



Messages About New Growth

Brought To You By FaithfulBloggers.com

Copyright © 2014 Kelly McCausey

Contact: kelly@kellymccausey.com

No portion of this book or accompanying materials or any portions thereof, can be stored in a retrieval system, reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means – electronic, photographic, mechanical – without written permission from Kelly McCausey.

No portions of the book or accompanying materials may be resold, rented or otherwise distributed, without written permission from Kelly McCausey.

Earnings Disclaimer

Every effort has been made to accurately represent this product and its potential. Even though this industry offers the possibility to earn money, there is no guarantee that you will earn any money using the techniques and ideas in these materials. Examples in these materials are not to be interpreted as a promise of guarantee of earnings. Earning potential is entirely dependent on the person using the product, ideas and techniques.

Any claims of actual earnings or examples of actual results can be verified upon request. Your level of success in attaining the results claimed in these materials depends on the time you devote to the business, ideas and techniques mentioned, your finances, knowledge and various skills. Since these factors differ according to individuals, we cannot guarantee your success or income level. Nor am I responsible for any of your actions.

Legal Disclaimer

While every attempt has been made to verify information provided in this book, we are not responsible for any errors or omissions. The reader of this book assumes responsibility for the use of these materials and information. I hold no responsibility or liability for your use of this information.

Meet Kelly McCausey



Kelly McCausey is a full-time solopreneur who's been earning money online since 2002. When she realized her "little Internet business" had huge potential, her stick-to-it attitude went into overdrive. The result: Kelly walked away from her J-O-B in 2006.

Kelly blogs, podcasts, designs, partners, creates information products, runs a membership site, and coaches other solopreneurs.

About her solopreneur life, Kelly says, "I love what I do and feel so grateful for the opportunity!"

Read more at

<http://www.SoloSmarts.com>.

Meet Tishia Lee

Tishia is owner of Tishia Saves Time and takes pride in providing excellent customer service. Tishia knows that as a Virtual Assistant it's about not just working with you as a VA but partnering with you to help you succeed in your business.

She offers several years experience in administrative support, transcription services, as well as other services. She is dedicated to meeting deadlines which she strives to meet ahead of time and pays close attention to detail.



Read More at

<http://www.TishiaSavesTime.com>

Table of Contents

We're All Growing.....	5
Season of New Growth	7
Springing Into New Life	9
Restoration	11
New Growth and Life	13
New Heart.....	15
New Growth comes from Conflict.....	17
Surviving in the Midst of a Spiritual Winter	19
Growth Opportunities Arise from the Struggle	21
SHUT-UP!	24
God Provides.....	27
When Winter Lingers – 7 Ways to Grow Your Happy.....	29
How Can I See New Growth in My Spiritual Garden?	31
Shelf Life	34
The Thaw	37
How Do We Achieve Spiritual Growth?	40
Personal Growth	42
The Ending of the Ice Age of Life.....	44
Spiritual Growth Found in Forgiveness	46
Preparing for Spiritual Drought.....	49
Dig In.....	52
Butterflies Aren't Free	54
God of the Snow Piles	57
Never Stop Growing Up	59

We're All Growing

The Faithful Bloggers Community is home to an amazing group of creative bloggers and we're thrilled to be releasing this Group Writing Project: New Growth.

We extend special appreciation to everyone who contributed to the project. Your willingness to share from the heart to encourage others is a wonderful gift.

Michael of <http://www.donewithreligion.com>
Karin of <http://www.FOGwalkerBirdie.wordpress.com>
Jen of <http://www.WordTraveling.com>
Roxy of <http://livingfromglorytoglory.blogspot.com>
Connie of <http://hesforeverfaithful.blogspot.com/>
Diana of <http://diana2rockwell.com>
Cindy of <http://www.aviewfromlookout.com/>
Dawn of <http://www.journeysingrace.com>
Kathryn of <http://www.thewritersreverie.com>
Betsy of <http://bphotoart.com>
Mary of <http://passagethroughgrace.com>
Ellen of <http://www.lifeinnncarolina.com/>
Michael of <http://www.KindlingWord.com>
Susan of <http://myplacetoyours.com>
Cecelia of <http://quietspirit-followingmyking.blogspot.com>
Carlos of <http://carlosaranda.tateauthor.com/blog/>
Cheryl of <http://thelegacypen.wordpress.com>
Tamara of <http://justuswomen.org/>
The Ministry Mama of <http://www.theministrymama.com>
Morgan of <http://www.loveanderrors-trialsandlaughter.blogspot.ca/>
Karen of <http://www.livingasapprentices.com>
Randi of <http://www.randiperezhelm.wordpress.com>
Kaylene of <http://faithfulfeat.blogspot.com>

Blessings To Your Blog,

Kelly & Tishia



SPONSORED BY

**WE PROVIDE FREE 'MOVE IN' SERVICE
IF YOU ALREADY HAVE A BLOG ON
OTHER HOSTING.**



**WE IMPORT BLOGS FROM BLOGGER OR
WORDPRESS.COM TOO!**

<http://www.MomWebs.com>

Season of New Growth

Over the years of our Christian lives, my wife and I have gone through many times of new growth. It is a normal process to grow, bloom, become dormant, and then have new growth again.

If we never had new growth, our Christian life would eventually wither and die. It is not wrong to re-think and question and have times of new interpretations and new inspirations.

We grew up in the traditional church and have many good and happy memories over the years of being involved. We were taught many things over the years, most of which we never questioned. We accepted what we were taught and considered it to be the truth. As time went by, we began to let some of the questions we had in the back of our minds come forward. Some things we had always accepted just didn't make sense.

We have found that so many times in church, people just take what they are told and don't question it. Most people feel questioning is a lack of faith or a lack of trust in the pastor. After all, didn't the pastor go to college and get all the training necessary to understand the Bible? Didn't the pastor have the inside track on hearing from God?

We began questioning why one person has the right to have the authority to tell everyone else what God is saying. We read that we are the temple of the Holy Spirit and we have no need of anyone else to teach us. There were so many different views and interpretations. There were so many denominations that to us, seemed to cause division among Christians. Yet we read we were to be one as Jesus and the Father are one. We read that everyone should have a word, a song, a praise, yet we sat in a service week after week just looking at the back of someone's head, never getting to talk or discuss or have true fellowship with our brothers and sisters in Christ.

All of this brought us to our most recent time of dormancy and questions, which actually lasted over several years. Of course time is not something that God worries about, since a day with Him is like a thousand years. So when I say we were going through this dormant, questioning stage for eight, nine or ten years, it was not a big thing.

Having grown up in the typical, modern day church, we had come to a place where we really questioned some of the doctrines and ways of 'doing church'. Some things just didn't make sense anymore, others seemed different from what we read of the believers in the New Testament.

Over the years, we continued to attend a few different churches thinking the answer was in finding the right church. After several years of that process and still having the same feelings, we realized that there was something more than finding a church.

After some time, we both started meeting people who were having the same thoughts, the same questions, and the same uneasiness. We met people at a local cafe and started talking, hearing them express the same concerns we were going through. Many books and various websites started coming to our attention, and each were from people who were going through, or had gone through the same things we were going through.

It was amazing to us how we felt a time of new growth beginning. We are finding people who were going through the same things, and we are starting to find answers to some of our questions. We no longer feel alone, and we no longer feel guilty for the questions and feelings we are experiencing.

For us, it's a time of new growth in the knowledge and understanding of grace. The grace we have in Christ, the freedom we have because of his grace. We no longer worry about the man-made denominations, doctrines and ways of 'doing church'. We are free from the guilt of sin because of his grace. We are now learning to 'be the church', realizing we are one with Christ and it is his spirit that lives and loves through us.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Michael Donahoe is the contributor for Done with Religion, a blog site about living for God in a non-religious way. Michael and his wife Betty, after many years in the organized church, have been living for God outside the walls of the traditional church.

<http://www.donewithreligion.com>



Springing Into New Life

Spring brings to mind refreshment and renewal. The whole earth literally starts to spring forth new growth. The trees bud, the flower begin to break their way through the hard ground. The birds begin to sing more and more, or so it seems; the sounds of children and laughter permeates the air bringing a lightness to my heart.

The other things that begin going through my mind are the things that need to be done to help maintain the new growth. Weeding, pruning, fertilizer, just to name a few.

As in the natural, so in the spiritual. In order to maintain our new growth – the renewed life we have in Christ, we need to allow the Master Gardener to weed, prune and fertilize, then we WILL grow and blossom. Our lives will bear much fruit. But we have to submit ourselves to Him.

When I gave my heart to Christ back in 1970 I was not taken under anyone's wing. No one at all talked to me about learning how to apply God's Word to my life. The result was simply that I had no growth! Yes, I loved the Lord. I sang in the choir, I even taught the children in Sunday School, was a camp counselor, all things that pointed others to Jesus, but my own life did not reflect any new growth. I had no springtime.

Years later, when the Lord brought someone in my life who cared enough to disciple me, show me that God's Word contained everything I needed for life, for growth, for victory over all things, did I come to know The Master Gardener and learn to submit myself to Him. Once I did, the fertilizer of The Word started to penetrate the soil of my heart. The Holy Spirit began teaching me how to pull the weeds up by the root. Abba Father began to prune (yes, these things hurt, but the results far outweighed the pain), and fruit began to grow. My springtime had come! And, praise God, it continues still.

Sometimes the pruning involves things we love – family, friends, things in our lives that have been a part of us for so long. Perhaps we looked to them or at them in ways which were not healthy. Putting them above God. (This is what I had done, unknowingly, regarding my disabled daughter.) He did not ask me to cut them OUT of my life, just cut them away and begin looking at them through His eyes. See them for the gifts they are. Keep my eyes focused on Him, on His Word, and looking to Him for my source of strength, accomplishment, peace, joy, love, hope, etc. instead of them.

Sometimes pruning involves the things we do – our jobs, even the ministries we may be involved in, taking care of someone. Again, I had to learn that this walk of faith was not about me at all – it's ALL about Him.

Afraid to give things up to the Lord? Afraid that if we allow Him to prune that we will dry up and wither away, die? That will NOT happen. In fact, the opposite will happen.

We can never out give God! He takes these things and as we fertilizer (study His Word), He waters us (also through His Word) and new growth is the result. The things that blossom forth out of our new, obedient life are far beyond anything we could have ever imagined!

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

My name is Karin Lynn-Hill. I am a wife, mother and grandmother, ordained minister of the Gospel, Biblical Counselor, worshiper and prayer warrior. I live in Texas and absolutely love to share God's Kingdom message of hope to those whom the Lord brings across my path – all glory to Him.

