yet he sets the poor on high, far from affliction, and makes their families like a flock.

The righteous see it and rejoice, and all iniquity stops its mouth. Whoever is wise will observe these things, and they will understand the lovingkindness of the Lord." When the righteous see God blessing and increasing a family, they rejoice. They are wise enough to know it is the lovingkindness of the Lord.

The Bible says that God...

Feeds His people like a flock (Isaiah 40:11; Jeremiah 23:4 and Ezekiel 34:15).

Gathers His people like a flock (Jeremiah 23:3 and 31:10).

Guards His people like a flock (Jeremiah 31:10).

Guides His people like a flock (Psalm 78:52).

Holds us responsible for our flock (Proverbs 27:23 and Ezekiel 34:10).

Increases His people like a flock (Ezekiel 36:37).

Leads His people like a flock (Psalm 77:20 and 80:1).

Makes families like a flock (Psalm 107:41-43; Ezekiel 34:31 and 36:38).

Makes His flocks to lie down in safety (Isaiah 17:2 and Jeremiah 33:12).

Saves His people like a flock (Ezekiel 34:22; and Zechariah 9:16).

Seeks out His people like a flock (Jeremiah 34:12).

May we be faithful shepherd mothers to the little flock God has given to us.

NANCY CAMPBELL

To read more articles about shepherding your flock, go to:
<http://tinyurl.com/ShepherdingOurFlock>

To be CEO Would be a Vacation!



“Her children rise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her” (Proverbs 31:28).

As I write about my wife, tears of thankfulness fill my eyes. Her price is truly *Above Rubies* and as Proverbs says, “I have found favor from the Lord.”

I am the pastor of Calvary Chapel in Cleveland, Ohio and my wife and I have 14 children. I also do Ironman

triathlons (swim 2.4 miles, bike 112 miles, and then run a marathon 26.2 miles). My background is Drag Racing and my father is in the Drag Racing Hall of Fame. Because of these things I have received a lot of attention and been asked to speak and write for many magazines and websites.

Yet, I am a nobody compared to my wife. There is only one true Ironman in our home—my wife who has delivered 14 children and homeschooled them all. When I met her in 1985 I was a pizza delivery driver. All I can say is that every blessing in my life started the day I met her on a blind date. I knew I was called to be a Pastor but had gone through a three year wilderness journey where I gave up any hope of being used by God.

Sheila did not marry a Pastor and was not a Christian when we married. One day she asked how to become a

Christian. The next day I came home and she was bouncing on her toes exclaiming, “I feel so light, I feel so light.”

“What happened?” I asked. She replied, “I asked Jesus into my heart last night.” I then told her that Jesus left me. She replied, “He did not leave you, but you left him.” That was the day the Lord restored me and Calvary Chapel in Cincinnati started that week. We both began to listen to verse by verse teaching through the Bible with Chuck Smith. Sheila’s entire walk with the Lord began, and has continued, with solid verse by verse teaching. She has tremendous knowledge of the Bible and with it discernment.

God has used her to speak to me more than any other person. We have been married for more than 27 years and I will say that I listen to her more than she knows.



I know I have been a trial to her. We are complete opposites. I'm sure she feels more like a single mom with 15 children! Yet, she has never belittled me or put me down in front of others. She has modeled the Scriptures that encourage a wife to submit to her husband. Some women think this is a sign of weakness. The opposite is true. **IT TAKES A VERY STRONG SPIRITUAL WOMAN** who trusts God to obey that verse. Sheila is that woman.

We moved to Cleveland in 1992 to plant Calvary Chapel although we did not know one person. For the first three months Sheila would be washing dishes and looking out the window, crying, and wondering why we were there. The church started in our house and people walked in, not just on Sunday, but any time. We also allowed many to move in and live with us over the years, 14 different people to be exact, with some as long as three years. During all this Sheila was a faithful mother and wife. The church has become a blessing, but would not exist without her.

Sheila loves her children. All of our adult children call her every day. Sometimes I am jealous, but also glad. They truly honor and respect her. But, the strongest trait in Sheila is that she is a woman of prayer. She prays and God moves.

If there is a key to our family it has been "Family Time" where we and the children sing worship songs, read the Bible, and pray. We have done this together for the last 19 years. I lead in the evenings and Sheila in the mornings before school. When I hear her teaching the Bible to the children I feel the power of God on our house. The Scripture we have both held onto is in Isaiah 54:13, "All your children will be taught of the Lord, and great will be the peace of your children." We both agree that it is God's faithfulness that our children are following God.

Many ask me, "Did you plan to have so many children?" No! Our first child was born by c-section, the next three normal births in hospital with epidural. The fifth was the first natural

birth in the hospital. The last nine were born at home with an awesome midwife, Frieda Miller. The first two home births the children were born before she arrived. It was 100 percent relying on the Lord.

