

EMPOWER THE MINISTRY

AROUND the FIRE

Fall 2023

RESCUE *the Equine* ★ MENTOR *the Child* ★ HOPE *for the Family* ★ EMPOWER *the Ministry*

PASSING BY THE LOST

By Sarah Wilson

Have you ever missed the mark? Not just slightly, I mean COMPLETELY missed it?

Growing up as a pastor's kid, I know the parable of the Good Samaritan all too well. Many times I have read it and thought "How could anyone be so cruel to walk away from someone in need?" And then, one year, three months and twelve days ago I found myself being that person.

With utter humility I share this lesson—and I pray God will use this encounter to impact your heart—as deeply as it has impacted mine.

Those who know me well recognize how much I LOVE a day that is beautifully planned and time managed perfectly. This part of me can be my greatest gift—and—my greatest weakness . . .

On this specific day, I had everything planned and timed magnificently down to the last millisecond, with no room for error. There was no place for "wasted" time or extra socializing of any type. The day went according to schedule and I had just one last stop to complete. I needed to pick up dinner and return home swiftly for a special get-together. My projected schedule allowed me to arrive home exactly ten minutes before it was time to greet my guests.

Once again, everything according to my plan was going beautifully. Our dinner was ready for pick-up as I arrived and while leaving the restaurant, a family opened the door for me. This enabled me to get out to my car with ease and load the food without any mishap. I started reversing out of my parking spot when I sensed an urgency in my Spirit to STOP.

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I looked toward the front of my vehicle and saw a major hiccup to my perfectly planned day. Before my eyes was a little boy that had just walked to the front of the restaurant. He was distraught and frantically looking around with GIANT tears streaming down his face. I braked immediately and assessed the situation. Then, God spoke, “Sarah, SEE him. Sarah, HELP him!”

With self justification, I brushed this clear command aside. I rationalized that the boy resembled the family that had JUST opened the door for me, so he was certainly very close to reaching safety and just didn’t realize it.

I glanced at the clock and saw I was already three minutes behind. I looked back at the boy, then to my right, and noticed a man next to me witnessing the same situation. However, he backed out and chose to leave. I anxiously looked at the clock; now I am six minutes behind schedule. Falling like an avalanche of boulders, the reasons dropped into my mind justifying why it would be okay to also leave. “He’s so close to his family and safety. Surely someone with more time sees him. It’s his parent’s responsibility to keep track of him . . . not mine.”

Now I’m ten minutes late and the crying boy is still standing there—lost.

I noticed a woman on my left parking her car and quickly making her way toward the restaurant. My instant thought was, “PHEW! She can help him, now I am off the hook.” At this point I’m late and my precisely planned day was off track.

I made my decision . . . and left . . . because my task became more important than helping a lost boy.

As I drove away, my self-righteous boulders were no match for the mountain of immense conviction and gut-wrenching guilt that I sudden felt. I wish I could tell you that I turned back and made it all right—but I didn’t—I pushed aside the conviction and continued home.

All the way home, I fought with the decision I had made. I tried with ALL my intelligence to plead my case with God. I gave Him all the reasons why I wasn’t wrong. I justified EVERY excuse for leaving the scene.

That’s when He firmly but softly spoke, “But I asked *YOU* to stop. I asked *YOU* to be the Good Samaritan.”

“Jesus replied with a story: ‘A Jewish man was traveling from Jerusalem down to Jericho, and he was attacked by bandits. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him up, and left him half dead beside the road. By chance a priest came along. But when he saw the man lying there, he crossed to the other side of the road and passed him by. A Temple assistant walked over and looked at him lying there, but he also passed by on the other side. Then



Photo credit: @imemilygreen

a despised Samaritan came along, and when he saw the man, he felt compassion for him. Going over to him, the Samaritan soothed his wounds with olive oil and wine and bandaged them. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn, where he took care of him. The next day he handed the innkeeper two silver coins, telling him, ‘Take care of this man. If his bill runs higher than this, I’ll pay you the next time I’m here.’ Now which of these three would you say was a neighbor to the man who was attacked by bandits? Jesus asked. The man replied, ‘The one who showed him mercy.’” (Luke 10:30-37, NLT)

Ouuuch . . . Oh. My. Heart . . . In that moment of another’s need . . . I had become the cruel person I vowed to never be. The gravity of my actions impacted me like a great wave of truth and knocked me to my knees in repentance before my Heavenly Father.

