

HOPE FOR THE FAMILY

AROUND the FIRE

Spring 2023

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

FOLLOW THE SPIRIT

By Kim Meeder

The thermometer outside my kitchen window rested on one, single degree. The world was dressed in a downy robe of pure white. Perfect snowflakes drifted down in pristine silence. It was almost Christmas Eve.

My beloved husband's gift to me was to lighten up our kitchen by painting all the cabinetry and lining one wall with cheerful tiles. It was a herculean job that he lovingly tried to mash into the few days of our Christmas break.

We linked Troy's phone to our central sound system so we could sing along with Christmas carols as we worked side by side. I was helping him tape off portions of the kitchen, when suddenly, the music stopped and a strange voice began streaming into our home.

"Hello, I hope this is Troy. I'm your new neighbor and we haven't officially met yet. But . . . I hope this is your number . . . because I need to let you know that all your sheep are in our front yard. My kids and I have so enjoyed watching them . . . but they are loose . . . and our yard is not fenced . . . and the road is very close . . ."

I looked at Troy. He was currently dressed like a whimsical snowman in a white, full body paint suit and mask. His expression was unmistakable. He wordlessly held up both of his hands, each filled with the needed tools to finish the job.

My response was equally unmistakable. I held up a single palm and simply said, "I've got this."

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Photo credit: Sarah Robinett

Quickly, I pulled on my heavy outer gear. I topped off the ensemble with boots, gloves, scarf and a knit cap made from wool shorn from the same sheep I was heading out to round up.

I slid into my cold truck, started the engine and allowed it to warm up. While waiting, I considered a verse I had read earlier that morning. It was simple, direct, profound and powerful:

"Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit's leading in every part of our lives."
(Galatians 5:25, NLT)

Like an echo, I kept hearing on repeat, "FOLLOW the Spirit's leading in-*EVERY*-part-of-our-lives. *EVERY* PART. Not just the fun parts, or the comfortable parts, or the easy parts . . . but *every* part! I pondered, since I live in a body that cannot be divided or move in two different directions at the same time . . . if *all* of me isn't following *all* of Him . . . then am I really following Him *at all*?

In minutes, I drove the short distance, met my wonderful new neighbors, shook a bucket of grain and called my small, four-legged friends. Upon hearing my voice—and the sound of their favorite treat—without hesitation they ran toward me like wooly mops.

Through the deep gray light of the waning day, a single, heavily bundled

woman led a gleeful flock of Icelandic sheep home through the deep snow.

It was not lost on my heart that *all* of them—were following *all* of me. And because they chose to do so, each were led to a place of provision, protection and peace. They were *following* their shepherd. And by following—they walked right through the brutal storm—and into all they would need to endure it.

With the flock tucked in for the night, I made the short return trip toward my home . . . but not before passing another neighbors' home. They are a delightful couple that I loved very much. She is 75 and he is 94. Often, I would stop by and simply check in to ensure they were well and help out in any way they might need.

On this frigid day, I could see that their narrow driveway was completely snowed in. I sensed the Holy Spirit urging me to turn toward their home. My instant response was to list all the reasons why that was not a good idea . . . Troy was waiting for me, he needed my help, we had a short timeline and I said I would be back in minutes.

Suddenly, I realized how I was *not* a sheep following its Shepherd. Nor was I following the Holy Spirit in *EVERY* part of my life.

Carefully, I turned my truck around and broke a trail through the snow up my dear neighbor's driveway.

She met me at the door with her endearing Texan charm. Once inside their toasty home, I shucked off my heavy coat and asked how they were doing. In her easy-going way, she assured me they were just fine. But as our conversation continued, she let me know in her amusing trademark humor that they were completely out of bread, milk and eggs.

My astounded response was little more than, "What? Well that won't do! I'll be right back."