What is funny is that Sheila was the youngest of three children and said she did not like children. With each child she would say, "That is the last one." Then the Lord would ask her, "Do you trust Me?" After a few months she would be convicted to trust the Lord and another would be on the way, because God likes children.

All our children were named according to the meaning of their names and a lesson God was teaching us at the time. We have since had three miscarriages. The first miscarriage someone told us we should give her a name and therefore we named her Hope because our hope is in heaven, a lesson God was teaching us.

Sheila has homeschooled each child every year. This adds up to 201 years and she has 12 years to go. To homeschool 14 children takes more patience, character, wisdom, humility, organization, teaching ability, and insight than running the largest corporation in America. To be a CEO for Sheila would be a vacation. The "highest calling" for a woman is to be a Mommy. Sadly, our society brainwashes young girls and robs many of this high calling.

Sheila used to do all the chores, but I told her she must be the Manager of the home, not the laborer. She is also a gifted musician and many of our children play, sing, and lead worship at church. Sheila is my favorite worship singer.

She is an amazing Bible teacher and anointed speaker to women. Titus 3:3-5 exhorts the older women to teach the younger women to love their husbands and to love their children. Sheila has lived this. No one will ever be able to say, "She does not know what I am going through." Over the years many have told me that when they feel like giving up they think, "If

Sheila can make it with 14 children, then I can make it."

I am amazed at the wisdom she shares with our children, especially to those who are married or getting married. To the boys she will say, "If you do not treat your wife right I will come after you." To our daughter she says, "Honey, you need to submit to him and trust the Lord." She models this herself and the beauty of her meek and quiet spirit is powerful.

Does she struggle? Yes. Does she have bad days? Yes. Does she ever feel like giving up? Yes. Yet, she has always turned to the Lord for strength and obeyed His will, no matter what the cost.

Once I made an observation that in many couples one person seems like "a blessing" and the other is "the blessed." I know full well that Sheila is the blessing and I am the one who is blessed. At the lowest point in my life God brought her to me and I have lived a blessed life ever since. That is why Proverbs 31: 28-31 applies to her, "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellent them all. Favor is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised. Give her of the fruit of her hands; and let her own works praise her in the gates."

I think the ultimate reward is grandchildren. We have three and two more on the way so far. I have never seen Sheila with so much joy as being a Grandma. And nothing gives me more joy than to see her filled with joy.

P.S. Sheila does not know that Mike has written this article. It is a surprise!

MIKE BUCHER

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Mike and Sheila's family are Matthew, married to Nikki with Titus 3 and Gabe 10 months, Elizabeth married to Timothy with Caleb 1 and Sadie 3 months, Elizabeth (25), Noah (23), Caleb married to Lauren and baby, Joseph (21), Isaac (20), Anna (18), Abbey (16), Melody (15), Rebeka (13), Daniel (12), Mikey (10), David (9) and Samuel (6).

Do I believe it?

Nearly six months after my husband released the documentary, *The Baby War: Defenders and Defectors*, I found myself choking back the tears and whispering to my good friend, “Part of me wishes I had never got married and had children.” Our family has been through a specific sickness with one of our children that had shaken me to my very core. The guilt of the possibility of having passed on “faulty genes” crushed me in my already depressed state.

I sat with my kind and merciful husband and confessed my fears and struggles to find pleasure in being a mother, which had previously come so naturally to me. I shared with him the irony that I saw in my feelings compared with the truth revealed in God’s Word and also the message of the film, *The Baby War: Defenders and Defectors*. God’s Word says that children are a blessing, even if they bring us pain or they go through pain. I asked him to pray for me that God would bring back my joy of having our children.

For three months, during the worst of our child’s sickness, I woke up a bundle of fears and stayed a bundle of fears. During those three months my husband’s father died unexpectedly and a friend lost her three year old daughter to cancer. Death, sickness, and decay were everywhere and my daughter did not get any better.

A year later, our daughter is better, but not well. However, I have learned what a blessing she is, even sick, maybe particularly through this sickness. Somehow she has become more thoughtful of others and more thankful. I have become gentler. She has also learned how committed her family is to her, as we have served and waited on her through this illness. Even our three year old, seen at the end of the DVD, encourages her and loves on her.

Her humor and drive are intact (especially on her good days and even sometimes on her hard days). The Lord has returned to me the joy of my salvation. Last Thanksgiving I was most thankful for being able to be thankful! The Lord did that for me. I am no longer



Jim and Jenette with their children--Joel (20), Jason (18), Jonathan (17), Jordan (15), Jewel (13), Joy (11), Jenna (8), Josie (6) and Journey (3).

afraid when I wake up in the mornings. What seemed unbearable is bearable in the Lord. The trouble with trusting our feelings is that they have no eternal perspective. I am learning how to say, “I don’t have all of the answers, but I trust God.”