My thoughts swirled around me, “How in the world did I get here? When did I become so calloused to the hurting around me that I wouldn’t even stop for a CHILD?”

Like a film passing before my eyes, God gently showed me how the callousness grew every time I scowled at the homeless man on the corner or didn’t acknowledge the gas attendant. It became more rigid when I was too busy to talk to the woman at the cash register, or the elderly man with the long-winded story. My heart became a degree colder when I chose to not have time and avoid listening to a tearful mother in the grocery store.

All these people were lost and I justified passing by them with my judgements, my excuses and my hurried schedule. Even when God clearly prompted me to stop, to see them, to love them, to be the one—like Jesus—that didn’t pass them by.

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I cried out to God, “Please forgive me for what I’ve done. Please help me to remember this child’s tearful face. May this be a reminder that when I get stuck seeing the world through my self-focused eyes—I want to see them through Your loving eyes. I NEVER again want to be the priest or the temple assistant. I ALWAYS want to be the Good Samaritan. God, I feel the heaviness of this prayer and Jesus, break my heart for what breaks Yours—that I will always stop to SEE the lost around me.”

“... And you must love the LORD your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your mind, and all your strength.’ The second is equally important: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ No other commandment is greater than these.” (Mark 12:30-31, NLT)

Friends, to this day I feel the weight of my fateful decision. Yet, God has used this encounter to transform me—to pay attention to those He places right in front of me. I pray as you read my encounter that God will bring to light the areas in your heart where you’ve grown calloused to the lost. We all need to remember that God does not ask us to be a judge in this world—He does not ask us to avoid the broken—He does not ask us to live in a perfect bubble. He DOES command us to love our neighbor and He DOES command us to care for the lost.

“Brothers and sisters, we urge you to warn those who are lazy. Encourage those who are timid. Take tender care of those who are weak. Be patient with everyone. See that no one pays back evil for evil, but always try to do good to each other and to all people. Always be joyful. Never stop praying. Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:14-18, NLT)

This experience has humbled me. I realize that the main calling on my life is to know Jesus and honor the ministry of His Gospel. The joy of sharing the Gospel of God’s love is my GREATEST responsibility. It is my most precious gift.

As I finish this story, I feel led to share with you the lyrics of a worship song. I pray the lyrics of the song become an earnest prayer from your heart.

Hurry by Kim Walker-Smith

I give You permission to interrupt my plans
I know Yours are better than all the ones I have
I’m slowing down
Tuning out everything but You
There’s no rush

You’re welcome to take up all the room
I don’t wanna be in a hurry
I don’t want time to get in the way
I just wanna give You the space
To move in this place

I don’t wanna be in a hurry
I don’t wanna miss what You wanna say
I just wanna give You the space
To move in this place



Photo credit: @imemilygreen

My encouragement to you is this: We are not guaranteed tomorrow, not even the next hour (Proverbs 27:1). Today is the day to turn away from self-focused ways of living. It’s time to listen to the Lord and obey Him by loving your neighbor as yourself. Let this be the moment you choose to be wise with the time given you and the people God has placed before you. Don’t allow the tasks and busyness of life blind you to the “lost boys” in your midst. May this be the day you give them your greatest gift . . . His redeeming love.



Photo credit: @imemilygreen

All stories written in “Around the Fire” newsletter are true. Some of the names have been changed to protect individual privacy. “Around the Fire” newsletter stands on the Word of God. Multiple translations of the Holy Bible are used to assure clarity for our readership. Each author is afforded the right to choose the translation that best suits their submission.

I reached across the arm of my chair for my favorite mug. After drinking the last of my morning coffee, I set the cup down on the end table and closed my Bible. With my hands resting on its leather cover, I noticed the stitching around the edges had frayed and the binding was compromised. Though saddened by its condition, I was grateful for the evidence of a well-used gift.

This tattered Bible is my most valued treasure. It was given to me fourteen years earlier as an anniversary gift from my friend Kim. With it came the encouraging challenge to begin each morning by reading its truth *every day*—no exceptions—no excuses.

I received the gift of God’s Word and made the commitment.