<http://www.FOGwalkerBirdie.wordpress.com>



Restoration

Have you ever restored something? Perhaps a piece of jewelry, or furniture? An old, torn article of clothing or antique cracking photograph or great-grandparents? Maybe you are passionate about restoring our eco-system? You've attempted an old home restoration, or are just enamored with This Old House? There's a great satisfaction in completing a restoration- in giving something old, without significance, a new life, most often better than it was! As we are made in God's image, I have to think that He especially delights in restoration. Not of physical objects, but of our very souls.

C.S.Lewis says this, "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you know that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to?

The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of--throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself!"

I know firsthand about our God's love of restoration. In fact, you could probably call me a poster child for proof that He delights in (multiple) second chances. In His loving kindness, He has restored me personally from a young divorce and failed marriage, addiction, and a wandering life in the deceptions of the "New Age." I have survived a scare with melanoma, loss of friends and family.

Together, as a couple, we have gone through a major home restoration, overcome job loss, financial crisis, paying off over \$100,000 in unsecured debt, and most recently God has been restoring to new heights deep wounds in our marriage. We both come from divorced parents, and we have drawn a line in the sand to say, "we are committed." To each other and to God. Whatever it takes.

Unified, my husband Luis and I have fought many giants, and won numerous battles. Clearly, God is for us. Through our most challenging moments, we lifted our hands higher, together, in praise and surrendered. "If God is for us, who can be against us?" And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:31/ 28.

Restoration in our marriage, and our lives, means we are better now. We are deeper, more intimate, and more excited about what will come next. We are ready for God's great adventure! Through all this refining fire, I can confidently say the same about my

relationship with God- it's deeper, more intimate. Isn't that all we ever desire? As our worship team sings, "Through the Fire, through the pain- I will lift my hands and sing, I trust you Lord."

A few years ago, I had a vision of a recurring image so strong that I eventually grabbed a blank canvas and attempted to create what I had been seeing. It was a sketched heart, with many different sections, cracked apart and broken, all different shapes, sizes, patterns and colors. Down came a hand and a glittering red thread that began to stitch all the pieces together to create something beautiful.

God's heart is to bind up our broken hearts- all the pieces, patterns, and puzzles in them- and to restore a new and glorious creation! Through my healing season, Holy Spirit would whisper, "what hurt you will heal you." ~And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true." Revelation 21:5

He was calling me to walk right into the refining fire, supernaturally. Keep this picture of his beautiful creation in mind, as He will call you there, too, if He hasn't already. Behold, all things are new through Christ who strengthens me!

Father, you know all the shattered pieces of our hearts. Let all those who read these words seek your love, mercy and restoration. May all my brothers and sisters in Christ know deeply and intimately of your great love for us. I pray restorations to the deepest parts of souls and the most impossible of circumstances.

Nothing is impossible for you! Hallelujah! Let Your glittering red thread of the blood of Jesus bind our wounds into beautiful creations for Your glory. Thank You, Holy Spirit that Your visions create visionaries, our messes become Your messages, and life's tests create testimonies to bring You praise! In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Jen Reyneri challenges you to live a life of creativity and discover the many blessings arising from living a lifestyle of journey. Jen empowers you to embrace an authentic life of adventure, courage, purpose, freedom in Christ in your family and beyond! Homeschooling mother of two boys and blessed wife to Luis, Team Reyneri resides between sunny Florida and a suitcase.



<http://www.WordTraveling.com>

New Growth and Life

New growth and fruit are sure to come in the believer's life. We all have had seasons of drought and seasons of pain and sorrow. But we know we have the promise of this statement Joy comes in the morning. The morning can symbolize a new day to a broader sense of a season or a timeline of age.

Our God wants healthy, mature Christians. And He provides everything we will ever need for our growth and well-being. We do not have to do everything perfect we just take what the Lord has given us, and forge ahead. He has said He will go before us, and that the Glory of the Lord is our rear guard.

We must learn to be grateful for even the long winter seasons as we get a chance to rest in a different way than we are allowed to rest in the summer months.

I think stepping out into those unknown and unfamiliar places we have opportunity to grow.

Even if we make a choice to do something and it does not work out, does not make us a failure.

Anyone who has done a great work in writing or an invention will tell you how many times it took to get it right! And it is possible to create something new out of what was first thought of as a mistake.

We can be assured of this one thing God does not make mistakes! And where you are at right now is no mistake. He will make all His plans work out in His timing. That is why we must learn to dance to the music. Because God is singing over us!

Most limits that seem to be upon our own life are the ones we have put there ourselves. We sometimes just need to look out into the ocean or gaze into the sky to realize the vastness of Gods space and time.

He can take anything we offer to Him and grow a ministry or a mission field into a great and wonderful thing. It may look small in size, but God will always use the individual in every situation!

He desires a heart willing to try and to give from a place that is a seedbed of ideas and creativity.

That He alone is the author of! We are just asked to be stewards of these wonderful gifts and talents.

He is asking each of us to respond and to say yes use me!

So how can we make a beginning step in a new direction of growth?

We firstly inquire of the Lord for His guidance and expect to hear from Him!

Then we need to take those ideas and thoughts that might pop into our heads and jot them down!

Then be looking for things that are taking place in your life or family that can inspire you!

Growth is a process and it is a part of living that we may not always be aware of.

But we can know we are always growing in many ways. Living a life to the fullest is a process.

Learning to embrace all the ups and downs help us to not be moved from our course we are running.

We need to learn to encourage ourselves in the Lord so we can help each other in times of their season of drought or struggle. But one thing we can be sure of a Great Harvest will come and He will not leave

One sheaf behind.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

My name is Roxy. I am a new creation in Christ, and a wife to a wonderful Husband. I have journal most my dreams and thoughts over many years. I have always loved words! My children our two and have the increase of now eight Grandchildren. I love blogging and taking pictures of life.

<http://livingfromglorytoglory.blogspot.com>



New Heart

As Christians we have been taught that if we just put the correct boundaries in place (have a mentor, limit where we go, guard what we watch, be cautious whom we befriend), read the Bible and pray every day, etc. then we will be empowered to live victorious lives, free from choosing sin.

But, I disagree with this school of thought. I am not saying these practices are bad, but I have seen in my lifetime many that put these safeguards in place and in spite of it all, still continually fall into deliberate repeated sin. I am convinced; the only way to live life victorious over sin is through a heart transformation.

Once our desires align with an unquenchable thirst to please the Lord, then we alter our choices, we walk differently and talk differently. Christianity is not a set of rules and regulations, it's a relationship with Christ, and just like we do not purposely behave in a way that hurts the hearts of our friends and family whom we love deeply, so too, we do not make choices that grieve the heart of our Savior and the Lover of our Souls.

It really is that simple. If we love Him, we strive to please Him in every way possible. "If you love Me, keep My commandments." ~John 14:5

Recently I learned through a very difficult lesson that this is not a one-time commitment. Having a heart that continually thirsts to know God more and to walk in ways that please Him, is a continual process. Each day I awaken, I must examine my heart and spend time with the One who created it to ensure that I am walking, living, and loving the faith to which I ascribe.

Once our heart has been transformed and beats to please the Lord, we find our choices being filtered through a desire to please Him. Then, when moments do arise that we fail, we will immediately be grieved in our hearts and instantly repent before the Lord and surely in our regret, will be careful not to repeat the offense again.

I was reminded of when a patient requires a heart transplant. The patient recognizes the value of the new heart, after all it cost someone else their life. If this patient is truly appreciative of the sacrifice that was made so that they may live, they will care tenderly and responsibly for the heart they have been blessed with.

They will honor the person that made the sacrifice for them by caring and behaving responsibly with their new heart. Dear reader, the One that sacrificed His life for you, has given you a new heart. Honor Him today by caring for it in a way that pleases Him and shows how appreciative you are for His sacrifice for you.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not

be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." ~Romans 12:1-2

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

My name is Connie. I was born in a little town in New Jersey. I have three amazing "children"...all grown now. I'm striving every day to fulfill the purposes of God in my life and hopefully make a Godly difference in the lives of people around me.



<http://hesforeverfaithful.blogspot.com/>

New Growth comes from Conflict

Two years ago my husband and I gave up our home to move in with his mom. His father passed away on June 8, 2012. His mom is legally blind and so although she is fiercely independent in her home she needed help with such things as shopping, cleaning, etc.

We were married in 1970 and have never lived with anyone since the day we said our wedding vows. So this decision did not come lightly. We agreed that the benefits outweighed the negatives. The negatives were obvious to me and less obvious to my husband. The benefits were more obvious to my husband and less obvious to me.

Conflict is never easy to resolve. I am very easy going by nature. It takes a lot to get me mad. Okay, I will admit it, I am a people pleaser. I love approval. I sometimes forget that God already approves of me so why am I seeking approval of that person.

In the beginning, we were all on our best behavior. After all, we had put everything in storage and gave up our home and she invited us to live here. There are rules that we obey. For instance, when a person is driving a car, there are traffic rules. The first rule was established when I took a telephone call and naturally walked out of the house because of needing privacy to take the call.

However, the rule was that all my telephone calls were to be taken in my bedroom. We have our own bathroom and that was rule number two, I could no longer use the bathroom in the house. The third rule was that I was never to use God's name in her house. She said, "I know you are religious but God's name will not be mentioned in my house." The fourth rule is I cannot touch my hair in her kitchen.

My running my hands through my hair to relieve stress bothered her and apparently I touched my hair too much to her liking. The last important rule is it bothers her if I am home by myself so when I am home alone, I stay in my room I do not unlock the door to the main house.

My feelings have been hurt many times. The day of my father-in-laws memorial service I was not allowed to sit with her and her kids. So I did not get to comfort my husband during his time of grief. I do not know why this surprised me, she has never let me be in the family pictures. She only wants her five children in the pictures. She does not want me here alone at the house, even though I live here. I had my knee replaced, and I did not walk fast enough and I did not walk straight.

She even told me in the midst of an argument that I was not a queen. Of course, I know I am the daughter of King Jesus so I am a princess.

I have felt hopeless living here. I have felt that I am in prison. I have shed many tears and the last argument with my husband, I feel like I signed a deal with the devil. I do

know I have choices but the one to move away would mean I would have to leave without my husband because he feels obligated to care for his mom. He promised his dad before he died that he would take care of her.