When my husband released this film I did not know we were headed for a trial that would make me (emotionally, at least) agree with some of the eugenicists featured in the film. That was not on my radar. I can say now that I have more compassion for those who hold those sorts of views, but what of my own? During the dark times my little daughters would often skip around the house singing “Standing on the Promises of God,” and I would ask myself, “What are God’s promises? Have any of


God’s promises been broken in our circumstances?” No, His promises are still good. Romans 8:18-39 continually comforts me.

The other day someone said to me, “So, you have nine children?” I grinned at him and said, “Yep, I am so thankful for them and I wouldn’t give one of them back,” and I meant it. Children are a blessing! That doesn’t only apply to bright, healthy, beautiful children (they are all beautiful anyway); it doesn’t only apply to middle class, “wanted” children. Children are a precious blessing in God’s eyes, period.

Do I believe it? Yes I do!

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My Multiplication Miracle

It was 12:30 am on May 24, 2013, and after a three hour very hard labor, our baby was born into Daddy's hands. What surprise and joy to discover that after two girls we had a little baby boy! This was my third normal pregnancy, and third normal birth at home—that is, until it was time for the placenta to come. Being a midwife myself, we had decided to do the previous births and this one on our own. My husband became an amazing labor coach and midwife's assistant, doing exactly as I told him, as well as having the honor of catching all three of our children. I was wrapped up in our newborn, as he was already nursing, while my husband was trying to coax the placenta to come. I wasn't having good contractions, but I wasn't really bleeding either, so I knew we had time to wait. Finally, I got up to go to the bathroom, squatted, nursed some more, but it just wouldn't come.

Then I began to bleed, and we still couldn't get the placenta to come. I knew we had to do something. My midwife on call was sick, so we called the ambulance. After waiting for a long time for the ambulance, having the EMT's take their dear sweet time getting me in the ambulance, and starting an IV, we were finally on our way, with my husband, baby, and parents following.

The on-call doctor arrived and proceeded to work on pulling out the placenta through my now closed cervix. After about 45 minutes the cord tore off and I was left with a D&C. We were told the procedure should only take about 30 minutes.

Several hours later I woke up to a room full of nurses, the doctor, my husband, and mother standing at my head, and the worst headache imaginable and terrible leg cramps. Everyone was asking me if I could hear them and how I felt. I was covered from head to toe in some sort of inflatable warming blanket. Looking around I could see an IV in one arm and blood dripping into my other arm. Things must not have gone as planned. One nurse asked if I wanted

my baby and I said yes, so they placed him on my chest. I was happy to have him back in my arms, but still didn't really have a clue what had happened.

I found out later that my brother and his wife (who lived two hours away) were coming up to see me on a work day! When the doctor came in to talk to me, I realized how near death I had come.

The doctor had worked on scraping the placenta off my uterus for two hours, and finally stopped before he did more harm than good. He said he thought he got about 90 percent. Being a midwife and knowing there was no reason it should have been that difficult, I asked him if it was an accreta, or at least a partial, which is where the placenta actually grows into the uterine wall. He said there was no way to know for sure without taking my uterus out and examining it, but felt it was at least a partial.

I was stunned. Why would that happen to me? I had no risk factors

such as previous D&C's, miscarriages, C-sections, endometriosis, or anything that would cause uterine scarring or adhesions. It made absolutely no sense. He admitted he didn't realize how much blood I had lost and should have started me on blood in the OR. I had lost so much they couldn't get an IV started because my veins kept blowing. My blood pressure dropped to 60/32. It was only when they called the oldest guy in the hospital to get my IV started that I finally woke up.

After about 36 hours and three units of blood later, they released me to go home. I was still incredibly weak and felt as if my head was about to explode. My biggest concern for the time being was that my milk would come in. Would I have enough for my baby? He was a hungry little guy. For a few days, he nursed constantly and lived on milk from three sisters-in-law and two friends who brought frozen milk and colostrum to me. What a blessing to have people close to me



Chris and Amy with their children, Alyssa (3.5), Evelyn (2), and Benjamin (6 months).



who were nursing babies of their own!

On day four my milk did come in, but there was very little. I pumped, nursed, and took every herb and nutrient to help rebuild my blood and body. We realized that for the time being we would have to supplement him with something. Formula was my last wish. I knew all too well the horrible GMO soy and additives they put in formula. I would make my own goat's milk formula before using conventional formula.

While I was still trying to just get through each day, feeling terrible and very emotional over everything that had happened, my mother-in-law found a gold mine. Some longtime friends of theirs have a granddaughter who was nursing a baby two months older than mine and having to pump. She had nursed twins a couple of years ago and her body was producing milk for this baby as though she still had twins. She had been freezing her milk, considering donating it to a milk bank, but due to the hassle, expense, and the fact that they pasteurize the milk, she held on to it, praying for someone who needed it. Needless to say, my in-laws made a six hour trip and picked up 900 oz. of breastmilk on day six! I was

overwhelmed by God's goodness.

