

EMPOWER THE MINISTRY

AROUND *the* FIRE

FALL 2016

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

THE GOOD GIFT

BY KIM MEEDER

It was the last day of our trip. Rain was falling in great gray sheets. Drenched sheep scattered off the dirt road as we bounced onward through a vast array of mud filled potholes. Finally, we reached a large metal gate with a sign proclaiming that we'd indeed, reached our destination. It was one of the few therapeutic riding centers just outside of Timisoara, in Romania.

Months earlier, Judy and I had been summoned by Beautiful Gate Translations, an organization that spreads the Gospel through impoverished countries by translating women's devotional materials. We were asked to join a small team that would travel through Eastern Europe and share the Hope of Jesus.

For the last thirteen days, we'd traveled between two to five hours a day while speaking one to four times a day. We'd already traveled through much of Moldova sharing the message of Salvation and now were nearing the finish of doing the same in Romania.

The purpose of our next event was to share with professional equine therapists how Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch works with highly disabled children. Because of the

rain, we met upstairs in a simple room lovingly outfitted with furniture made from wooden pallets. After sharing a simple meal, the group pushed their plates aside and launched into a series of kid/horse related questions.

In moments, it was clear that this crowd was highly steeped in programming, human understanding and 'therapy models.' While listening to one leader speak of the value of balance and movement—which is important—my grandmothers favorite verse crossed my mind.

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart: do NOT depend on your own understanding. Seek HIS will in all you do, and HE will direct your path." Prov. 3:5-6 (NLT).

Flowing out above our conversation was my simple prayer. "Jesus, when You are not present in a life—You are not first—the wisdom of men is. Lord, please show me how to pour Your LOVE out in a way that they can SEE the difference, that they can see YOU, that they can see YOUR gift of love for all of them."

The assembly moved into a covered arena. Here, I was to give a demonstration of how to work with a 13 year-old, blind from birth, boy named Theodora.

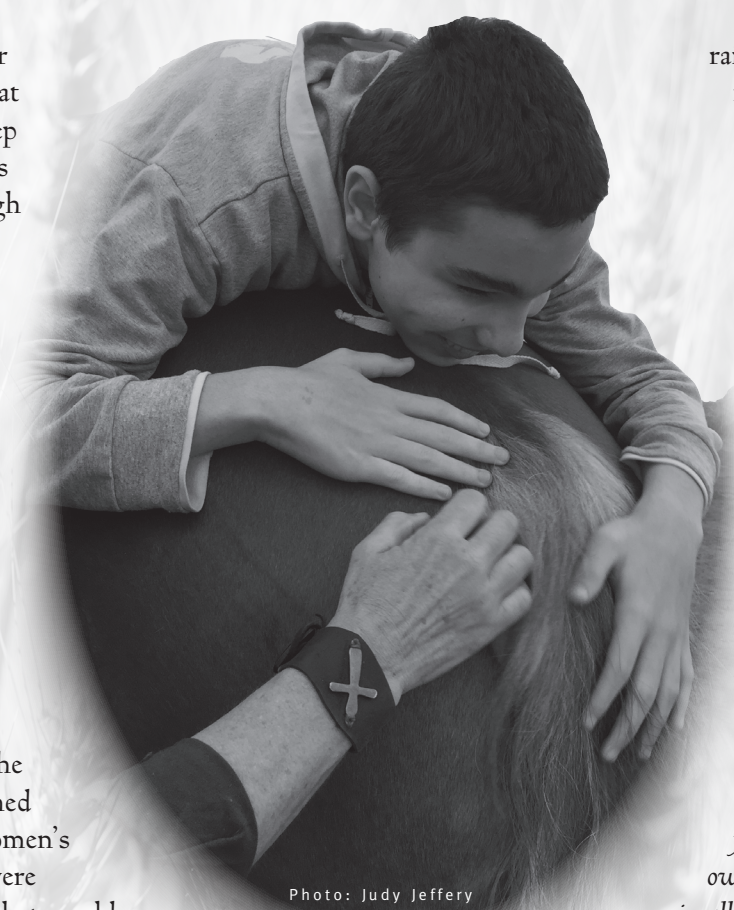


Photo: Judy Jeffery

A short, Haflinger-type gelding was lead in with a riding pad strapped to his back. Two assistants were assigned to me; one to lead the horse and the second to walk along the off side of the horse in case our rider needed help to balance. This individual would also aid in translation when needed.