The discipline of reading daily was challenging at first, but soon it became something else—something beautiful.

This habit has deepened into an abiding relationship with Jesus. Each evening as I prepare my coffee maker before bed, I cannot wait for dawn to come so I can spend time with Him in His Word. The truth I read in the morning supports my heart and provides opportunity throughout the day to apply and share with others what I’m learning.

Prior to receiving this Bible, God’s precious Word was reduced to verses on mugs and scriptures on my wall. I had attended 30 years of Bible studies—which was great—but all too often it became more about filling in the blanks than applying the Sword of the Spirit to *all* my heart. Even still, I longed for a deeper relationship with my Savior. God’s grace and mercy came when He sent TRUTH to me through this heart-felt gift. I now had a Bible that I could understand. By adding His life altering Word to my day—*every day*—my entire life has changed.

More than a decade ago, Kim invited me to join her speaking ministry. We’ve had the awesome privilege of being sent out into all the world to share the Gospel. Through her messages of hope, I’ve heard my friend declare that the whole purpose of this life is to know God. (John 17:3).

I’ve come to realize that scriptural truth is not only valuable . . . but *vital*. I now make it my daily mission to know Him through His Word. This lifts my eyes above what is happening on a temporal level to His eternal level. When I read and apply God’s Word, the circumstantial impact of negativity becomes less—in view of knowing Him *more*.

I lifted my worn Bible to my chest and held it close to my heart. It was then that I recalled a dream I had shortly after receiving Kim’s gift . . .

Kim and I walked side by side on a beach. Although we didn’t speak, there was a strong sense of the Holy Spirit’s presence. She was on my left and just beyond her was a wall of sand that curved around in front of us and forced us to change direction.

My friend’s gaze was fixed toward the surf. A look of wonder filled her eyes. Taking my hand, she pointed toward the rocky tide pools and then led me in their direction.

Kim searched for just the right one. Finding it, she crouched down and peered into the watery world below her. Smiling, she looked up at me and pointed, silently asking me to look deeply into the beautiful pool. Curious to experience what she was seeing, I laid down on my belly like a little child. I tucked my arms up under my chin and peered into the salty water. Colorful rocks, sea anemones, starfish, sea urchins, tiny crabs, seashells and barnacles clung around the inside of its edges. After I studied this for a while, I glanced up toward her in awe. Again, my friend pointed to the center of the pool, this time with urgency, her expression reflected there was more to see.

I moved up on my elbows for a better view. The clear blue color of the water indicated there was depth. The more I focused into the middle, the darker and deeper the water became. I struggled to understand what I was seeing. Puzzled, I looked up at Kim and it was then that the Holy Spirit revealed what He wanted me to know. She was

GO DEEPER

By Judy Jeffery

still crouching beside the pool, but had become a small silhouette against a backdrop of incredible light.

Out of the brightness appeared a figure. He stood behind her and His garment flowed around Him. Though His facial features weren’t defined, I knew instantly that it was Jesus. Slowly, the Lord raised His arm and pointed toward the ocean. I heard no audible words but revelation came. “I want you to *go deeper* with Me.” He looked down at the tide pool and brilliant light radiated from Him. Then He turned back toward the ocean. His humble and gentle voice spoke to me, “Though the tide pool is deep, the ocean is infinitely deeper. If you search for Me wholeheartedly, you will find Me.”

This encounter was so real and so impactful that when I opened my eyes Jesus had my full attention. The entire course of my life had just changed direction. I knew if I would follow Him with all my heart, He had incredible things to show me. If I continued to obey Him, I would experience a deeper, greater measure of the victorious life He had intended for me. No more would I allow the ‘back door excuses’ for not reading His Word daily. Within my life, I was just directed toward the only TRUE source of hope I have—an ocean of hope available to anyone who would simply choose it. (Romans 15:4, 13)

Recently, while reading in the Old Testament, I found an account of a wise young man named Josiah. He was the King of Judah. (2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chronicles 34-35)

He was indeed young for Josiah became King at age 8. He was the son of King Amon and the grandson of King Manasseh. Both these kings did evil in the Lord’s eyes. They set aside everything God required and worshipped false gods. Unlike these evil kings, Josiah did what was honorable in God’s sight and pursued righteousness.