Over the next two months my baby did very well, but unfortunately I was never able to build up my milk supply and could only get about ¼ to ½ oz. off each side. He still fights me and will only nurse for a few minutes, but I am determined to make it work. Emotionally I am not ready for him to be done.

Back to the milk miracle. We had been taking the bags of milk off the bottom shelf in our freezer before opening any of the other four boxes stored in a second freezer. I couldn't believe we hadn't had to get into any of the other boxes. Finally, when my baby was about three months I decided to email the mom to see if she had any more milk. She said she had about another 300 oz.

Before we planned to meet to get the extra milk, I decided to count the bags to know how much was left and how long it would last before we picked up the rest. I started counting the bags and they just kept coming! How in the world did we have so much milk left? I knew that at the rate he was drinking it should have only lasted two months. I was nearly three months already! The final count was 122 bags, each with 8 oz.

of milk in them!

I ran upstairs to check my calculator. Sure enough, that came to 976 oz.! PRAISE THE LORD! God more than doubled the milk for my baby. I couldn't hold back my tears of joy and thankfulness for how God miraculously had provided for my sweet baby.

I have struggled with all I have been through and what the future could hold for us due to the complications of this last birth. I deal with fear on a daily basis. But, I cannot ignore the very many ways God provided above and beyond what we needed. He didn't have to have three sisters-in-law who were nursing their own babies available to take care of my baby for the first several days. He didn't have to provide 900 oz. of breastmilk. But, He not only provided it, but DOUBLED the blessing! And yes, when we went to pick up the second batch of milk, it turned out to be another 900 oz, instead of 300 oz. as she thought! This is the God I serve. I didn't have to put him on formula!

He also provided loving friends who did much needed house and yard work, including six weeks of nutritious

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Maiden with Many Mothers

We call our baby Lilja the "maiden with many mothers." The Lord has blessed her with many dear mothers who have generously nurtured her. Just before Lilja was born in June 2013, a cancerous tumor in my breast filled with fluid. Could the Lord have used Lilja to save my life? Now we see through a glass dimly, but someday the Lord will reveal the beauty and hidden details, a symbiosis of our lives and His tender workings. We will marvel!

This cancerous tumor cut our time of nursing to only one month. Because I know that breast milk is priceless, I desired that little

Lilja would continue to benefit from God's liquid gold. A friend from church who is a lactation specialist asked us if she could write a protocol and request for breast milk for Lilja. We were so blessed by the results.

For the first six months of her Lilja lived on donated breast milk. We have prayed for more and He continues to provide! We would love her to continue to have breast milk as long as possible. We are so thankful to these mothers for their sacrifice of time and consider it a labor of love. My heart is lifted up "To him who alone doeth great wonders: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Psalm 136:4).

MEREDITH BREWER

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P.S. I am sure Meredith will be very blessed if you are able to donate breastmilk for baby Lilja.



Photography by Renee Bergeron.

Acme, WA USA

Craig and Meredith with their children: Esther (8), Jesse (7), Josiah (5), Caleb (4), Ezra (2), and Lilja (10 months).

Dwell on Beautiful Things



Thomas and Doris with their children: Sparrow (8), Golden (5), Silas (3) and Pippa (2).

The house work is always behind.
Piling up.

Crumbs, clutter, Craisins, and crying.

Do you feel overwhelmed, like me? Do you feel that you work the longest hours of anyone in your family?

Thoughts are dangerous things. Today as I was still working away in the kitchen at 10 pm, with everyone else in the house resting, I started down the path of self-pity, but God gave me miraculous grace tonight ... to remember to dwell.

We are memorizing Philippians 4:8 at the moment, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

We recite it every morning. How then, am I choosing to dwell on my tiredness, and on the inequality of this work called wifehood/motherhood? Why am I seeing only interruptions, chaos, and endless to-dos in a house full of half-eaten apples and broken ornaments? How have I come to see the papers piled up on every surface as irritating triggers, instead of the thoughtful expressions of little hands producing masterpieces from the heart? How prolific my children are in the drawing department! These are lovely things. These are true things.

To dwell means to live. If I dwell on the ugly, dwell on overwhelmed, I create an ugly place for myself to live. In fact, I "tear down my house with my own hands." But the wise woman builds her house (Proverbs 14:1). She builds a dwelling of beauty by dwelling on beautiful things. There is always a higher truth to my reality.

Yes, it is hard. Yes, the work is unequal. But, I am not a hired girl, I am the mistress of this house. My work is of monumental importance. My life is not defined by struggle and hardship, but by my heavenly identity. I am queenly. I reign in this life. I have audience before the King of the Universe, my Father, who values me, and He is the God who sees me, as Hagar so poignantly realized in her driest of deserts (Genesis 16:13).