When Theodora was guided in, I was struck by his expression. Although he was being led through a world of darkness, his expression was . . . pure contentment. He wasn't much shorter than I. His black hair and cloudy dark eyes framed such a sweet face. He was a happy little man carried in an unseeing, unique thinking body.

"Jesus, You made him perfect. He's Yours. He's so much more than a 'participant' to simply stretch, bend and balance. He's a little boy who needs to feel SEEN and valued . . . who needs to feel LOVED . . . who needs to feel Your love. Lead on Holy Spirit . . . and I will follow."

After a brief introduction, I led Theodora over to the horse.

"Theodora, who's this horse?" Without thought, he answered, "Jax, he's the horse I always ride." I felt led to ask again, "Buddy, who is this horse to you?"

Turning slightly to me, he grinned, "He's my friend." Pressing in further, I continued to follow this river of direction, "Is Jax a casual friend? Or, a really good friend?" Theodora's smile grew, "He's a really good friend!"

I supported him by adding, "Wow! That's great! I bet you know he's a really good friend because he gives you really GOOD gifts, like riding on his back!" With a toothy, mouth open smile, he simply nodded in agreement.

"Well, if Jax gives you good gifts . . . what can you give him back? What would be a good gift given back to him?" My young friend pondered this question for a long moment. Finally, I helped by giving a suggestion, "I think he'd really like it if you'd put your hands on him and 'tell him with your touch' that he's your good friend. Do you think that's a good idea?" Again, the open toothy smile returned with another hearty nod.

Guiding him with my hands, together we rubbed Jax's muzzle, eyes, ears, chest, shoulders and rump. With our good gift firmly in place, it was finally time to climb aboard the gelding's back. Nearly in stride, our little group set off around the arena.

I had a silly flashback of feeling the pressure of showing livestock when I was a kid in 4-H. I was highly aware of the therapists and equally aware that what I was doing was completely outside of the therapy models they'd just spoken to me about.



Photo: Paulett Carson

To respect their profession and the education they lived by, I persisted to encourage Theodora to show his love for his horse. By reaching as far as he could with both hands and both feet he continued to rub Jax from behind his ears all the way to the back of his rump. I even had Theodora ride his horse backward and facing each side—while the horse was walking—so he could reach and show love to even more of his friend. By doing this, conventional therapy was satisfied.

But there's nothing conventional about Christ's love. It doesn't conform to the laws of men and it doesn't fit into any boundary assigned by human hearts. His love is wild and it colors outside the lines of our understanding. It's completely overwhelming in the very best of ways and once experienced, nothing else compares.

"Jesus, as this beautiful boy is pouring out his gift of love over his horse, will You pour out Your gift of love over him? Do this Lord in a way that his unique mind will understand how treasured he is to You and to this world."

"Theodora, now that you've loved your horse well and given him a really good gift—I think he would like to give you another gift in return. I think he would like you to TROT with him. Trotting is a little bit faster than walking, does that sound scary or fun?" With little hesitation, he replied "Fun! Trotting sounds like FUN!"



Photo: Paulett Carson

With simple instructions in place, our crew encouraged horse and boy into a lively trot. Theodora let out a voice-cracking cry that alternated between half man and half child. I whipped around to look at his face. Instantly I could see this wasn't a sound of fear but elation! His smile was so HUGE that it looked like a rift between Heaven and earth had opened and pure glory was streaming out through this boy's smile! I nearly fell to my knees!

Calling from behind the group I yelled, "Theodora! Your smile! I've never seen anything so beautiful! It's AMAZING! Don't stop SMILING!" He didn't. What I thought was glorious grew bigger and brighter with every stride. I could literally feel the loving Presence of Jesus pouring over and through him! The very Presence of God was beaming through a boy . . . a boy whom the world considers blind and broken.

After a full victory lap around the arena, the little team pulled up and stopped in front of the panel of professionals and me. Out of breath, Theodora shouted, "I have a BEAUTIFUL SMILE!!! CAN YOU SEE IT?!"