As quickly as frozen roads would allow, I dashed to the nearest open market and picked up the necessary staples. Then, I returned to the Ranch and heaved open the root cellar door and gathered 30 pounds of potatoes and a dozen large onions. Wading through the snow, I went upstairs to the Ranch Cannery and gathered several jars of spicy home-canned applesauce.

With my basket loaded down with supplies, I started to turn my truck back toward my neighbors—but a second time—the Holy Spirit urged me to "redirect" and go home to pick up meat to add to the gift. Once home, I quickly gathered salmon, halibut and . . . elk meat. I added the provisions and started to leave my home—but for a *third time*—the Holy Spirit nudged me to return. He wanted me to add a bag of sweet, home grown carrots from our personal garden.

Through the deep purple hush of this Christmas season twilight, I wondered if angels above were amused at the heavily dressed woman running back and forth through the snow . . . to retrieve *carrots*?

In minutes, I was carrying the heavy basket up the neighbors' steps and into their home. As my dear friend lifted the items out of the basket to put them away, she paused for a moment when she found the elk meat. She smiled and shared, "At 94, my husband enjoys the simple things in life. He told me that all he wanted for Christmas this year was elk chili for dinner . . . and . . ." She suddenly stopped short.

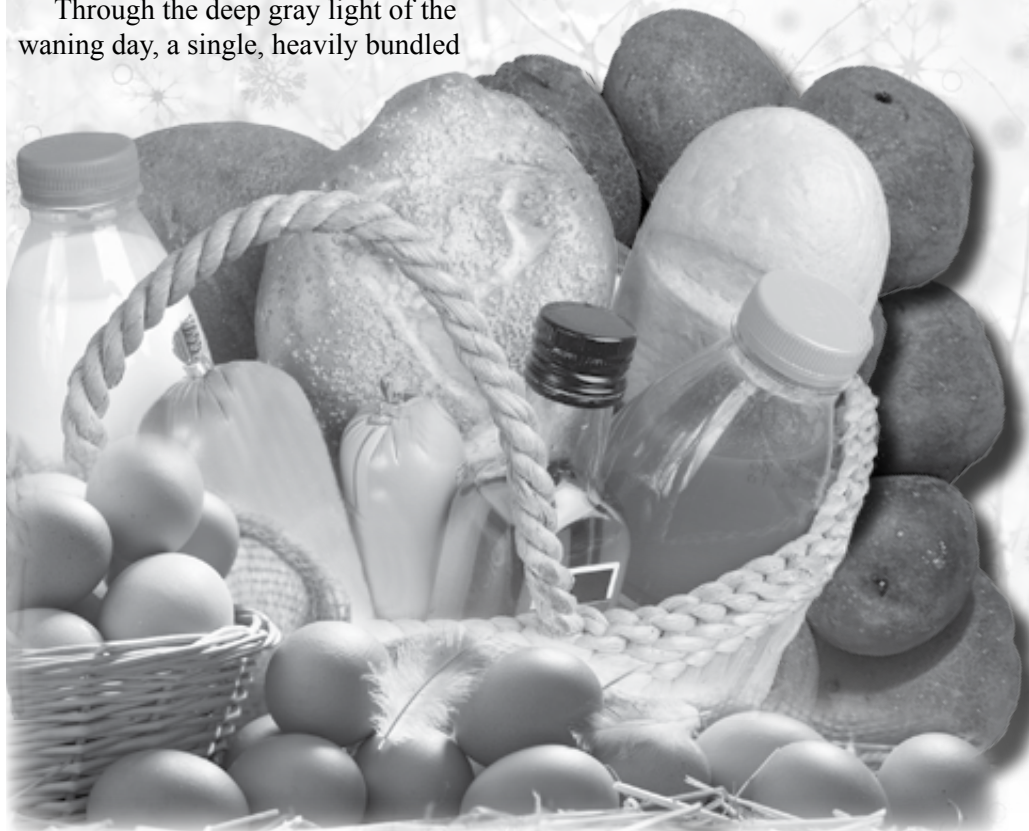




Photo credit: Sarah Robinett

I turned my full attention to what had impacted her. With the same gentleness of one lifting a baby, she raised the bag of home-grown carrots and simply stared at them. Without looking up, she nearly whispered the private realization that she was cradling a tiny miracle.