At the age of 16, Josiah made seeking God the whole purpose of his life. When he was 20, he personally went out into all his kingdom to purify the land entrusted to him. He put a stop to detestable idolatry by tearing down pagan shrines, Asherah poles, altars of Baal, witchcraft and carved or cast images. In the surrounding towns and regions, He made sure ALL of these sinful practices and idols were crushed into dust.

When Josiah was 26, he ordered the restoration of the temple. During the cleaning of the temple, the high priest Hilkiah found the long lost Book of the Law. He gave the scroll to Shapan, the King’s secretary and Shapan read it to Josiah. The young king desired to understand what the book of the Law meant so he sent men out to seek clarity. They found a prophetess named Huldah who warned them of God’s boiling anger. Upon hearing and understanding that the Word of God had been *intentionally* ignored—the king tore his clothes—a sign of mourning and repentance. (2 Kings 22:10-11)

King Josiah called his entire nation to repentance. God’s Word was then read throughout the land and a unified covenant was made. “*And the king stood by the pillar and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD and to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people joined in the covenant.*” (2 Kings 23:3, ESV)

National reformation followed. Out of reverence to God, Josiah changed the direction of an entire nation. He humbled himself and lead all his people into a deeper relationship with God.

All of this came from reading God’s Word.

There is immeasurable value in knowing what lies within the pages of His Word. With Josiah, that truth gave him the instruction needed for Godly leadership and living. Because of his obedience to God and His Word, everything in his life and his reign changed. With this one vital gift—the Book—he was able to take an entire kingdom deeper into knowing, honoring and serving God.

Isaiah 55:3 says, “*Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life. I will make an everlasting covenant with you. I will give you all the unfailing love I promised to David.*” (NLT)

Friend, this I know: my Bible has *never* jumped up to run to me—I choose to run to it. I choose to come to the Lord through His Word to know Him. I’m almost 65 and have been a Believer in Christ for 45 years. At this stage of my Christian life, I seldom sin by accident anymore—sin is a choice. “*Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.*” (James 4:17, NIV) For me to know the life giving value of daily reading God’s Word—and choose not to—is simply not okay.

God’s Word is so vitally important. It helps me navigate through this life and guides me into all truth. It teaches me about humility, corrects me when I miss the mark and empowers me to do what is right in His sight. “*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right.*” (2 Timothy 3:16, NLT)

Today, I want to pass on to you the same gift of challenging encouragement given to me from Kim. If you’re not in God’s Word daily, I encourage you to change direction—pursue HIM first thing in the morning—into the deeper waters of His loving presence.

PELIAH

(Pel-ay-ah - the marvel of God)

By Tenille Licari

Our scheduled morning time with the Ranch Founders took a slightly different beginning. Instead of meeting in Refuge or another common area, we were asked to go down to the sheep paddock. Excited from all the anticipation of new baby lambs arriving over the last few weeks, our intern team of four walked down to the pasture.

To our surprise we saw a weary-eyed, but always joyful, Kim Meeder. She was sitting ever so quietly next to a newborn lamb and her mother ewe, Yohanna. We slowly snuck up and joined her on the hay bales in front of the little enclosed sheep pen. Kim began to tell us the ordeal of the night before.

She explained how the ewe had gone into labor and the lamb became stuck in the birth canal with her tiny nose and legs sticking out. She shared how this little lamb and her mother became distressed as the birthing process continued into the early hours of the morning. She continued to explain that a sheep can only be in labor for a relatively short amount of time before both are imperiled with death.

Kim could see how the ewe's strength was failing and the lamb was no closer to being born. Knowing the baby and mother would die without help, she and Troy began to pull the lamb's front legs during each contraction. With Troy's hands over Kim's, they used as much force as they could without hurting either the lamb or ewe. Precise caution was needed to not dislocate tiny joints in the trauma that comes with such intervention. In the early morning light, at the very last moment, the little lamb was safely delivered.

Both ewe and lamb were close to death—when life and hope were fading—the lamb finally passed through and was set free.

Although Kim and Troy didn't get much sleep that night, they were elated to see mama and babe alive.

Through Kim's tired but delighted eyes, you could see her relief and joy over this little lamb that made it through. As I continued to take notice of this special woolly soul, I realized she was one of the most distinct looking lambs born this year.