So the new growth occurred after this last argument. I realize I have just been existing not living. I am asking God to show me ways to witness to her. I am accepting this as an assignment from God. I have dedicated this room that I live in to be my writing studio, I have set up a new blog I am going to use these life experiences to help someone else. To ease the feeling of being in prison, I will be more active with friends.

I have decided to sew which is something I have in common with my mother in law. I will serve God and speak about God as I am led. My mother in law recently has been ill and she needs us so that she may stay in her home. I am a part of a bigger plan. I will honor my husband by allowing him to fulfill his promise to his dad.

Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28, Philippians 4:6

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

My name is Diana. I am fearfully and wonderfully made. I am married to my high school sweetheart. I am a nurse, a mother and a grandmother. I seek to serve the Lord in all I do and say. I have been to Israel and shared my testimony in Nazareth. I have been to Tata Hungary to serve the missionary families by working as a children leader. Currently, I am writing a blog, sewing for my granddaughters, focusing at work on being the best I can be giving all honor to Jesus. Lastly, I have a beautiful writing partner she is a West Highland Terrier, her name is Tory.

<http://diana2rockwell.com>



Surviving in the Midst of a Spiritual Winter

There are times in our life when we go through seasons of spiritual despair and amazingly God brings us into the springtime of spiritual discovery and blessing. We walk in the sunlight of God's love and proclaim His praises. "This is what He did for me!" we proclaim. Again and again we share the stories of the miracles He has performed in our lives. God has made it clear that He is moving in our individual lives and blessing us.

God has given me salvation, led me to my husband and my vocation. He has been with me through the reality of a physical handicap and the heartache of infertility and a failed adoption. He has had a clear hand in my life guiding me, making it evident where my husband and I should work and live and worship. He led us through foreign adoption to bring us the child who was to become our daughter. He even made it possible for us to provide her with a Christian education.

Yes, I can look back on my life and see God's clear hand.

However, sometimes the faithful find themselves in circumstances in which they are not quickly relieved. This is the circumstance I find myself in now. Current circumstances cause me to question the whole direction of my life. Did I mistake God's leading? Why am not rewarded for my obedience and faithfulness? I put my life in your hand, so why does my life seem to be falling apart?

There are crises in the lives of my loved ones that have totally blindsided me. I ask myself, what did I do wrong, what could I have done differently? I pray for those closest to me and do not see the change I long for. When I pray it is so difficult because I do not believe the words I utter. I cry because I so want to believe.

Yet I know God is faithful. Even if I question what He is doing in my life and the lives of my loved ones, even if I cry out angrily that He has not rewarded my faithfulness, I remember prayers He has answered. I ask him to give me the faith to believe His promises and for Him to help me see even the smallest glimpse of Him moving in the life of my loved ones.

Then He gives me the grace to love Him, to believe Him, even when I can't see the answers to my prayers. I continue to speak to Him, to look into His Word and realize only He can change others. My task is to allow Him to change me and continue to be faithful.

He makes His presence evident from the people He brings in my life to the way He leads me to a particular scripture. Daily He opens my eyes to His work in my life. So even if there are circumstances that cause me despair He changes my hopelessness to hope and my doubt to trust.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

I am a retired teacher, married and the mother of a college student and two dogs. My interests range from theology to history to science fiction to politics. I love to study the Bible, swim, read, watch movies, and write. You can friend me on FB- Cindy Bleuler Tucker

<http://www.aviewfromlookout.com/>

Growth Opportunities Arise from the Struggle

The entrance of spring and summer bring forth the abundance of sowing and planting in the heart of the avid gardener. Planning the perfect space, finding just the right seeds, and scouring the local nursery all lead up to the excitement each new growing season begins. The imagery is poignant as a believer in Christ, because God, the master gardener, has already planned and orchestrated the beauty of the garden which is composed in each believer, both individually and corporately.

Psalm 139:15-16 reminds us that He has already established our end from our beginning and the joy he has for us helps us to see he loves the outcome. (Zeph 3:17)

The garden represents new life and redemption together. It reveals the character of God's heart as one who tends that which He plants with a harvest of expectation to follow.

If you have been a gardener for any length of time, you know the process. First you need to till up and cultivate the soil so it is ready for the seed to be sown. Then you wait, anxious and expectant, for something to emerge; almost hovering as you watch the plants break through the soil. It seems like an eternity to wait when you plant the seed and then subsequently see the green shoot spring forth. Sometimes, you know what to look for when the seedlings pop through the humus rich topsoil, because you have planted this seed before. If not, however, it is hard to decipher the seedling from the weeds which also sprout, abundantly, in the newly turned dirt.

Prayer is the cultivation of the soil of our hearts as we spend time rooted in the life giving power of His Word. Prayer prepares our hearts through the intimate fellowship that communing with God allows. Prayer is the tool which breaks up the clumps of sin and decay that rob the believer of the power and ability to produce fruit.

Pruning, Weeding, Tending, and Diligence are the key to maintaining.

Scripture talks about seeds being sown into fertile soil, but it also mentions the soil sown in the rocks and the roadside. It is interesting how similar the impostor weed often resembles the plant. Eradicating the weed before it becomes a resource stealing entity, is a necessity. If we let it go, soon the integrity of the plant is jeopardized.

In order to expect a harvest, we must purposely weed and tend the garden. I have learned, the hard way, that steady diligence is the key to maintaining the garden. Daily, I must spend time removing anything that does not belong there, as well as pruning and thinning what is good. The process of pruning is difficult, because we are removing

perfectly acceptable plants, stems, branches, or flowers in the effort to cause the both the quality and quantity of the remaining fruit to ripen and mature.

Just like in the life of a believer, the act of refinement and ‘working out our salvation’ is not always easy or enjoyable. In fact, it is hard. It is the place of struggle, where we are tested and tried, that we grow the most. Often, we are growing in places that are not always visible, but the working is just as real. God does some serious heart surgery during times of wrestling and conflict.

The beauty is hidden in the final product. When we extract ourselves from the cocoon of our trial, we break forth with wings that are ready to fly. Not to mention, of course, the inward change affects the outward appearance and we are transfigured from the caterpillar to the butterfly, the seed to the flower, the dry and brittle to the strong and resilient.

Transformation happens even when it is too dark or obscure to see.

Many times in my life, the struggle was accompanied as an effect of sin or misdirection. The pain of the consequence provided an opportunity to grow closer to the Lord. Sometimes, though, it is no direct result of anything we have done, rather instead it is the Lord revealing the need to change our course, alter our direction, and follow Him. In each circumstance, it is sometimes painful and often difficult, yet we are not promised a life w/o struggles or trials.

In fact, as a believer we should expect them. James 1:2-4 reminds us to consider it joy to endure trials because it works out an attitude of patience, and when patience is perfected you are whole lacking nothing.

New life begins where death and division end.

Here in the pruning and dividing new growth has its start. The evidence of His masterful plan is revealed through the trial and we are released, temporarily, from the struggle. Once the plan is exposed, we can see behind the scenes and understand the purpose, which paves the way for maturity. It points to the glory of the harvest.

New growth is exciting to watch when a seed is sown in fertile soil and we are expecting the plant to emerge looking for the harvest. Comparatively, new growth is appreciated when the trial and the pain of struggle reveal a resilient and beautiful limb which has been grafted into the branch of a strong and solid source.

As believers we must always be looking, listening, and applying those lessons that the physical garden provides, like a pattern of God’s handiwork that mirrors our own living. Don’t resist his ministrations of grace and mercy, confusing them with judgment and

condemnation. Allow Him to manipulate and to orchestrate the harvest of your heart so that your fruit will grow.

Growth opportunities arise from the struggle.

New growth provides abundant opportunity for a plentiful harvest when it is expertly pruned and gently persuaded to mature. In Christ we are a garden that is uniquely fit to the trowel held gently in the Master Gardener's hands. Don't miss His harvest plan, yield to His touch and be changed for his glory.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Author, writer and speaker, Dawn is passionate about many things: God, Family, Prayer, Food, and the Word. You can find her writing about those hard questions, reasoning and rejoicing in God's grace and mercy for those who are walking this journey to grace on her website, Journeys In Grace.

<http://www.journeysingrace.com>



SHUT-UP!

The "S" word was not allowed in our home during my child raising years.

That - along with the "B" word. I did not allow my children to ever suggest they were "B-O-R-E-D." Children with plenty of art supplies, books, Legos, dress-up costumes, random toys and chores to do have no cause to ever be bored. The "B" word was not to be tolerated.

And, the "S" word! If uttered, swift and decisive discipline would be administered! Never were my children to tell each other to "Shut-up!" As a parent, I never used the expression. It was inappropriate behavior to do so, being both poor behavior modeling, and harsh, unattractive language.

That being said - there were other "B-S" words I did use: BE SILENT.

Children chattering or arguing in the car - Be Silent!

Children complaining of one thing or another - Be Silent!

Children melting down over a perceived wrong when they didn't get their way - Be Silent!

Children speaking out of turn through their arrogance, disobedience or lack of manners - Be Silent!

Children prattling on and on when adult stress levels were at a breaking point - Be Silent!

Children! Being . . . children.

Just like me. Chattering, prattling, arguing, complaining, melting down, arrogant, disobedient, lacking in reverence - to my Heavenly Father - more times than I would like to admit.

"Oh, that you would be silent, and it would be your wisdom!" Job 13:5

I really need to shut-up. Be Silent.

Thinking on these things I realize that most of the negative noise children create tempting you to shout "shut-up" is due to a lack of trust.

So too, in our childISHness, we may chatter and prattle on about how we know better. We argue and complain about circumstances we don't like. We melt-down in fear and despair wailing and moaning our discord. We posture and fight, arrogant and disobedient, showing a complete lack of manners and reverence for others as we hog the

spotlight with our wants and desires - whether we speak from a position of knowledge or ignorance.

In such a case, the parenting model of our Heavenly Father elicits a firm, loving rebuke in a simple instruction, "Be Silent!" In CHILDLIKE TRUST - Be Silent.

"Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation." Psalm 62:1

I considered these things recently as I spent the early part of this year "shut-up" - in my house. A furiously harsh winter kept me tied to my home. January and February turned to a more frigid March when our oil burning furnace blew its last breath of hot air. We "shut-up" in a couple rooms with space heaters, closing off part of the house to keep what heat we had contained till a new gas conversion could be accomplished.