Today I failed more than once. My children did not see the best side of me (though they are always full of forgiving grace). But, on into the unrelenting evening, I found my victory. I cleaned those dishes. I labeled that food, put it away, and cleaned more dishes. And then, why not? I went ahead and made an extra salad for my husband and served it with a smile on my face. And I felt free.

DORIS McDONNELL

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Jeremy and Melody with their children: Samuel (15), Harmony (7), Arron (heavenly Treasure), Josiah (4), Emma (heavenly Treasure), Blessed-Grace (1), and expecting a new baby August 2014.

Nothing Too Hard for God

After two C-sections, we were given a glimpse of hope that we could finally give birth naturally. It came from a sweet midwife as well as a specialist in Prince George. This was an idea that was stolen from us with our first child who was born at 2lbs. and stolen again because of lack of resources in a small town.

We were excited we moved close to the midwife who lived eight hours away. I settled into our new home and started preparing for our new arrival. I labored on and off for two weeks until one night my bowel started to bleed with every contraction. We called our midwife and met her at the hospital for the last of many stress tests as our little Josiah was already two weeks overdue. After consulting with the specialist, it was decided with great sorrow, that we were to have yet another C-section. We were so grieved.

Into surgery I went. My special midwife stayed with us the whole time. She held me when my husband was not allowed in the room for the spinal and kept him distracted when he was worried.

Then the whispers started, "Have

you ever seen this?" and "Wow, look at that!" Why was it taking so long? The hours drew on as evening turned into early morning. Finally we heard the cry. He was sweet and chubby with an adorable pout from our interrupting his cozy nest. Yet, as I snuggled him with my eyes and heart the surgery persisted for another three hours as they tried desperately to separate a fused mess of my organs that were attached to everywhere they shouldn't be.

The doctor tried to explain what was going on and asked, "Were you planning on having more children?"

"Oh yes," I replied, "We plan for many more babies." "Oh," she replied. Instantly, I felt in my heart that removal would have been an easy solution to the dilemmas she was facing. Why untangle if you can remove, but she trudged on.

"You can never get pregnant again," she said. "I am amazed that you held to full term without complications. If you get pregnant again, you and your baby could die." I was also hemorrhaging internally. Every few minutes they changed and weighed the bed pads as I weakened and bled into the morning. There was talk again of hysterectomy and more whispering and tension between doctor and nurses.

I looked over to my husband. He was crying. They had tried so many different drugs to stop the bleeding and still it continued. The sun was beginning to glow ever so gently into the room as it rose. I slipped away in prayerful rest, "Father my life is yours. If you want me to die, I will serve you; if you want me to live, I will serve you." Then I saw before me Jesus on the cross, and I heard the words, "Just as you are willing to bleed and die for your child, so am I." Instantly I was back in the room, awake. The sun was up now, and the bleeding stopped. Praise God!

A few days later, I went home to bed and my Mom and Dad came and helped take care of us. My first reality of no more babies came as my mother packed away all the baby girl clothes I had set out, just in case it was a girl. Over the next few months I grieved deeply and secretly. I listened to the suggestions for birth control for the first time in my life, even though controlling our conception was against

what we believed.

We moved to Saskatchewan and when Josiah was about seven months old, I started praying for healing. I knew this was not too hard for my Creator. He made me and therefore He could fix me. All I needed were two things: healed organs and a new womb. One day I asked some women to pray for me, not telling them any specifics. There were three women and an 11-year-old girl. The little girl was silent, with a funny look on her face and I knew she had received something from the Lord.

The next day her mother came to me and said, "Cassieanna saw something when she prayed for you, and she wanted to tell you, but was too shy." She called for her, and she said, "As I was praying, I saw a comb going throughout your tissues, and I don't even know what tissues are, but it was combing your insides." Those words were so encouraging and I kept praying and praying. Slowly, I started to notice differences in my womanly functions. It was working, and my pain was gone. I believed I was healed. Now, Lord, one more thing: my womb!

I confided in my husband that I felt we had done wrong in taking our conception into our own hands. Why should we not trust the Giver of life with my own life? My husband outright refused. "I can't," he said, "It would be murder."

I kept praying. One day in a vision I saw my husband asking to receive more from God. In front of him I saw the Father with his hands bound, saying, "Release me and I will." Two weeks later, he came to me, and said, "Honey, we need to talk." He shared how God had been working in his heart and giving him peace to release the Father's hands.

At our next church service, we shared our sin in binding God's hands to do what He wanted in our lives (we got some funny looks from our congregation). After the service, Cassieanna's grandfather came to us, and said, "You are pregnant!" We thought he was crazy, yet the Father in his wisdom already knew the decision of my husband's heart and had caused us to conceive two weeks earlier.