Although she had similar features to Elora (a lamb born earlier), both bore a white crown on their head, but the new lamb had a white tip on her nose almost like an arrowhead. This feature was so distinct, so designed with purpose. While admiring how special this little one was, I heard Kim pray out loud, "Jesus, what name should we give this new tiny one?" I added my thoughts to this prayer and heard the Holy Spirit say, "I broke through for this little lamb . . . what do you know about Me breaking through?"

My thoughts moved to David, when God helped him break through an enemy attack (2 Sam 5:20). I whispered out loud, "Baal perazim?" I said back to God, "is that really a baby girl lamb name?" I kept this little conversation to myself as we left the lambing pens and climbed into Kim's truck for a short hike up Cline Butte.

We arrived for our hike significantly later than what had originally been planned. Kim told us about the history of Cline Butte and how she and her team had come here so often to walk and pray that they literally wore a new trail up the butte.

To me, there was nothing special about this trail. It just looked like a dirt track to the top. Even still, my heart anticipated something special to come from this prayer walk. We were instructed to hike in silence to the top of the small mountain and prayerfully listen to what the Lord might say to each of us. My heart smiled at this thought, I so enjoy these moments. With my head full of many conversations and thoughts, my continual focus was on what God was saying about the little lamb who broke through, my time in America, my life in Australia and everything in-between.

Suddenly, a foreign language broke through the silence. It was German. I was instantly amazed because one of our interns is from . . . *Germany!*