For a record cold month, God shut me up in my living room, bundled in three layers of clothing with my computer and a make-shift office surrounding the sofa. I tucked in tight. In a quiet place. Silent. Still. Simmering in Solitude. Listening. Learning. Preparing in secret for spring – like every good seed does when shut-up underground in a cold winter season after the noisy summer and fall seasons of color and revelry. Thank God for such seasons to shut-up and heal!

Four weeks with no working furnace and sub-zero weather may have been inconvenient. But, not intolerable. I was living out a spiritual principle - "shut-up" like the winter. It could be harsh. The gray melancholy tempts us to lose hope. We become cold. We bundle-up in stillness - holed up in a corner den like a hibernating rodent. We become raw and real – the place God can do His best work in us. Like that seed falling to the ground dying for the purpose of rising again to fruitful life.

And so comes the spring. There is meaning and reward to our winter exercise of "shutting-up" - of "being silent" . . . and still. Our children eventually learn the rewards of silence. Hot tempers cool and have strength for renewal and measured thought. Silence teaches the child within to cope with disappointment after a negative outburst.

On the day the heat was turned back on, I left my "shut-up" state of "being silent" with mixed feelings, even though I felt more than ready to break through the cold, warmed with the energy of growth. That broken furnace was a gift from God. A time to "be silent" and work through some recent harsh circumstances that tempted me to lose hope. I put away childish noises and took hold of the lessons learned in "being silent" - the only "B-S" word worthy of embrace.

"Only in returning to me and resting in me will you be saved. In quietness and confidence is your strength." Isaiah 30:15 NLT

The season of "Be Silent" should be a portion of every day - not just certain months of the year. In my child-rearing season, not a day went by that I didn't have to use the "B-S" word. Sometimes it was firmly demanded within the realm of disciplining unruly behavior. But, every day there was "Be Silent" time - quiet play - slowing down.

ChildISH things are put away. Learning to listen in silence and stillness, parent and child can perfect CHILDLIKE TRUST. Spring will come and I will grow – blossoming and beautiful. Hope is fed there – a place best honed in what feels, sometimes, to be the cold, harsh discipline of just . . . shutting-up.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Kathryn Ross is a professional storyteller ministering literature, history and arts enrichment programs from a Biblical worldview in schools, churches and community groups in Southern New Jersey. She blogs at www.thewritersreverie.com and has published a collection of devotional poetry, "Fragrant Fields" with two more publications due later this year.



<http://www.thewritersreverie.com>

God Provides

After my son's birth, I went through a time of spiritual sadness and grief. I was overwhelmed and angry: my son arrived via unexpected c-section two weeks after my grandmother passed away. I keenly felt the pressure to "perform" as I thought the world expected me to. I compartmentalized my grief, subconsciously refusing to deal with it because I didn't want to let my grandmother down (on her deathbed, her concern was that her dying would hamper the joy of my son's arrival).

Peace was what I wanted, but it seemed to elude my grasp. I was not in control, and I knew it. My failures crowded my mind, seeming to press out any fragments of peace that remained. I don't know that I found me so much as God's peace finally broke down the walls I'd built up.

As a mother, there are days where I feel like a failure. I'm not 100% mentally there, too tired to give my full attention to my toddler son. I have lost my temper too easily, given consequences that I later regretted, you name it. But that's the thing about parenting. My mistakes don't mean I've irreparably messed up my kid.

Rather, I can look at them as opportunities for growth and learning, chances to explain to my son why we all need God's grace. A conversation starter about how no one is perfect, not even mommy or daddy -- only Jesus is perfect. I've been humbled time and time again as a parent, stunned by my toddler's understanding of difficult faith concepts like this. My son's mind is full of questions, he could ask "why" all day long. And I could get frustrated (as I sometimes do). But his questions open the dialog for deeper discussions. I can give my opinion -- or I can ask "why do you think?" It's amazing what happens when I stop talking... and start listening.

As I hinted earlier, my toddler understands the basic concept of grace - undeserved, unmerited, yet given freely with love. I stumbled across a learning opportunity one day after doling out a consequence I didn't really want to enforce (probably something like "no more playing outside" on a nice sunny day).

We had a conversation, the two of us, about how he deserved the punishment, the consequence, because of his behavior. And how I was making the decision to give him grace, grant forgiveness, wave the penalty he knew was deserved. Since then, I've heard him make a conscious decision to be compassionate, to withhold his anger and walk away. There have been occasions when my son has said "I'm giving [friend's name] grace."

Things like this floor me, and make me grateful that I've somehow managed to do something right, even amidst my many failures. Life is not perfect, but God doesn't expect us to be. He has provided for us, given us Jesus to cover over our imperfections.

And what of my earlier struggles? Now that I look back, I can see that maybe God was preparing me, helping me to see the need for change, the need to be humble, intentional, and flexible in the way I support and encourage my family. God provides. Even when we can't see the forest for the trees.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

A lifelong bookworm and creative soul, Betsy Finn lives in Michigan with her husband, (soon-to-be-two) boys, and two cats. She is a photographer, artist, and mother. You can see examples of her photographer and read more of her thoughts on life and creative musings at BPhotoArt.com

<http://bphotoart.com>



When Winter Lingers – 7 Ways to Grow Your Happy

Winter gray blankets the sky and wraps around oppressively in a season of loss and brokenness.

Gray, white, dull, and lackluster describes the weather outside and the storm in your heart.

Loss threatens to smother the life within you, yet you still breathe out in a whisper “where are you?”

You cry out for God and question His absence in your life. Each day you go slowly through the routines on automatic and hope that the fog lifts and spring comes.

You crave spring – you crave a way out of the gray mist that threatens to smother. Your whisper becomes stronger and your call louder to God to strengthen and move you into a life of brilliant colors. You leave an opening for the bright greens, yellows and lilacs of spring to seep in and fill you along with some happy. You seek God in the everyday and allow normal to enter in and in the process, spring and new life begin to bloom where only emptiness and loss were present.

Losing a loved one can leave you broken and in a world swirling with gray mist that distorts your direction. Reaching out to God gives you the opportunity to embrace new life, a renewed sense of purpose and a reason for throwing off the blanket of darkness that has been your refuge.

I have been working through a season of winter after the loss of my mom in January and in this process God has never left my side and my still, small voice has become stronger as I allowed Him to minister to my brokenness. God wants us to be whole and happy and is willing to send us reminders in our everyday that turns our ordinary into reasons to get up and live again. From my time of brokenness and vulnerability, spring started blooming inside me and happy entered my heart.

7 Ways to Grow Your Happy

1. Breathe slow and deep – let God’s Word wash over you and soak into your being. For me, Matt Redman’s song “Your Grace Finds Me” played over and over on repeat. God’s love note to me and for all – my mantra – “breathing in your grace, breathing out your praise”. [Click here to listen!](#)

2. When your friends want to minister to you, just say “yes”. An invitation for coffee, a prepared meal brought to your house, or a phone call are ways for your friends to reach

out to you. What might seem like intrusions are really God's invitations to live again and allow healing to begin. Saying "yes" is honoring your friends and God.

3. Enjoy physical activity! Take a walk, run, dance – whatever, you enjoy and you will be surprised how this brings a smile to your face and happy to your heart.

4. Count your blessings! Name one thing that was a blessing to you that day – you will find that joy comes back to you immeasurably! Read more about counting your blessings and take the Joy Dare with Ann Voskamp's community. Ann shares... "But when thanks to God becomes a habit – so joy in God becomes your life."

5. Steer clear of mind-numbing activities such as watching TV, spending too much time with Social Media, or other behaviors that steer you away from living life. Instead, be present each day in your daily routines and with God and persevere because winter does become spring no matter how we feel during the bleak periods of our lives.

6. Be still with God each day! Allow His grace, His Words, His love to wash over you and heal you. God reminds us... "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me." 2 Corinthians 12:9

7. Participate in your passion! Use the time singing, scrapbooking, reading, or writing to feed your soul and fill your emptiness with "happy".

There is hope, my friends, for all who suffer from a brokenness that can only be healed when we let God love us into His light. Winter can linger but spring is always around the corner. 1 Peter 2:9 shares how God specifically chose us to be His son or daughter and with this promise is the reminder that our darkness will become God's light!

But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Prayers and blessings!

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

I am the mom of two grown sons, an elementary teacher and a woman seeking God in the ordinary routines of life. This is my story of drawing closer to God through the power of grace. Come and join me on my grace journey!

<http://passagethroughgrace.com>



How Can I See New Growth in My Spiritual Garden?

The seed of righteousness was planted in my heart 53 years ago, for that is when I confessed Jesus Christ as the Way the Truth and the Life. For no man can come to the Father except through Jesus Christ alone.

John 14:6: “Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.”

It was then that I was washed by the blood of the Lamb and the seed began to grow. Oh what a beautiful beginning to a beautiful garden.

I realized that my new garden needed lots of light and yes Jesus was my “Son-shine” giving me light through His Word.

Psalms 119:130: “The entrance of thy words giveth light; it giveth understanding unto the simple.”

Psalms 119:105: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”

I need that light every single day! Especially in the storms of life, I need to let those rays of Son-shine in.

But my garden needs rain too, and sometimes the rain is more than I think I can bear and winter may be such a cold and rainy season that seems to never end. But as the winter passes, I realize that this is actually a growing process. God knew exactly how much rain my garden needed and how much it needs at each stage of life.

God may bring trials and problems to help me grow and God has promised to bring good out of it. Romans 8:28-29 says that ALL things work together for GOOD to them THAT LOVE GOD...in order that we might be conformed to His image.

The winter season of life is often to make me more like my Lord and Savior. The rain will come to pass and I may see tremendous growth in my spiritual garden at this point. He will use that rain to bring forth the right crop.

It is important that I thank God for the rain He has sent and keep on doing right though at times it may seem that I am just going to drown. A tree planted by the rivers of water is often drenched in torrents of rain, yet it remains steadfast and brings forth its fruit in its' seasons.

Checking for weeds and bugs in my garden is a must. Is there something there that I have neglected to get out? Have I pulled out the sin in my life by putting off the old man

and putting on the new man which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness? (Ephesians 4:22-24) This needs to be a daily process.

I also need to fence in my garden to keep the intruders out? I must guard my heart for out of it are the issues of life. Letting intruders in is certain to be tragic.

Proverbs 4:23: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life."

Ephesians 4:27: "Neither give place to the devil."

Sometimes the winter is so hard, I just want to shrivel up in my own little corner and neglect everything and everyone, but instead if I would transplant some seedlings then perhaps I can extend my growing season.

I am learning that sharing God's Word with someone else can greatly encourage someone and cause them to grow or even have a part in starting a new garden in someone else's heart.