We ALL witnessed Theodora TRANSFORM! He was seen. He was valued. He was flooded with the love of God. In response, his WHOLE body was laughing!

I was still gushing about the beauty and power of his smile when he stopped me. Then he asked a simple question. "Tell me . . . what does my smile look like?"

My prayer was nothing more than, "Speak, Jesus."

I approached and place my hands over his. Looking up into his unfocused eyes, I began, "Theodora, imagine when it's early in the morning. You're awake and it's dark and cold. Then the sun breaks over the horizon and streams into your room. You know the sun has risen because you can FEEL the heat on your skin. Suddenly, everything around you is drenched in light and warmth . . . your smile is like that! It fills and warms the whole room . . . this whole arena . . . and everyone in it! Theodora, don't ever stop smiling . . . it's such a good gift! Your smile has blessed me more than words can say. Thank you for that, for sharing your glorious smile."

The wheels of human understanding were turning. Flesh was receiving Spirit. Truth was rooting in fertile soil. He was comprehending the power of a good gift. With my hands still cupped over his, Theodora quietly asked, "Mrs.

Kim, what does your smile look like?"

I couldn't restrain the tears filling my eyes. "My smile is different than yours. Why don't you tell me what YOU think it looks like?" With that simple instruction, I gently placed his right hand on my face. With thoughtful wonder he felt every contour of my smiling cheeks and mouth. To gain the full picture, he even placed grubby fingers inside my lips.

After careful deliberation he leaned down from the horse's back to be closer to me. With his precious lips only inches from my ear, he quietly concluded, "Your smile is like the best dream ever!"

And just like that, one whom the world considers blind and broken, gave me a precious gift . . . one of the best gifts ever.

Theodora and I talked a little longer about the power of good gifts. We talked about how Jesus gave the very best gift when He gave His life for us—so we could live for Him. We spoke about how every good gift ultimately comes from Jesus. We shared how easy it is for us to give back good gifts to Jesus by choosing to have a grateful heart—a heart that constantly lifts up praise and gratitude to Him.

All too soon our time together came to a close. In keeping with Romanian culture, Theodora and I kissed each other's cheeks many times. In parting, he gave me one last gift. "Mrs. Kim, from now on when you see the sunrise . . . no matter where you are . . . you will remember me and my special smile."

Indeed, I will.

Friend, as long as there's still breath, there's an opportunity for doing good, for giving a good gift. God's Word says in Ephesians 5:16 to make the most of EVERY opportunity for doing good. In verse 18, it encourages readers to let the Holy Spirit fill and control you. Verse 20 encourages each of us to " . . . always give thanks for everything to God the Father in the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ."

So, on this day—be encouraged to ask Jesus—what good gift might YOU give Him? Perhaps a gift to another who needs to know His love? Or might it be you choosing to give Him all of your heart—your very life?