“... and ... and ... sweet carrots from *your* garden.”

As her soft words filled the space between us, realization poured into my heart. The Holy Spirit heard the simple desire of a beloved son—so He spoke to a beloved daughter—to provide it.

Had I pursued my own “busyness” and kept on driving, a gentle soul would have missed a humble Christmas blessing—and I would have missed a quiet, yet profound miracle.

When my dear friend finally looked up at me, her eyes were shining with gratitude.

“Since we are living by the Spirit, let us follow the Spirit’s leading in every part of our lives.” (Galatians 5:25, NLT)

During the short drive home, I considered the sheep. Once I called them and we were moving together, they didn’t deviate from my heels. They didn’t detour in fear or pride.

They weren’t drawn away by curiosity, comfort or temptation. Had they veered away—for any reason—that would not be following. Sheep cannot “kinda” follow a shepherd. Either they are or they aren’t. Nor can I “kinda” follow the Spirit. Either I am or I’m not.

When it comes to following the Spirit, there is no such thing as a “partial” follower. I’m either following HIM—or—I’m following ME. I’m either moving toward HIM—or—I’m moving away.

I also noticed that when I called the sheep, they didn’t argue with me. They didn’t question my motives. They didn’t need a detailed explanation of my plans or where we were going . . . they simply followed because they know there is goodness in my presence. Whether it be in the form of sustenance, gentle touch or quietly resting together, they pursued me because they wanted to be with me *more* than they wanted to go their own way.

“The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep recognize his voice and come to him. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. After he has gathered his own flock, he walks ahead of them, and they follow him because they know his voice.” (John 10:3-4, NLT)

“Simply listening to the Holy Spirit became the foundation for a treasured Christmas blessing.”

~Kim Meeder

The cab of my truck filled with a frosty prayer, “Jesus, thank You for Your voice. If sheep can choose to follow me closely—I can choose to follow YOU closely—in EVERY part of my life. Lord, I choose to pursue You because I want to be with YOU more than I want to go my own way. I don’t want to pretend that following You some of the time is truly following You at all. The Holy Spirit is such a clear and kind leader; thank You for placing Him in my heart. And thank You for showing me the absolute goodness of Your presence. Jesus, You’re amazing and I love You so much . . .”

Simply listening to the Holy Spirit became the foundation for a treasured Christmas blessing.

Looking back on that special evening, I wonder if an angel showed our sheep how to escape. Perhaps He used them to—pry me out of my task—drive by my elderly neighbors—hear HIS voice to go to them—have the opportunity to follow . . . so He could release a Christmas miracle.

Indeed, the beautiful choice is ours. Since we LIVE by Him . . . let us also FOLLOW HIM in everything we do . . . deeper . . . into the absolute goodness of His presence. For, it is within this hallowed place of following God—through the storms of our pride, fear, selfishness and complacency—that we will encounter the miracles of His love.

One of the things I enjoy the most about working at Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch is the opportunity to interact with everyone who visits here. Whether giving Tours, chatting with session families or spending time with our volunteers, it is a daily privilege to connect with people.

Our winter season is typically pretty quiet in this neck of the woods—but since we’re a working ranch, there are always tasks and projects to complete. We are blessed to have a hearty group of volunteers, who we’ve dubbed our “Winter Warriors.” They brave the elements to shoulder alongside us and help lighten our load.

Recently, one of our faithful “Winter Warrior” families contacted me to see if they could schedule a day for their family to volunteer. They hoped to work together along with some visiting friends and relatives who were staying with them. The entire group cheerfully came out after Christmas to help with our daily chores.