Matthew 13:23 "But he that received seed into the good ground is he that heareth the word, and understandeth it; which also beareth fruit, and bringeth forth, some an hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. "

As the fragrance of our gardens attracts wildlife, may the fragrance of my spiritual garden attract others to the Lord. Can others see the beauty of the Lord in me? Have I reacted to my cold and rainy winters in a way that would make others want to keep on working on growth in their own gardens.

Psalms 90:17: "And let the beauty of the LORD our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it."

Each year I realize that although working on my Spiritual Garden may not always be easy, it is still my responsibility to take care of it! And sometimes I don't see the growth I would like to see, but if I don't tend to it daily, it will certainly shrivel up and die. I can make a choice to care for my garden or to give up on it. But it is certain that if I give up I will never see a spring and summer filled with fragrant flowers and luscious fruit. I will never see NEW GROWTH in my garden.

One thing is certain, if I am growing in grace and in knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18) and letting God's Word dwell in me richly and teaching and admonishing others in Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (Colossians 3:16) then one day my spiritual growth will come to completion and I will be satisfied as I awake with His likeness.

Psalms 17:15: "As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness."

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

I'm Ellen, a Bible Believer, wife to my best friend for over 35 years, Mom to four wonderful children, and grandmother to 16 beautiful grandchildren. I am also the bookkeeper for hubbie's HVAC business. I enjoy blogging for fun and blog about our life in North Carolina. I am part of a new ministry to reach the inner city where I live.



So recently, I hope to start posting more Bible Lessons as I work on preparing them each week for our ministry. Basically you may find a little of this and a little of that, but in all that is said and done, it is my desire that it will all bring glory to my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

<http://www.lifeinnccarolina.com/>

Shelf Life

It wasn't supposed to look like that. It certainly wasn't supposed to smell like that.

Opening that can of sweetened condensed milk was an unforgettable experience I have no desire to repeat.

A glance at the expiration date explained the condition of the contents. It had been sitting on the shelf way too long. No longer even resembling the original product, it was unfit for use. Life on the shelf had not been good to it.

I know how that feels.

For nearly fourteen years, I sat on the shelf. Unused, unproductive, unengaged. Set aside as if my value had expired and my usefulness had passed...at least that's how it felt. With gifts unopened, potential unfulfilled, talents untapped and dreams unrealized, I lived out-of-pocket and out-of-touch for well over a decade

Shelf life.

No one puts the good stuff on the shelf. But I was damaged goods. After nearly 20 years of apparently productive ministry with externally recognized success, failure cut my legs out from under me.

Public failure readily creates intense desire to isolate in obscurity. Honestly, when you've been run through the mill, shelf life can seem attractive and feel like relief.

For a while.

I was glad to be out of the spotlight and off the main stage. The experiences of both success and failure had left an unpleasant taste in my mouth. I was just fine sitting unnoticed among all the other castoffs.

The pain of enduring accusation, the struggle of answering questions, the agony of facing failure, the discomfort of dealing with the past...all made the relative anonymity of being on the shelf preferable to the risky visibility of being in the public eye.

But god did not create us to sit on the shelf...it is simply no place to live.

He enables us with gifts and ennoble us with desires that when neglected will make their presence felt in un-ignorable ways.

God has never designed anyone to be benched by brokenness.

In modern commerce, extensive intellectual energy and expensive frontline technology is employed to extend the shelf life of products. The idea behind all this effort is too keep goods usable and visible for consumers until they are sold.

Our middle son, Caleb, is an assistant store team leader for Whole Foods, a company known for its unbending allegiance to sustainable, natural, organic products. I asked him what other grocers had to do to produce food-stuffs that lasted so long on the shelf. His answer was startling.

Food quality is compromised in direct proportion to product longevity. In other words, the longer it lasts the further it gets from both fresh and live.

There is a careful reduction in the real and a calculated insertion of the artificial in order to create false freshness--it looks real, lasts long but barely resembles what it was in the beginning. Carefully controlled environments and specially designed packaging seal the product off from the effects of the real world.

Shelf life is sustained by the artificial and unreal. Chemicals, fillers and preservatives are added to keep the product from decaying. The longer the shelf life desired, the higher the proportion of artificial ingredients.

Sitting on the shelf results in degraded quality. Products lose their health and nutritional benefits. They simply wind up taking up space and losing value. Inventory rotation is interrupted so that newer, fresher products aren't reaching customers.

Far from fresh and alive, these products are sad imitations of the real thing.

And in spite of all the precautions, let a product sit on the shelf too long and it will eventually and inevitably becomes unfit for use--useless.

Sitting on the shelf for such an extended season nearly robbed me of any sense of life and fruitfulness. As I wasted away in obscurity, an epic truth finally snapped me out of my self-imposed, death on the installment plan.

I was not punishing myself for my past. I was robbing God of my future.

Like the servant who buried his talents, it was the Master who was losing His investment and potential. My false sense of condemnation wasn't reparation for failure while trying. It was resistance to trying again.

To live, I had to get off the shelf.

To get off the shelf, I had to accept that I still had value.

But this meant a death of sorts. A death to the hidden, riskless and controlled life into which I had allowed myself to sink. I had to take the risk of leaving the spiritual witness

protection program and offer my gifts to God and His people again--even if there were some who believed I should never get off that shelf.

That is what Jesus meant when he said, "Listen carefully: Unless a grain of wheat is buried in the ground, dead to the world, it is never any more than a grain of wheat. But if it is buried, it sprouts and reproduces itself many times over." (John 12:24, MSG).

So I decided to trade my canned, tasteless, inoffensive mode of existence for the fresh, savory, challenging life of creative productivity again. It was a courageous and crazy decision to put myself back into circulation in God's Kingdom economy before it was too late.

You see we all start out with an expiration date.

Until we reach that moment, God wants us to offer to our world the fresh life of bold living. We are to be "salty salt"--salt that hasn't lost its flavor.

We are neither designed nor destined for spiritual storage. No matter where you have been, what you have done, how you have failed or who you have hurt...grace renews your life and reuses your story.

I choose to live the risky adventure of serving others because I know for a fact I was not meant for the...

...shelf life.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Michael Thompson spent 20 years in professional ministry and the past 14 years in the financial services industry. Combining these two worlds gives him unique perspective to pursue and express his passion: seeing life as it can be impact life as it is to create life as it should be.

<http://www.KindlingWord.com>



The Thaw

Thankfully, the thaw has come, but not before the Winter of 2014 wreaked havoc in the garden. Many plants experienced such trauma that their only hope was found in a drastic springtime pruning. Others, once treasured, are now no more than treasured memories – their blank spaces in the landscape recently filled by tiny replacements... as if one could really replace a treasure.

For still others, like our stately magnolia, the verdict is still out. We worked so hard to save the Southern favorite – the arboreal beauty that's shaded our century-old house for many decades – but I fear its days are numbered. Every time I look out my kitchen window and see another brown leaf fall to the ground instead of waxy-green spring growth, my heart breaks just a little more. I haven't given up hope, but it feels like the end of an era. The landscape is changing all around me... and yet it seems eerily familiar, for the spring thaw has come to my soul as well.

Unlike winter in the garden, my winter of the soul lasted longer than a season. It was less dependable, more personal, filled with the unknown. It was bitter cold and out-of-control hearth-fires. A lost coat, and no blanket to wrap around the shoulders.

It was an endless landscape of white with no visible path, little clarity, and lots of lonely. Some days it was accompanied by a crisis of faith; many days with disappointment in humanity and questions of purpose.

As grief and pain, fear and confusion, lay in drifts outside my own soul's door, my spirit weakly continued its hopeful search for warmth, always knowing that one day – someday – spring would return. Good would triumph over evil. Courage would replace insecurity. Dark winter nights would disappear into the brightness of a new day... and new beginnings.

But until that happened, I learned...

* To be comfortable in the quiet of God's presence, eventually convincing frustration to give way to peace during His long, long season of silence.

* I had a choice to make: Walk through the winter planning to someday step into spring with an exercised faith – or one flabby from lack of use. Which would it be?

* Even in his silence, God had not forgotten me, but loves me and wants me to trust Him. Simply trust.

* God whispers loudly enough for listening ears – and searching hearts.

* I wasn't as smart, special, generous, loving, selfless as I thought I was. Pruning hurts...

* Trading the comfortable for the unknown is scary, gut-wrenching ... liberating. People will think you're crazy. God will smile.

* Life was easier when I was ignorant... before numbers had faces. Before I realized the lives behind the faces aren't "someone else's" problem but mine: 153 million orphans in the world; more than a million children locked in prisons, usually in subhuman conditions; 254 children waiting for adoption from the foster care system in my state (where there are 10,000 churches).

I'm still learning. So much to learn...

The path out of darkness is not the one I expected. Honestly, it's still filled with lots of unknowns, but they no longer seem to matter so much, for trust is learning to replace worry, perfection, and inflexibility.

While I'll always thrive on order and planning ahead, I'm learning – even as I trade entire days of "to do" lists for an unforeseen something better – that God's plans often look different from mine. I can only experience, and participate in, His best when I make myself available to be His hands to a lonely and desperate world... or neighbor... or stranger.

It feels good... Right. Mostly it still feels foreign.

I've noticed something else about winter turned to spring: Only a few old friends will travel the new road with you. They're the rare ones who aren't afraid to step off of their own comfortable paths, even for short distances, to walk alongside you. But rest assured, if God has put you on a new path, He will provide the kindred spirits you need to be obedient – they just may not look like what you expect, so it's best to lay preconceived ideas aside.

Winter of the soul. No one willingly asks for one, but if you're experiencing such a season, I hope you make the most of it. I hope you learn that new growth doesn't have to wait until spring but can happen any time you allow God to love you, minister to you, lead you. Whenever the soil of your life is fertile, willing to be tilled and planted rather than hard-frozen with bitterness, unforgiveness, hatred, you can expect to see them... tiny shoots of hope.

One day, not so long ago, the darkness began to dissipate, and a warm, healing light took its place. New growth, with its beauty and sweet fruit, began to enhance my life's landscape. Today I look back on that winter of the soul with mixed emotions... ultimately grateful for the role it played in opening my eyes, refocusing my spirit, and preparing me for whatever lies ahead. One thing is certain: Winter brought permanent changes in the landscape of my soul, and pursuing a dirtier, hands-on, faith is now requisite. There's no going back...