I was ecstatically overjoyed. What should I be praying for now? Should I put my faith in a good birth, a good C-section, or what? I felt God's answer to my heart, "Put your faith JUST IN ME." While praying another day I felt God say, "I am not going to heal you." "WHAT?" "He whispered again, "You are already healed!" All of a sudden, I felt the whole circumference of my womb, not just the front but the back, become thick, strong, and youthful. I WAS HEALED!

We have been blessed with two babies since that day, both home births, and we are waiting for more. When my husband proposed 16 years ago, I asked him how many babies he wanted as I handed him a bunch of wild Baby's Breath. I started counting the delicate flowers one by one, and said, "So 15 is good?" He smiled and said, "We'll let God decide."

And so we are! We have six babies altogether, the first three all C-sections, the last two home births, and two I keep as treasures in heaven. If God so chooses there will be many more blessings in our home.

MELODY WILLMENT

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SLOW DOWN

"In the name of Jesus Christ, who was never in a hurry, we pray O God, that You will slow us down for we know that we live too fast. With all of eternity before us, make us take time to live—time to get acquainted with You, time to enjoy Your blessings, and time to each other."

~ Prayer by Peter Marshall

Someone Was Missing!

I grew up in a typical American family in the 1970's—dad, mom, my brother, and me. My dad worked hard to provide and my mom stayed home to care for us. Even with a five year age difference, many people asked if my brother and I were twins. We were so close and did everything together. We were American Indians building tipis, cowpokes wearing our matching fringed vests and holsters, and pioneers living off the land in the woods behind our house. We took turns playing Barbies and Matchbox cars.

We had tons of fun times, yet something was missing. My brother and I both felt that there should have been another sibling between the two of us (a sister, in my mind). We spoke of it to each other, but never to our parents. We both wanted more playmates and all our adventures included large families. If one sister and brother could have such fun together, surely more would have a blast!

Mom would sometimes bring up wanting to be pregnant again or adopting a boy for my brother and a girl for me, but nothing ever happened. I never knew about birth control and sterilization. I just figured that she couldn't have any more babies and that we were not able to adopt.

As an older child, I would pretend to be pregnant and nurse babies even though I had never been around any of that in my home. My mom didn't breastfeed and I don't have many memories of life before my brother. I remember a picture that I drew as a young teen of my future family. I was in the center, surrounded by my children of four girls and four boys. This desire never left me. Later in high school, I was talking with one of my best friends and told her I wanted to have at least six to eight children someday. In my junior year, that same best friend introduced me to her college-aged brother. He became my first boyfriend a month later.

The week of my graduation, I found out I was pregnant. My parents were upset. To tell you the truth, upset is

putting it mildly. They had never yelled at me before that time. There were many tears, pleadings, door slammings, and outbursts after my graduation ceremony. I spent at least one night sleeping in my car at the end of my driveway trying to avoid another heated conversation.

My parents wanted me to go to college, not get married to my first boyfriend, and throw my life away. The only way to fix this was to have an abortion! They told me that later on I would be a more capable mother as a college graduate. I would be doing my boyfriend, myself, and this baby a disservice if I kept it and became a wife and mother now.

"I just can't," I replied.

My mom assured me that it would be alright. After all, it wasn't as if I was really in love with my boyfriend. We weren't really committed. She told me she had an abortion when she was married, for goodness sake. Between me and my brother!

I was shocked, horrified, and devastated. My brother and I knew all along someone was missing! But, how incredibly horrible! My little sister had been killed. Taken away from us by our own parents—her own parents. I mourned my loss and have not stopped doing so for these last 25 years. My sister, my children's aunt, my children's cousins, my nieces and nephews and their children—all taken from our family. I hope to see my sister in heaven, but we will never have the opportunity to meet her family because they were never allowed to be.

Abortion is a devastating action. It destroys a precious baby from God. It destroys moms and dads emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually (maybe the abortion caused some of my mom's depression). It destroys the family that God desires to design and give. It destroys trust and innocence. It destroys life-long sibling bonds and more. It destroys what should be.

Thank God for His grace He bestows upon all who come to Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. This

is the only hope for those of us who suffer the consequences of abortion. Whether you are a doctor or nurse who has aborted babies, grandparents who convinced their daughter to abort their grandchild, a father who convinced his child's mother to abort their baby, or a mother who aborted her child—if you have had someone taken from you through abortion, Christ Jesus can forgive, cleanse, comfort, heal, restore, and renew you. Come to Jesus today, right now!

A GRIEVING DAUGHTER

P.S. WHAT HAPPENED TO ME?
My first boyfriend and I celebrated our 25th wedding anniversary this year, along with our six children! Thank you, Lord.



continued from page 22
meals. My wonderful teenage sisters stayed with me during the weeks my husband had to work, managed my home, and took care of my children.

I write to encourage you that no matter your trial, God is bigger! He will come through in ways you cannot even imagine, simply because He can. It may not always be in the way you want (I certainly did not want to have to go through the D&C and hemorrhage), and I would have preferred that He just increased MY milk, but He works in His own marvelous ways. Whatever you are going through, take heart, cry out to God, and just rest in knowing that He will provide your needs, even above and beyond!