Patty and her sons, Jimmy and Jon, are regular volunteers and they were thrilled to show their extended family the ministry they serve. Throughout the scooping, fence mending and horse feeding, many stories were shared and much laughter was heard. Patty’s older children were visiting from a Bible college in Wyoming, where they serve on staff, and they were eager to reconnect with their companions. One of their friends was going to be the best man in Patty’s daughter’s wedding. Stories of their close ties with their school friends ensued and plans were discussed for another family volunteering opportunity in the future.

New Year’s came and went and with the busyness of ranch life, I didn’t give much additional thought to this family’s day of selfless service. A couple weeks later, one of our former interns came to the Ranch to volunteer with her husband. McKenzie had stayed with Patty and her family during her internship a few years ago and she felt close to them. She immediately asked me if I had heard the news. I hadn’t.

On their way home from visiting their Bible college, the five closest friends of Patty’s daughters were involved in a fiery head-on collision . . . all five of these beloved and vibrant souls were killed.

The suddenness and finality of the accident was shocking. One minute, plans were being made, lives were intertwined and their futures lay ahead of them—spreading out like the lonely Wyoming highway they had been traveling on. And in an instant—everyone’s life changed.

Those who knew them well described the five students as “living representatives of Christ.” At their memorial service, the Bible college administration stated that each of them “had a confident and persistent belief in Christ that permeated their lives. If they could be here today, they would tell you to place your trust in Jesus Christ, for . . . He is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one gets to the Father except through Him. (John 14:6)”

These five students had fervently prayed for many individuals who were non-believers: family, friends and

acquaintances. Patty and her family have already heard incredible stories of how this tragic event was a catalyst for the hope of the Gospel to go out to numerous people in their community and beyond.

“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 8:28, NIV)

How can we have hope in a world where there’s such darkness and despair? In the upper room discourse (John 14-17), Jesus is preparing his disciples for what lies ahead—but He also gives them hope: *“Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God; believe also in me. My Father’s house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am. You know the way to the place where I am going.”* (John 14:1-4, NIV)

No one can know what tomorrow may bring. Time is short for all of us. These five students already knew what the Lord is also urging each one of us to consider: the God of the universe did something radical for us. He sent His only Son to earth to lead a sinless life and then to die an unimaginable death on a cross so that we might have eternal life.

Jesus bore our sin—He paid the debt for every believer so that we will be saved from eternal death. He literally destroyed death.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life.” (John 3:16, NIV)

Not only is death demolished by the cross—death actually becomes the very doorway to eternal life!

HOPE IN THE DARKNESS

BY ANN HAWLEY

“ . . . I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.”

John 11:25, NIV

“...now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.” (John 16:22, NIV)

Just days after receiving the news about the deaths of the five Bible college students, I received an email from a woman named Stephanie. She and her husband, Ted, had come to the Ranch for a Tour several months before and the three of us quickly hit it off. Ted had lived in Idaho, where I was born and raised and we discovered that we had a few mutual friends. An easy banter was established between us as we walked around together and I shared the humble beginnings of the Ranch with them.

When the Tour was finished, both Stephanie and Ted expressed their support of this ministry and the work the Lord is doing here to provide hope to the hopeless. In fact, Stephanie contacted me shortly thereafter to express their desire to join our volunteer program. I was so thankful that the Lord had led this lovely couple here to share their time and talents.

More time passed and Stephanie reached out again to say Ted wasn’t feeling well. Some health issues had arisen and he needed to get some tests done. They didn’t want me to wonder about the time gap of them returning, only that they were still sincerely interested in volunteering. I assured them that I would be praying for Ted. Not long afterwards, Stephanie emailed me again. Ted had been diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. They were hopeful however, because he was among a small percentage of patients who was a good candidate for surgery.

I have continued to pray for Ted’s healing through his surgery and subsequent chemotherapy. As I opened Stephanie’s newest email recently, my heart sank as I read her

words: “It is with devastating sorrow I tell you . . . that Ted passed away . . . he fought so hard and stayed so positive, but even after 8 chemo’s, an 8 hour Whipple resection surgery, 5 glue surgeries on his back due to the chemo, the cancer came back in his liver.”