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Whether the topic is vintage linens, old houses, orphaned children, or self-focused Christians, Susan's hope is always restoration! She blogs at My Place to Yours™ where you'll find inspiration, encouragement, and challenge – Interior design of the soul.

<http://myplacetoyours.com>



How Do We Achieve Spiritual Growth?

As a young adult, I noticed the shrubs and trees in our city's neighborhoods. Come springtime, the limbs would sport lighter green fingers stretching out from the body of the shrubs and the limbs of the trees. Seeing this excited me; this told me spring had arrived. This new growth usually got cut back in order to maintain the shrubs. The municipal light company trims the new growth of trees in order to keep them from causing power outages as a result from storms.

In my Christian walk, I strive for new growth in myself. I know when I mature in Christ, I become more like Him. Sometimes, this is a hard thing to gauge. We attend a church whose denomination observes Ash Wednesday, the Lenten season, Maundy Thursday with a Seder Meal, and Good Friday. I have found that these services foster spiritual growth in me.

On Ash Wednesday, we focus on how we are with the Lord. We decide what we want to do to draw closer to Him, be it sacrificing something we like for 40 days or choosing to study a particular Bible passage in depth during the Lenten Season. One year, I gave up Facebook for Lent. I would receive postings from my 'closest' friends; I chose to delete them. My blog is networked and appears on my Facebook page. I did check and respond to any comments my blog posts received.

As I see it, the main way I grow spiritually is to practice the basics of the faith, prayer, devotions, Bible reading and Bible study.

Prayer: I feel a connection with God when I pray. Our church schedules times of prayer groups to pray about the needs of our congregation, our city, state, and nation.

Devotions and Bible Reading: I learn from the devotional writers. They apply the message from His Word to daily issues in life. The Bible readings that accompany the thoughts magnify the lesson the devotional writer has learned and shares with their readers.

Bible Study: I learn the Old Testament stories and the New Testament lessons as I God's Word. Some of the studies are on books of the Bible; other studies are on a topic.

Fellowship with like-minded believers: When I have an issue that bothers me, I can ask for prayer and guidance from those with whom I worship. When any of us are facing serious circumstances in our lives, we band together, listen to one another and pray.

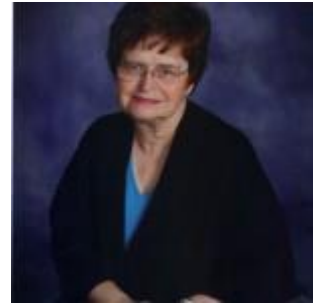
While I attempt to practice these basic steps of faith, I find I have grown in my faith. My steps of growth are not always apparent to me, unless I take the time to reflect on someone else's issues that remind me, "I was there once and I know how you feel."

God has been good to me and my family over the years as I walk with Him. I strive to live my life for Him. I have noticed God works on the issues that affect me when I trust Him completely.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Cecelia Lester blogs, as Quiet Spirit, on quietspirit-followingmyking.blogspot.com, an arm of her Quiet Spirit Writing Ministry. She also writes a weekly column online. She is married and lives in east central Indiana. She and her husband have one son.

<http://quietspirit-followingmyking.blogspot.com>



Personal Growth

Growth to me is important as I know it is for us to grow in and through God as in (1 Corinthians 3:2). None of us are born eating meat but rather milk until that time comes where we can handle it.

In my life personally I grew the most when I learned to be obedient to the calling on my life. God has called me to be a writer and that I never knew until April 13, 2013 at 11:57 am.

I believe that when God calls you to service you will never forget that day. I was afraid I knew nothing about writing till that day. In my obedience to pursue Him and what He needed from me, I learned that in this calling in my life I had to grow (eating the meat of the word) no more spiritual milk.

As I began to pray more and read more of the word of God I became more aware of whom God needed me to be. It felt like I knew all along, but because of my disobedience I missed out on a lot of chances to share with many of God's children.

In my personal growth I look at it this way. When you plant a seed in good soil it will grow according to what seed you have planted. As Christians we need to plant ourselves in good soil (In God) so that through His timing we can become like oaks of righteousness as in (Isaiah 61:3). I had to learn that in my delayed obedience I stunted my own growth and in that I was not able to shade, house, or produce and fruit for harvest for those looking to find God's love.

I love that my deeper experience with God happened so sudden that it gave me new hopes and dreams knowing that His timing is never off (2 Peter 3:9) and that He will continue His work in me (Philippians 1:6) until completion. I almost felt like the caterpillar who crawled his way around till one day God transformed him into this beautiful butterfly that is no longer limited to just crawling around but now is free to fly.

This is how I feel when God takes you into the next step of your life where all things become new just as when you accepted Him into your life as in (2 Corinthians 5:17). I am so thankful that God is a father like no other that will never give up on His children even when we walk away in our own bad decision, but yet willing to receive us as the prodigal son in His glorious return to the father as In (Luke 15:11-32).

As I am still growing day by day I encourage you as you walk in your growth with God to take His hand and let Him led you to new places and new heights. I am excited as we get to heave to see God's growth chart on heaven's gate for all of His children where He will say this is where you grew and I was most proud!

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Carlos Aranda was born and raised in California. He was saved at 7 at his churches Royal Rangers program. He served through many ministries throughout the rest of his life including becoming a Royal Ranger commander himself. He is married and has two children.

<http://carlosaranda.tateauthor.com/blog/>



The Ending of the Ice Age of Life

Some of the characteristics of the ice age are recognizable patterns of life. Sometimes, the temperature of life is at a freezing point or below, with extreme wind chill factors, stagnant, with nothing moving. Life can be cold with no movement . . . just like ice for a definite period of time. Ice can only form into a solid state at a certain temperature. I never determined the temperature, challenges and decisions took care of that.

The ice age is a long period – nothing short and really, it cultivates patience and endurance. This is not a short season, or temporary process. What causes the ice age? One significant trigger in initiating an ice age is the changing positions of Earth's continents, which effect ocean and atmospheric circulation patterns. Well, 3 points that immediately resonated with me: 1) changes 2) circulation and 3) patterns. There were some abrupt spiritual changes and broken patterns in my life. I also experienced challenges resulting in loss of financial circulation. Thus, I believe I experienced an Ice Age of Life.

During the ice age of my life, I experienced cold responses from individuals that I thought were my biggest supporters. I slowly realized that the sentiments of others could not define my future. Vegetation was almost non-existent. It was impossible to plant (wrong season); the ground was so stiff, I could hear the cracking of ice sheets as I walked by faith. The whisking wind of tribulation tested my endurance. I could often hear the whistling sound of the kingdom that gave hope of a future thaw.

There were areas of my life that suffered from frostbite because certain parts of my character were exposed to the cold temperatures for a long period of time. I slowly realized those negative parts of life could not survive the cold season. Exposure can be deadly; it can damage relationships. However, I needed to become numb to negativity, doubt, hurt, and pain. Fear was frostbitten along with high-mindedness, bitterness and unforgiveness. The frostbite was so severe, I loss some limbs. I have no regrets for the disconnection – there were some deep, living issues that needed to die. I carried infectious attitudes and demeanors from season to season due to comfortable temperatures and cozy environments that created nasty germs and became a breeding ground for bad bacteria.

How does one survive the Ice Age? Typically, ice ages develop slowly, yet they end abruptly. Another significant aspect of a cold season in my life – without warning, the season began to thaw. I was unable to control the temperature and thus, not able to determine the time of thaw. The thaw was my hope of a new season. The thaw would declare warmth, goodness and grace. The thaw would melt the ice and cause a flood of blessings. I walked by faith on a cold ground. I accepted my state of existence and recognized the power and deliverance of God. There were days of weariness, and I felt

that the cost of the cold was too high. During the cold era, I was not as susceptible to germs or viral issues of others. The ice isolated me from others.

As the Ice Age ends and the thaw begins, character flaws, issues and pain were left in the cold, never to be carried or lifted in my life again. While in the frozen era, I was unable to cry, unemotional and nonreactive. I learned patience and to be nonreactive in diverse situations. I trust God's process. I am daring and not depressed, vibrant and not vulnerable. The emergence of the thaw has afforded me the opportunity to plant in rich, fertile, moist soil with expectation of a healthy harvest. A natural water supply was created. My weakness has transformed to endurance. The Ice Age was the method that provided internal liberty from years of emotional struggle. There are associated risks with the Ice Age, but sometimes extremity is necessary for hard cases.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Cheryl extends her purpose of educating beyond the classroom and lecture. Her writing expresses passion, conviction, and personal accountability. She serves on the pastoral staff of her church; as well, she is an Assistant Professor at university-level. Recognizing her life purpose to serve; in serving, she educates.

<http://thelegacypen.wordpress.com>



Spiritual Growth Found in Forgiveness

Spiritual growth is not reserved for new followers of Christ. I accepted Christ almost twenty years ago and I continue to grow spiritual every day. There have been times when I have felt stagnant in my faith, but glory to God that I didn't stay in that place.

There have been other times when I have been in a season of waiting, but a season of waiting is also filled with spiritual growth. Three areas of spiritual growth that stand out for me are obedience, wisdom, and forgiveness.

- Obedience - surrendering all of me to God.
- Wisdom - "knowing intimately" what it means to fall in love with Christ.
- Forgiveness towards my enemies that has required intervention from the Holy Spirit.

It's easy to be obedient to God's call on your life when you can clearly see the benefits. The benefits of obedience for me have included landing a dream job that let me work from home. When we refuse to be obedient it places a burden on our soul. This was my experience when I was convicted spiritually to give up a personal relationship. Deep inside the Holy Spirit was convicting me and I knew that the relationship wasn't God's will for me.

For months I procrastinated until I finally surrendered and ended things. The sweet taste of obedience resulted in the lifting of the burden of sin from my shoulders and the stress from my mind.

Matthew 11:28-30: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Wisdom is defined as the quality of having experience, knowledge, and good judgment; the quality of being wise. I gained wisdom about love through death. The woman that inspired me to seek a deeper level of intimacy with Christ was Janet. Janet was my sister in Christ, a kind and joyful woman who attended my church. Her death was sudden and unexpected.

At her memorial service I learned so much more about who she was as a woman of God. I learned about how she touched the lives of people wherever she went and shared her love for Christ. I was so touched by the testimonies that I told God I wanted to know him the way Janet knew Him. I knew that moment that I wanted to leave this earth knowing that I God could say, well done my good and faithful servant.