AMY BREWER

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DISCONNECTED AND DISILLUSIONED

It was June 2003 and I was the quintessential stay-at-homeschool mom of three children, between ages five and 12. However, due to ever evolving potential evidence that my first husband was not being faithful and had not been for years, my marriage was in big trouble. The possibility of becoming a divorced mom of three loomed before me.

Before this, I thought I had the ideal life. I met my first husband in Bible college and I was a stay-at-home mom since my pregnancy with my first child. I had committed to staying home even when confronting huge financial difficulty while my first husband was making as little as \$8 an hour. However, when I realized I may soon be a divorced mom, human reasoning kicked in and I got a job.

I began to work closing shift as a crew person at a restaurant. Since I worked from 4 pm to 11 pm, I justified leaving the home because my children were with their dad most of the time. It was not as though I was leaving them with NO parent, right?

It was not long before my superiors noticed I was very dependable, responsible, and hardworking and they approached me about becoming the closing shift manager. Once again, knowing I was facing singlehood, I seized the opportunity to make more money.

A few months later, the eventual demise of my first marriage became more and more a probability. Facing that reality head on, I went to my store manager and regional supervisor to ask about moving into upper management as soon as possible. This promotion meant doubling my current salary as well as great benefits and a 401k. The potential for salary increases to \$70k a year plus were very realistic and alluring. I began to take great pride in my career achievements along with the accolades and praise of my employers. The trade-off for making more money

opened myself to 24/7 availability.

I Squashed the Guilt

At first, I felt guilty every time I pulled out of the driveway. I felt an internal tug of war between my job and my primary calling to be the manager of my home. But, I justified it over and over and over again. When I arrived at work, I would stuff my pangs of guilt and proudly work for the favor of my superiors. I worked hard and in order to avoid my ever increasing troubled marital issues, I stayed late for work or went out to eat with co-workers after work. I abandoned some of my core convictions and began to smoke as I had when I was younger. I joked and carried on with co-workers so I could be accepted and liked as their equal peer.

An Independent Woman

After a few months in upper management, my marriage came to an end. By this time, I was making more money than my ex-husband and was fully confident that I could make it as a financially independent woman.

I enrolled my youngest child in Christian school along with before and after care. I began to date a man I met at work and he eventually became my second and current husband. My son had gone to live with my brother's family five hours away because he could not be left unsupervised while both parents worked. My older daughter had opted to stay with her dad and I provided her homeschool materials. However, she was ALONE much of the time.

How it breaks my heart to look back on that time! I cried myself to sleep many nights, but I continued to callous my heart every time I pulled out of the driveway, left my little girl at day care or with her older sister to take care of her while I worked and worked and worked at a job, that by this time had swelled to a 55-60 hour a week commitment.

My parents lived close by. They pleaded with me to move in with them. I stubbornly refused. After all, I was a grown woman in my late 30's and I wanted to prove to myself and the rest of the world that I could make it ... on my own.

My current husband and I married in 2005 and along with that marriage, my former little family of three children became six children as I took on the additional responsibility of his children. He was a single father of three between the ages of six and nine. By this time, my children were between seven and 14 and I had already disconnected myself from my home for two years.

I Did Not Comprehend the Fallout

Not long after remarrying, I found an online job from home. It was a sweet gig and we were able to pull the four younger children who were living with my husband and me out of public school. (My younger daughter went to the Christian school one year and then I had placed her in public school—another of my core values I completely abandoned for a short time). I began to homeschool again, but I still was not fully present with my family as I spent hours and hours working my online job.

At this point, my older son was still at my brother's and my older daughter had moved with her dad to another state, 200 miles away. I continued to cry myself to sleep at nights but still worked hours and hours at my stay-at-home job. Over time, we were able to move to the same town as my older daughter and closer to my son and after awhile he was able to come home from my brother's. I was still working ... a lot, albeit from home. Even then, I still did not realize the fallout from all of those years of disconnect from my family.

My husband kept offering to work two or even three jobs if needed, in order for me not to work. I selfishly turned down his offer because I was so determined to never place all of my trust in another man when it came to being financially capable of providing. And besides, I took great pride in my work.

For the next seven years, I continued to work, sometimes from home, sometimes outside the home.

Why Did I Wait so Long?

Recently, my youngest daughter began to express her resentment and pain about my lack of presence in her life. Now my final, very part time job, is ending soon and I have already started being more "present" and "attentive." However, after 10 years of disengagement, she began to ask me, "Why now?" "Why did you wait so long?" All of those years. Ten years of her life gone!

She has been a child left to herself. She is hurt, and no wonder. My oldest son is now in his early twenties and an atheist. My oldest daughter is in her early twenties. By God's grace, she is married to a very responsible, godly young man and committed to him and their first baby as a manager of her home.