I was absolutely crushed that such a vibrant, kind man was no longer with us. And my heart immediately went out to Stephanie—she had been Ted’s primary caregiver through his illness and now she was attempting to navigate all of the details of life without her husband by her side. I could only imagine the incredible loneliness and hopelessness she must be feeling.

But here’s what is true. Even in the depths of our despair, the Lord is with us.

“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” (Deuteronomy 31:8, NIV)

The Word of God is absolutely trustworthy. No matter what we are feeling or going through, this is what is true. For those who believe in Jesus Christ, death has been swallowed up. *“ . . . for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith.”* (1 John 5:4, NIV)

Scottish pastor and author, Alistair Begg says, “There is nothing like the prospect of death to clarify the issues of life. Death uniquely focuses our attention on the life we’re living. What are you living for? As believers, we give what we can’t keep to gain what we can’t lose.”

Our culture promotes youth and worldly riches—we are encouraged to run from the prospect of death. But we all know that we can’t run forever. Eventually these bodies of ours will perish. Our only door to eternal life is in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

“ . . . don’t you know that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were therefore buried with him through baptism into death in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, we too may live a new life.” (Romans 6:3-4, NIV)

For each person reading this—all the promises of Jesus are for YOU.

Just as Jesus comforted Martha at the death of her brother, Lazarus, He is saying to YOU: *“ . . . I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die.”* (John 11:25, NIV)

Let each of these precious lives we’ve recently lost bear witness to the resurrection power and eternal life promised to every believer.

Are you in the middle of a dark season? There is hope. He will never leave you or forsake you.

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Revelation 21:4, NIV)

No matter your storm, Jesus is in the boat with you. Choose HIM. Choose LIFE.



By Ben Donald

Each evening before bed, I lie on the floor of my three boys' room and go through their bedtime routine. Young and rambunctious, it takes time and commitment to guide this troupe down the path to peace.

The journey begins with each of them building Legos in their beds while I read the Bible and have prayer. After this, I am instructed to tell "Epic Stories," made up tales in which the boys and their sister are super heroes, battling evil foes under a variety of harrowing circumstances.

The bedtime finale: philosophical discussions about life. Good guys and bad guys, good and evil, why these things exist and whose side we are on. A recap of the day and what will be happening the next conclude the night. Either Daddy or Mom will be going to work. The boys will be pressing into their school lessons or going to karate or doing projects. We start to wind down, directing them toward putting the Legos away, lights off, time for sleep.

And here is where it can derail.

My creative builders and attentive listeners crumble into whining criers. Desperate to eek every last minute out of the night, they resort to telling me how mean I am. And admittedly, I'm tempted to break the peace of the aforementioned, idyllic, bedtime scene. How on earth could they possibly see me as mean? I just spent an inordinate amount of time nurturing, guiding,

entertaining and loving these small people. I have led them from daytime chaos into bedtime calm.

And now . . . *I'm mean?*

It is no coincidence that within our life the outpoured manifestation of the Spirit is called fruit. We can offer nourishment to those around us—if—these fruits are tended and grown in our life. Are the fruits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control hanging from the tree of our life? Are they available for the passersby to pick and eat?

When someone cuts us off in traffic, is the fruit of peace there for them to eat? Do you realize that they just made a withdrawal from the bank of you? Were there sufficient funds in your bank of peace for that withdrawal?

Kids are REALLY good at making withdrawals from our banks.

They know that mom and dad are a great source for ALL their needs. Kids seem to arrive on the earth with two preconceived notions: 1) I have needs, and 2) those around (mostly the tall ones) will meet them. But can you hear the deeper cry beneath their behaviors? "Do I matter?" "Do you see me?" "You have what it takes, but do I?" "Why am I so awkward?" "Why is everyone better than me?" These tiny humans make countless withdrawals every day, often in very annoying and time-consuming ways.