I wasn't a new follower of Christ, yet I wasn't sure how to "get" what Janet had. I decided to start by putting in the work to get to know the object of my affection. I spent

time talking and listening to the Lord. I began reading the word so I could understand his character. Our relationship started growing intimately, and one day I realized I was in love with Christ.

I had an epiphany. This love reminded me of when I looked at my newborn daughter and realized that had fallen in love with this tiny person. I didn't just love her; I was in love with her.

The same way now I didn't just love Christ; I was in love with Christ. I am now wise enough to know that in order to "stay in love" with the Lord I have to continuously nurture my relationship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

My spiritual growth has also been found in forgiveness. I was like many people who claimed that they forgave their enemies. I had spent about a dozen years forgiving the same individual repeatedly for the sins they committed against me years ago. I justified this pattern by admitting that I wasn't God, therefore forgiveness was harder for me.

One day, in the most unlikely of places, the Holy Spirit spoke to me and told me to approach this person and tell them I forgave them. Well, you could have knocked me over with a feather. I questioned what I had received and the Holy Spirit repeated himself. When I pondered what to say he simply told me to focus on the sermon and just be obedient; He would do the rest and give me the words to speak.

To make a long story short I was obedient. I approached the individual and we had a positive discussion. Spiritually I knew our interaction was less about what we discussed, and entirely about me offering up forgiveness. I allowed the Holy Spirit to lead me. In the flesh there were some things I would have liked to say, but in the spirit I was obedient and only said what I was given the authority to share.

That was several months ago and I still have not found the words to describe the burden that has been lifted from my life. I no longer feel plagued by negative emotions when I think about this person. When we forgive the Lord's way, what we receive supersedes head knowledge of why forgiveness is important.

We also stop saying "I forgive you" like robots and actually extend grace and mercy the way God intended. Matthew 6:14-15 14 For if you forgive other people when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. 15 But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.

Sharing my testimony about my new growth as a believer, and the important lessons I learned, has allowed me to press pause and reflect on God's goodness. I pray that it blesses you too, Romans 8:28 28 And we know that in all things God works for good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Tamara Wrenn is the Executive Director and Founder of Just Us Women Productions. Tamara envisions leading a Christ-centered business that uses non-traditional settings to reach women, love them, and sow seeds into their lives empowering and equipping them to fulfill their purpose.

<http://justuswomen.org/>



Preparing for Spiritual Drought

King Solomon penned some of the most helpful words to express the times and seasons of life. With every positive he mentions in Ecclesiastes chapter 3, he also mentions its' negative. We like to hope that negative times of life just will not come to us... but that is not realistic life.

Even the Christian life is a life filled with the positives and negatives, but one of the gifts of salvation is the gift of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit Himself. The Comforter is the person of God that helps us endure the pains and afflictions of this life.

Let's look at some of the "negatives" of life that Solomon mentions.

1. A time to die.
2. A time to pluck up that which is planted.
3. A time to kill.
4. A time to break down.
5. A time to weep.
6. A time to mourn.
7. A time to cast away stones.
8. A time to refrain from embracing.
9. A time to lose.
10. A time to cast away.
11. A time to rend.
12. A time to keep silence. (That is a huge negative for some of us that like to talk!)
13. A time to hate.
14. A time of war.

Wow, sometimes in our life when these negative times come we experience dryness of our Spirit and will drift away from the close relationship we had with God before. If anything, our hearts should cry out to God louder, our prayers should be more fervent, our devotion to find out the answers to our problems in this life from the Bible more passionate but that is not our typical response.

People can dry up during hard times because they get too comfortable in God's blessings and then forget to plan for disappointments and heartache. They relish in the joys of life and like to soak up the good searching for more, instead of using the plentiful blessings to store up for times of spiritual drought.

Joseph's plan from God when dealing with Pharaoh (Genesis 41) was to store up the grain from the 7 years of plenty so that there was food enough during the 7 years of famine. We need to be looking toward a future when we may not be blessed to have all that we now. We need to save up for those times filled with the negatives of this life.

5 Ways to Prepare for Times of Spiritual Drought

1. Reading – Read your Bible. Read devotional books. Read Bible commentaries. Read Bible biographies. Each of these types of reading will sharpen you and teach you things about the Bible and the Christian life. Watch for people in the Bible and in biographies who learn lessons of faith and watch their response. Someday you may also be in their situation and you can simply take those life lessons and apply them to your own life.
2. Write Down Blessings in a Blessings Journal – When spiritual drought comes there's nothing like opening a journal where you have written down blessings and finding hope and encouragement from what God has personally done in your life already. Write about how God blesses you, answers your prayers, and meets needs that no other person could meet. The meat of these writings will increase your faith once again to believe God can do the impossible and walk beside you through your current journey.
3. Speaking God's praises to others. When you speak of God's goodness to others, you encourage them and you are repeating the works God has done in your life. Each time you repeat them (not that you should tell the same story over and over to the same people) you are building faith in the Lord for the future. You always have to be sensitive to whom you speak those praises to and in what attitude, to tell a grieving person about how God healed your aunt might just hurt their feelings. Use your praises in the right way at the right times. You may also find that your family and friends will remind you of what God has done in your life when you are spiritually dry because you have told them about His work in your life.
4. Memorizing Scripture – There's no better time to fill your heart with scripture than in the good times. You can repeat it, sing it, write it out on cards and put it around your house and it will begin to soak in to your life. We need to memorize scripture during the good times because our hearts will need to be able to recall verses in the hurting and dry times. The Holy Spirit can use verses we have learned to help comfort us when we least expect it, but we need to fill our hearts with it first.
5. Nurturing Relationships – Sometimes in the good times of our life we become self-centered and pursue entertainment of our heart's desires often leaving other people that are hurting in their own spiritually dry place behind. When you are looking to nurture relationships in the good times and helping aid the weak, then it will help lift them up. We should also nurture relationships because we never know when we will need help ourselves. When we leave others behind or even isolate ourselves, we run the risk of making our spiritually dry times harder on ourselves. During hard times we need our own family, our church family, and good Christian friendships, that is why we have to work to maintain those relationships and keep them right in the plentiful times of our life.

Use your times of plenty to store up the things you need to help you with the times of spiritual famine and negatives. The Comforter will come beside you and be able to minister to you more effectively if you will do some of the work yourself. Are we required to do all the work? No, but we should expect these times of life and be wise enough to plan for them.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

The Ministry Mama, is just that, she is both a woman in the ministry beside her husband, and a mama at the same time. She has been married since September of 2004 and has 4 children, 2 boys and 2 girls. She likes to write primarily to encourage ladies in the ministry at her website, <http://theministrymama.com/>. In her spare time she enjoys to plan for church events from ideas she finds on Pinterest, write funny skits, and make beaded jewelry.



<http://www.theministrymama.com>

Dig In

Digging into a new plot could very well sound like starting something new in life. Or digging in sounds parallel to going deep, to bring to light, issues in one's life.

Here is a spot that looks fine, grass is growing, why would there be any reason to question what is underneath. But once that shovel breaks through the turf, then all is revealed: the grass can be pulled back like sod to reveal that the earth below is not as rich and healthy as one would have thought. It is mixed with sand, and rock.

Now that it is exposed it reveals why the grass gets so easily scorched and dead half way through the summer there. Also its obvious that this plot needs an overhaul. Dig deep and turn the soil, dig out the rocks, pull the weeds and add to this plot what it is lacking: compost, manure, and black earth.

So my parallel to this would be: We can't pretend buried hurts, fears, dysfunctions, bitterness, resentment, is OK to leave buried deep as long as they have been there for so long, that it looks OK when it is left alone. In Psalm 19:12 it says- How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults-. Sure you can smile, look put together, but once something or someone treads that plot that you leave alone, it can get disrupted and your thoughts are: Why am I reacting this way? Why am I so sensitive about that? Why does this bother me so much? Why can't I get over this set back? Why can I not progress in this area? What is holding me back.....?

Dig in. Bring to light in your mind what is not letting you progress in an area of your life. Acknowledge that buried issue, take it out, and hand it over to God. (Eph. 4:21-23 NLT) Since you have heard about Jesus and have learned the truth that comes from him, throw off your old sinful nature and your former way of life, which is corrupted by lust and deception. Instead, let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes. Put on your new nature, created to be like God—truly righteous and holy.

I'm not keeping those big old rocks in my garden! Those weeds are coming out! Because I want beautiful things to grow here. (2 Cor. 5:17) Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old is gone the new has come in.

And now that I think about this walk I went on recently this spring, I noticed how those who have planted delicate little trees, they placed a little fence around it. Or flower gardens are edged with a little barrier of rocks, or fence.

In this same way we need to protect our new growth. It is hard work, and the new growth is delicate. We need to protect it. Checking over the area for the old trying to come in again, or something else corruptive trying to invade the new growth. (Psalm

91:9,10) If you make the Lord your refuge, if you make the Most High your shelter, no evil will conquer you; no plague will come near your home.

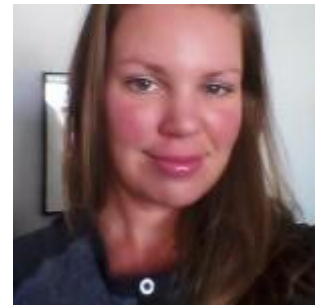
Its HARD WORK but the result is so much more full filling when the job is done right. The garden flourishes, and thrives, with a thorough job. I've had gardens that I didn't properly maintain. And they were a sad sight, and it was easy to see that they lacked care, and maintenance.

So throw all spoiled virtue and cancerous evil in the garbage. In simple humility, let our gardener, God, landscape you with the Word, making a salvation - garden of your life. (James 1:21 MSG)

Keep that garden healthy like applying mulch and compost, and constantly go to the father for encouragement. You will grow and flourish with abiding in Him.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

My name is Morgan. I'm an ever growing, God girl. Who's in love with her honey of 18 years (married 14). We have a 13 year old daughter, 9 year old son, and 6 year old daughter. We recently moved to Western Canada, from some 3000 kms of Southern Quebec. Yay and Yeesh...more growing experiences!



I'm a stay at home mom, who loves being thrifty, frugal, cheap whatever you want to call it. I love most things creative, and does baking count with that? Because I love baking and trying new recipes. I'll also throw in here that I love my coffee in a hobby sort of way, I like reading and the outdoors.

<http://www.loveanderrors-trialsandlaughter.blogspot.ca/>

Butterflies Aren't Free

Becoming a new creation.