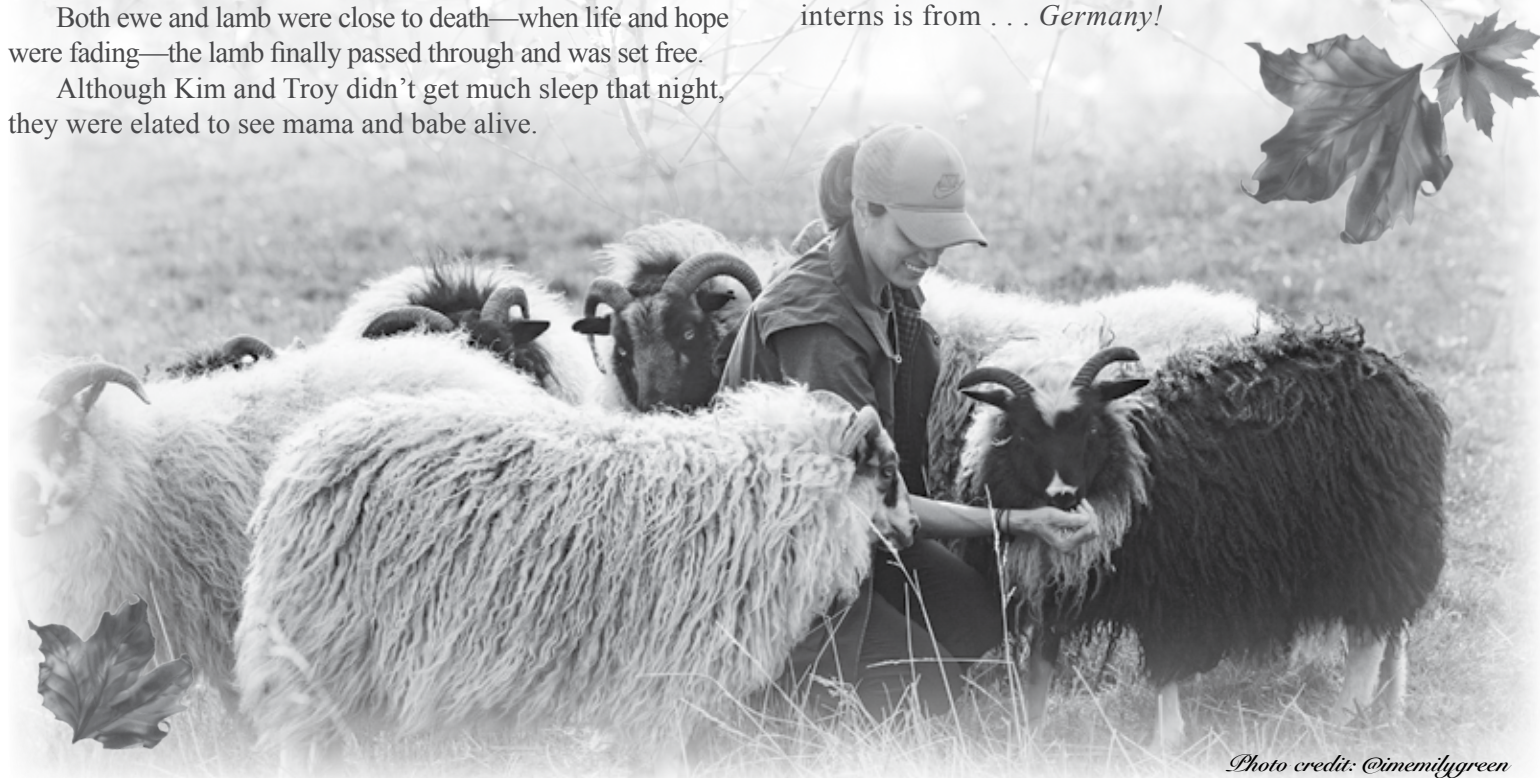


Photo credit: @imemilygreen



Photo credit: @memilygreen

All our ears turned into the sound of this language and we motioned for our German intern to run to this couple and speak to them . . . in their native tongue.

One didn't need to understand German to hear the astonished excitement that filled the air. We learned how this family had just recently moved to the area and were searching for a community to raise their two young sons. They were people of faith and had just been asking Jesus where to turn. As we shared about the Ranch and all that God does at

Crystal Peaks through the gardens, programs, international interns and more, our new friends melted into tears. We all rejoiced at the connection and prayed together in English and German. Finally, we exchanged details and with big smiles, we resumed hiking to the top of Cline Butte.

While walking into the returning silence, again, I asked God what we should call this little lamb? This was such a special day, out of nowhere we had just met a German family who were praying for community, and a tiny lamb's life was saved. A second time, I heard, "Baal perazim, I am the God who breaks through . . ." Again, I responded with, "Lord, that really isn't a baby girl sheep name!"

Feeling led to press in, I looked up "Hebrew girl names meaning breakthrough" and BOOM, I saw it.

Peliah (pronounced pel-ay-ah) came up and it means "the marvel of God" or "the Lord's miracle."

My heart smiled at this name because it reflected our whole day—a marvel—a miracle.

Once we reached the top of the butte, we all shared what God had spoken to each of us. During my turn, I felt somewhat nervous as I explained the story of my 'rabbit trail' thoughts that lead me to the name Peliah. I explained the way that I kept sensing how David broke through in 2 Samuel 5 and hearing "Baal parazim, I am the God who breaks through." I also kept thinking of the wonder of meeting Germans—speaking German—while hiking with a German girl who had *just* asked Jesus to please send a German family that she could bless in a special way.

God combined a family in need of community—with a young woman who wanted to give community—and how the Holy Spirit led them together at the exact time needed for both. Then, He led me to the name Peliah, meaning the marvel of God. When I suggested that this be the little lamb's name, everyone agreed to the marvel that we each had just witnessed on this day.

Now, when I go into the sheep paddock to say hello to all the lambs, I see the arrowhead on Peliah's little nose. It reminds me that God can break through anything, not just for his creatures great and small—but for us—His sheep—His flock. Her white arrowhead speaks of His divine purpose, how He encouraged homesick strangers on a mountaintop, a little sheep in her pen and me when I call out to Him.

If you are ever blessed to enter our sheep pasture—I hope you will see the lamb with an arrowhead on her nose—and be encouraged as well. Our loving Father sees you and wants to break through for you too.

"So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom." (Luke 12:32, NLT)

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Prayer Warriors . . .



Please join us in prayer as we lift up those attending our combined Ignition/Inferno similar ministry event on October 24th-28th. As the Lord calls each participant into ranch ministry, it is our desire to encourage all into a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ.

Through the last 28 years of challenges and victories, we have learned to follow and depend on the only One who KNOWS the way.

This event equips participants from across our nation—and beyond—with the tools needed to return home and establish their own ministry. During this event, our greatest prayer for each individual is to encounter the living God in a tangible way.

Again, thank you beloved family for joining us in prayer over this event. We so appreciate you.

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