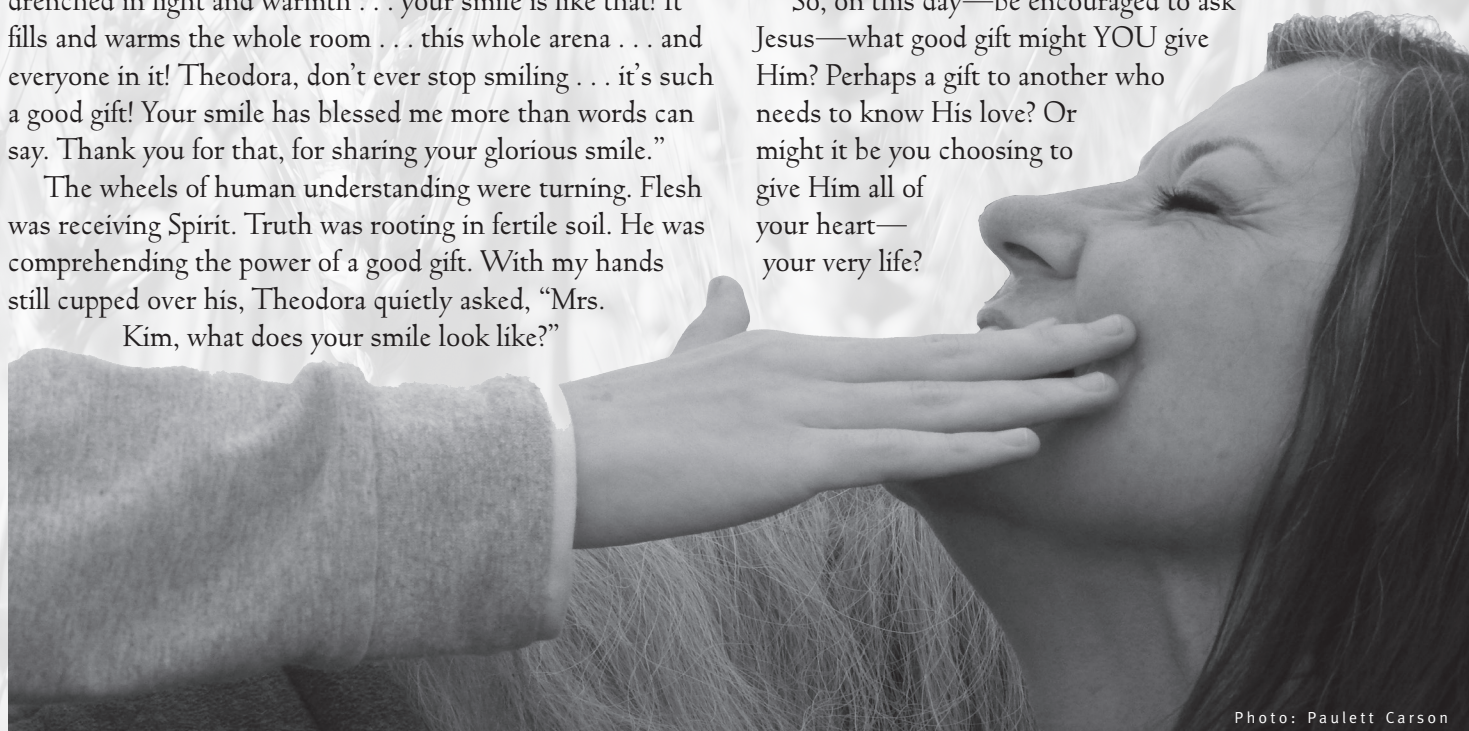


Photo: Paulett Carson

GRACE FALLS

BY RACHEL SHULTZ

To hear the testimony of the Lord through someone is a beautiful gift. To walk through it with them is quite another.

Most of us take 'walking' for granted. Perhaps some reading this story are currently experiencing pain and physical limitations. Others might be rejoicing in prayers that have led to healing and restoration.

Last December, my husband Brad and I witnessed this truth. We were invited to visit a small farm—one of Crystal Peaks' Similar Ministries—in Apache Junction, Arizona. Resting at the base of the Superstition Mountain foothills, this little desert oasis was built by love. Our prayer was to shoulder with these dear friends and co-laborers in the midst of leading their ministry.

In 2011 James and Aly, founders of Grace Falls Farm, began their journey after attending an Information Clinic at Crystal Peaks. By October of that same year, they opened the doors of their home and land to serve families in their community. Through this ministry they share the love and hope of Jesus Christ.

During our visit we attended their Christmas Hoe Down. Despite the rainy day, everyone clustered together for a rambunctious family dinner followed by a message of the truest gift of Christmas. We were blessed to meet these families and connected with many who shared their stories with us.

The following day began with a break in the clouds. We'd hoped for a hike with our hosts and their family on Silly

Mountain. During our trek, we shared the joy of friendship. The laughter of James and Aly's two adopted daughters Jilly and Aaliyah along with the curious exploration of 'Rook', their German shepherd, added to the fullness and beauty of God's creation. Suddenly, my dear friend Aly declared, "Come on girls!!" Then she bounded up the trail with her daughters. My heart leapt and my eyes welled with tears.

I stopped. "Jesus. Oh Jesus, look what You continue to provide. Your grace continues to fall in such a loving way!" I was awestruck.

Awestruck because the last time we were together at the CPYR Ministry Conference in May of 2015, no one could've imagined this day. Aly's circumstances then, were evidence of much different 'walk.'

Her story and the terrible injury that had shifted Aly's life came flooding back.