“Sometimes I don’t even think I’m a Christian,” she wailed with tears in her eyes. She had just described a toe-to-toe shouting match with her husband to a group of women. “I’m trying so hard to change and grow, but it’s not working.” The rest of us knew very well that it was working. We had watched her grow. Even her facial expressions had changed from anxious frowns to peaceful smiles – most of the time.

As I watched the group interact, I thought, she doesn’t just want to grow. She wants to be transformed! She wants to be the new creation that Paul promises in 2 Corinthians 5:17 and encourages in his masterful description of shedding the old self and putting on the new self in Colossians 3. And don’t we all?

My favorite explanation of growing, changing, transforming (the process of spiritual formation) is the title of a book on discipleship by Eugene Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. We are on a journey with God, engaged in a process that calls for obedience and perseverance. But how does transformation actually happen? And what is our role?

IT’S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

I have learned that it’s not about trying harder. My friend cannot control her anger by saying over and over, “I will not be angry.” Spiritual growth is not like soldiering through a list of New Year’s resolutions. Just the opposite.

We have to surrender. Recognizing our powerlessness is the first step to being transformed. We do as the Twelve Steps recommend. We admit that we cannot manage our lives and turn them and our will over to God. And then the Spirit of Jesus, the one Jesus promised would live in us, takes over.

I vividly remember the day when I first understood this. I was not taught about the Holy Spirit as I grew up in the church. I knew the concept of the Trinity, but it was beyond my comprehension. So I just didn’t think about. But now I was learning about spiritual disciplines and trying them on for size. The book I was reading challenged me to open my life to the Holy Spirit, but I had no idea what that meant. Then I remembered that snakes shed their old skins for new ones.

I decided to use that visual to shed my old self and put on a new one. I pictured peeling off an outer layer, exposing who I really am. I offered the Holy Spirit the opportunity to change me. Surrender! That was the first step of a great adventure with God.

Surrender isn't a one-time event. It happens daily, even hourly. We intentionally turn our agendas, our visions and dreams, our relationships, our schedules, our emotions over to God - in real time. We invite and allow God to mold us and shape us, just as the potter shapes clay.

Margaret Silf describes this process in a stunning essay on surrender: "The process through which God shapes God's dream in our lives is always done by hand. It is a process of intimate contact. Intimacy requires trust as it invites us to surrender to the touch of God's love, so deeply personal, shaping us uniquely. No mass production on God's workbench; no two pots alike in God's kingdom; and in the end, no waste."

AND THEN IT'S ABOUT SUFFERING

It's a cliché of life that nothing worth doing comes without a struggle. Sometime just because it's a cliché doesn't mean it's not true. Growing and transforming are not easy! Since it is the work of the Holy Spirit, we can't control how it happens or choose the doors through which we must walk to obtain it. And it's my experience that the most growth happens through suffering.

That doesn't mean that we choose a path of suffering to ensure growth. It means that we become conscious of how growth comes out of suffering. We become willing to take on whatever God calls us to do, even if it means risking pain and suffering.

Richard Rohr says, "Jesus is more than anything else the God of all who suffer." Jesus understood suffering. He even chose suffering. He reconciled us with God by suffering. Rohr goes on to say, "Many of the happiest and most peaceful people I know love a God who walks with crucified people, and thus reveals and 'redeems' their plight as his own." (Breathing Under Water, Spirituality and the Twelve Steps) Rohr gives us this list of seemingly cruel paradoxes:

We suffer to get well.
We surrender to win
We die to live
We give it away to keep it.

And that leads me to the third way we grow and are transformed.

IT'S ABOUT SERVING

We are in stiff competition with a culture that teaches, preaches and seemingly rewards the philosophy, "It's all about me." But focusing on me does not create growth; it creates rigidity and unhappiness. A healthy focus on others helps me grow. When we surrender control and risk and accept suffering, we learn and we change. When we give

away who we have become and what we have learned in service, Christ-in-us transforms the world.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

My name is Karen. I am passionate about spiritual transformation and about helping others become like Jesus for the sake of others.

One of my favorite quotes is "Whatever job we get and whatever task we are assigned can serve as a container for grace" (Eugene Peterson in "Practical Resurrection"). I pray that the words I write and speak may also serve as "containers of grace" for others.

<http://www.livingasapprentices.com>



God of the Snow Piles

I can do this!

Around February I began chanting this to myself over and over while I was shoveling yet again; digging myself out of the 4 feet of snow piled at the end of my driveway. The snowplows had no mercy this year. At times I felt they deliberately found a way to dump all the snow from the street right at the end of my driveway as some sort of cruel joke. By mid February I could no longer chant to myself.

It seemed that everyone struggled this past winter. I'm no exception. Snow was piled up at the end of my driveway at least twice a week. It was the kind of snow that you can't blow your way through. I was alone with my shovel tackling the icy mounds. The shoveling was endless. The winter seemed endless. My patience definitely had an end.

I remember one morning I really struggled with anger while shoveling.

I was angry at the snow.

I was angry at the plows.

I was angry I had to shovel alone.

I was angry my husband had to work out of town.

I was angry that I just couldn't get a break from all of the snowstorms.

I was pushed to my limit. I was embarrassed that snow could reveal so much about me that wasn't pretty. As I shoveled a thought came into my inner world of grumbling, "I am God of the snow piles too". I know it wasn't my own thought but rather God's. I can remember feeling such a strange sensation.

"What does this mean?" I thought. The snow pile is still there, no one magically came and removed it. No Good Samaritan came to my aid. I thought this is how God works. He sends His help and boom-the problem is solved. I feel better, I praise God and thank Him for the help and then get on my merry way. This never happened.

I continued to ponder as I shoveled. God began to make it clear to me that He was more than a rescuer and aid. Lazarus, a close friend of Jesus, got sick and died (John 11). Everyone involved had to grieve and suffer. Paul and Silas, servants of Jesus, were tortured and were imprisoned (Acts 16:22-23). They had to go through tremendous suffering and hardship. More stories from Scripture emerged in my mind, trouble kept company with those that loved Jesus. Why was I any different?

I expected God to deliver me from my circumstance so I could feel better and life would be easier. I came to realize that this is my view of God, my expectation from God; that He would make things better for me just so I could be happy. I do believe that God wants to deliver His people and bring aid to them in their hour of need. He does care

deeply about our struggle. Plenty of Scripture supports this. But my thinking had become one-sided.

My perception of God was being challenged. I had lost sight of the fact that God is the God of our pain and struggle, as well as, the God of deliverance. He is not just the rescuer and help, He is also the sustainer and strength. When the problems persist, when the snow continues to pile up, God is Sovereign over that as well. Just because I struggle doesn't mean God isn't being God. It just means that things are hard at that moment and I need from God things I would rather not have.

I would rather be rescued than strengthened.
I would rather be delivered than sharpened.
I would rather be whimsical than matured.

This winter was hard on me. Being buried in by the snow exposed my anger and shallowness. My character is weak. My theology is weaker. God was stronger and more faithful to me than I deserved. Shoveling endless piles of snow God came to strengthen me and be my companion in my work. When I could no longer tell myself, "I can do this", He began whispering in my ear, "we can do this".

The God of the snow pile isn't always the God I want to show up in my problems because He would rather walk through it instead of take it from me. He allows the struggle to refine me, expose my sin and ultimately form my heart and mind more like Christ's. God doesn't waste our broken down lives. He redeems them. Sometimes He fixes our circumstance by first fixing us.

The snow continued throughout March. I had many more times where I had to dig myself out of the snow piled at the end of the driveway. I continued to struggle with anger and frustration but I as I did God was faithful to remind me that He was the God over this season of trouble. The trial wouldn't be wasted. I was welcome to let go of anger and invite Him to strengthen me with every scoop of snow I shoveled.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Randi and her family live in Michigan where life is a little slower and the scenery is not too bad! Finding God in the midst of this noisy world is always a welcomed experience in Randi's life. She loves to write about her simple experiences and hopes they encourage others.

<http://www.randiperezhelm.wordpress.com>



Never Stop Growing Up

Ever notice how we are never fully grown up? Fully matured in every aspect of life?

I notice it most in my spiritual walk.

I'm never quite done learning, growing mature and complete, not lacking anything, as it says in James 1.

Neither do I want to be.

My God is limitless. So His knowledge is never ending. I will always be learning, experiencing new growth in Him....

Continually growing up.

I like that. I like that I will never come to the end of God.

There's an ongoing cycle, to this continual new growth in believers. Not just new believers, but matured ones as well.

It goes something like this:

1. Grow up.

The desire to grow up comes when we want to do better, be better, know better, etc. So we crave Him. Maybe, new believers can't put their finger on what the craving is, or where it comes from, but it's there.

It's real.

It's Him.

"Like newborn babies, crave spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation." ~1 Peter 2:2~

We must never stop growing up.

2. Stand up.

In order to grow up we must stand up. We must take a stand against evil and make life decisions based on His Word.

Then, with no questions asked, simply and plainly... stand up.

"Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of any kind." ~1 Peter 2:1~

3. Put up.

When we stand up for what is right, somewhere along the line we will have to put up with unfair suffering. Relationships may be severed. Scoffers may scoff. Pain will have to be endured. We are going to have to put up with some heartaches.

Remember, He is refining us through it all.

"though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials." ~1 Peter 1:6~

"it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscience of God." ~1 Peter 2:19~

4. Measure up.

The trials have to come so that we can be refined and with every step measuring closer to Jesus.

But we must stick through the trials, not losing our integrity, our faith, and our desire to keep growing up in Him.

So, we:

"Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." ~James 1:2-4~

The new growth cycle doesn't end here.

In fact, the cycle is never done because God is never finished working in us, molding us to become more Christ-like.

Isn't it exciting that the God Who created me, loves me enough to never want to be done with me!??

He never grows tired of me. He always wants to be around me. My company never grows old to Him!

That, alone, gives me enough desire to crave growing up on His spiritual milk, standing up for what is right, putting up with trials of all kinds, all so I can be refined, measuring just a bit closer to Jesus.

Just a bit more mature.

Just a bit more complete.

Always developing new growth.

Meet the Faithful Blogger:

Just a girl....with a sword....a shield....and a strong cup of coffee! I'm a happily-ever-after wife, mom-in-training to three and encourager of women. I genuinely love living my blessed life! I'd love to have you step over to my little spot at Faithful Feat.

<http://faithfulfeat.blogspot.com>



Faithful Bloggers is Powered By Mom Webs Hosting!

Host a Single Blog, Multiple Sites, Upgrade to a VPS or Dedicated Server.

<http://www.MomWebs.com>

MomWebs
Reliable Website Hosting