I have recently asked my younger daughter's forgiveness. I have taken off the blinders, or maybe I should say, God has taken off the blinders. Through devastating news and a heart-wrenching situation, I was brought to repentance for my pride, selfishness, and disengagement from not only my children, but my current husband. I disrespected him with my actions and attitudes and caused deep pain to all of them.

Coming Full Circle

My focus is to once again, and wholeheartedly, serve God and my family. There is nothing like coming full circle and realizing that you allowed human reasoning and fleshly decisions to interfere with bringing your children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

I am so glad that I serve a loving and grace-filled Father who constantly draws my heart to focus on Him while He takes me, puts me on his lap, and wipes my regretful and repentant tears away. As 1 John 1:9 says, "If you confess your sins, He is faithful and just to forgive your sins and cleanse you from all unrighteousness."

If you are facing singlehood, whether through death or divorce, or

the decision to leave your home and work for financial reasons, can I ask you to please think twice and pray for a way of escape. If my experience can save even one mom and her children from disconnection and the devastation that is sure to follow, I will be so grateful.

I want to encourage you to continue in your commitment to leave a godly legacy and to follow God when He says in Titus 2:3-5 to manage your home well, love your husband, and love your children. It is much harder to reconnect than to stay connected in the first place.

A REPENTANT AND RECONNECTING MOM

reconnectingmom@hushmail.com

KIND WORDS

It's not much use saying kind words to those outside our home if we can't say kind words to those in our home! What kind words have you said to each one in your home today?

~ Nancy Campbell

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Email: sarah@happyhealthyblessed.com

Website: www.happyhealthyblessed.com

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Registration & Information:

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Email: connielewis72@yahoo.com

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Email: kprinas@gmail.com

Or Contact: Melissa Brown • Phone: 701-330-6858

Email: melissalahtibrown@gmail.com

Retreat website: aboverubiesnd.weebly.com

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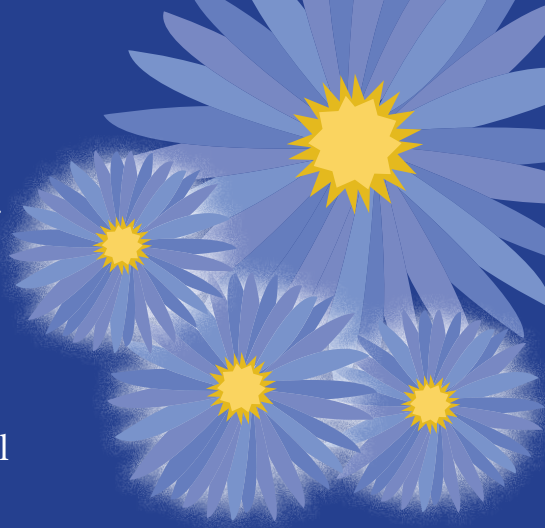
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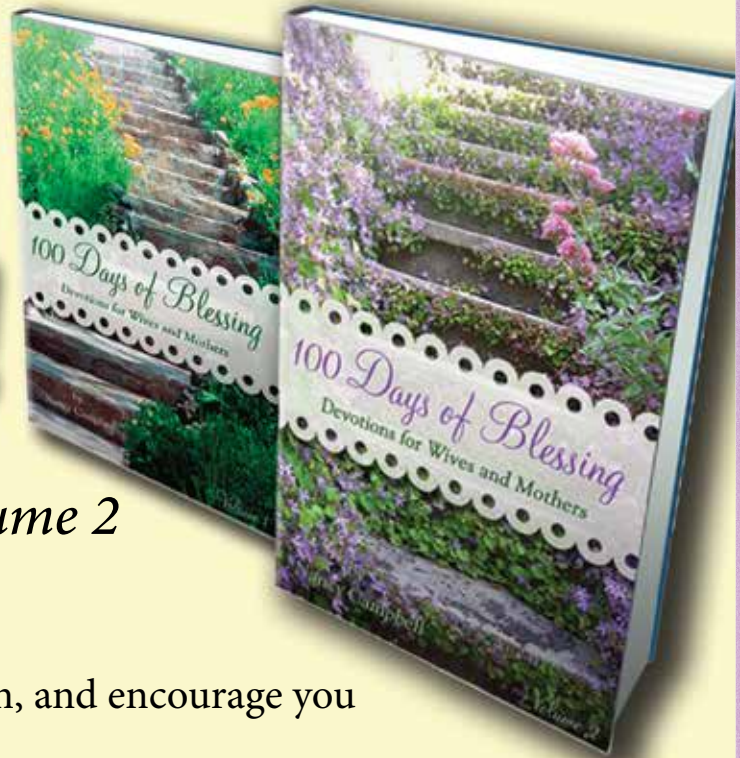
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