Even still, is there fruit for them to eat from our tree?

In John 14:27 Jesus made an amazing declaration to His disciples, "*Peace, I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.*" (ESV)

This verse becomes even more amazing when we remember that Jesus was not far from his betrayal, trial and execution on the cross. Jesus was soon to have his personal peace tested at every point and He was speaking these words to men who would soon flee from Him and deny that they even knew Him.

Jesus' disciples would be holding secretive meetings behind closed doors, instead of boldly preaching in the open, as He did (John 20:19).

It was during one of these meetings that Jesus appeared to them after His resurrection. And His first words were, "*PEACE be unto you!*" (John 20:21, KJV, emphasis added)

Often, in group settings, there is that one friend who just says the wrong thing at just the wrong time.

Superficially, Jesus can seem like "that" guy. But if we remember the power of Jesus' words, we will realize that they are opening a door into *His* world.

He does not open a window for us to take a peek. He opens a doorway for us to *walk through*.

Daily, His words invite us to see as He sees, think as He thinks and act as He would act.

In fact, this is the very invitation that Jesus issued to them after He said, "Peace!" His next words are, "As the Father has sent me, even so I am sending you." (John 20:21, ESV)

He was commissioning His people to be to the world what He had been during his ministry. They (we) were being commissioned to bring hope where there was none, to speak life in the face of death, to speak peace where there was no peace.

Jesus went beyond just making us into a bank or an ATM or a tree to be picked. He made us into a *temple*.

He made us into a dwelling place for His Spirit. Just before Jesus said, "My peace I give unto you . . .", He promised the Holy Spirit would come. (John 14:26) This was no coincidence. One of God's names is Jehovah-Shalom, meaning the Lord is peace. (Judges 6:24)

When the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in His temple—in us—that is when God, "who is peace," is in *us*.

When God moves in to dwell in us through His Holy Spirit, He comes in just as He is. He brings all His nature, all His virtue, all that He is, with Him. This does not mean that life becomes a blissful cake walk every day. It *does* mean that the deep well of God's resources and His very peaceful presence are all available to use every moment of every circumstance.

So, at the very end of the day, when I have invested in my children and am left with the moniker of "mean," what fruits do I offer for them to pick? Is it the mushy fruit of impatience? The bruised fruit of anger? The worm-infested fruit of chaos? Or do I nourish them with the best, juiciest and most-crisp fruits of patience, love, and peace?

Paul encourages us in Colossians 3:15, "And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are called to live in peace." (NLT)

As we learn to let Him be the Lord of our life and rule from His throne in our heart, we will find His peace filling all the spaces of our existence, internal and external. As a result, we will have His peace to share with those around us, even under tumultuous circumstances.

May His peace be with YOU today.



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.

Yes! I would like to shoulder with Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch to support children, horses and families in need.

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OUR 2023 CPYR INTERNS . . .

will be arriving soon!



Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch will be welcoming five new Interns to our team for the 2023 Season. Three hail from the United States, one from Australia and another will be joining us from Germany. Together, they are becoming a beautiful tapestry of strong hearts called to serve Jesus Christ through this ministry.

The Ranch interns come alongside our team for a period of eight months and are the only volunteers we teach to work one-on-one with the children & horses in our session program. Each intern who is called to Crystal Peaks does so through their own financial means. Year after year we see God provide for these humble individuals in amazing and awe-inspiring ways.

If you are interested in learning more about our Internship Program, please visit our website and click on “Join the Cause.” For those of you who are prayer warriors for CPYR, please join us in lifting up these five outstanding new team members. We pray that during their time here, each will learn to trust Jesus for all their needs—each will be encouraged by how He ALWAYS provides—and each will experience breakthrough for the Kingdom of God in mighty ways through their heartfelt service.

Many blessings to you all,
CPYR Team