The previous year, while on a church outing, Aly stepped backward to join a camper photo and her leg buckled awkwardly beneath her. In an instant her physical condition was altered. The resulting agony confined her to a wheelchair. Her diagnoses was Lubrosacral Plexopathy, a rare affliction. It affected interwoven nerve bundles that deadened areas of her leg and caused extreme-pulsating pain throughout her left leg and back. Multiple examinations and caregivers offered only partial hope through intense rehabilitative care. Despite all efforts, her leg began to waste away.

My role at Crystal Peaks enables me to shoulder in prayer with ministry leaders. As Aly and I prayed together, I could sense her growing vulnerability. She grieved over her reduced ability to be vested in sessions. She shared concern about the added stress on her husband who worked full-time to support the ministry. She mourned her inability to actively play with Jilly and Aaliyah. Her lifeless leg was an excruciating anchor that also affected her spiritual walk.

Because their ministry was still young, Aly and James were the only session mentors. The road ahead seemed long and arduous. The reality of uncertainty was hitting hard.

Often, we prayed together through the setbacks, pain and grief—and rejoiced over the grace that just continued to fall.

Aly endured a surgery and slowly progressed from her wheelchair to a walker. During this time, she was blessed to adopt and train a service dog as her fulcrum.

When she and James came to the CPYR Similar Ministries Conference, 'Rook' dutifully worked beside her providing the balance she



Photo: James Pflugfelder

no longer had. Lagging beside her with each step, her useless leg continued to atrophy. Although experts told her that complete healing may never come, Aly and James continued to prayerfully ask the Lord, “What’s next?” They trusted Him fully, even if it meant closing the ministry they loved.

During each of our Similar Ministry conferences, Friday evening is reserved for fellowship and worship. On this night I sat outside the barn with other ranch leaders chatting about their passion for the families in their communities. Suddenly, I heard a joyful shout coming from the back of the ranch. I looked up and saw Aly—RUNNING—down the gravel path! Upon reaching the grassy hill she lifted her eyes and arms and the most beautiful, tearful worship filled the air. Falling beneath the weight of pure gratitude, she knelt to the ground in praise to her Great Physician.



I quickly shifted my gaze to James. He stood transfixed, tears streaming down his face. With purpose, he released the dog at his feet and watched Rook run to join his charge in celebration. James collapsed to his knees, falling to the earth in grateful praise.

I have to be honest—even as tears of joy welled up in my eyes I asked, “Is this real? Lord, is this real?”

I’d never actually witnessed a physical healing before. Any ‘healing’ I’d ever heard of seemed like showmanship. They appeared to be more focused on the person administering the healing gift than the ONE and ONLY HEALER of physical and spiritual afflictions. During those brief moments of doubt the Holy Spirit within testified to the truth of HIS power, HIS grace.

I KNEW Aly. I’d walked out her suffering with her. I witnessed her willingness to praise and follow the Lord no matter how dark her circumstances. I knew the very real pain that impacted her and all those she loved. Indeed, this was real. As truth settled into my heart, I prayed that each witness in that moment would receive the depth of what was truly happening.

I learned that two had prayed, believing beyond the shadow of doubt that God was in control of the outcome. I searched for evidence of pride. I found none. There was no

showmanship, only the simplicity of a Father’s love for his daughter and the glory of HIS power alone.

I asked the Lord what His Word says about healing.

“Therefore confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person has great power as it is working.” James 5:16 (ESV)

“... (Such great salvation) was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to His will.” Hebrews 2:3-4 (ESV)

“Does He who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith?” Galatians 3:5 (ESV)

“Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts...” 1 Corinthians 14:1a (ESV)

In my search for truth, the Lord revealed that healing is not by our will, not for self-exultation, and rightly to be pursued.



Returning to the trailside moment on Silly Mountain, I watch Aly leaping up the steep, rocky path with her daughters. I reflected back on Jilly and Aaliyah’s response to this miracle. Both girls shared that they were deeply touched by the miraculous experience at the conference earlier that May. The Lord solidified in their hearts His love and closeness—the realness of who HE IS. One of the girls said emphatically, “If God can answer our prayers like this, He must be real. I have my mom back!”

The Lord not only healed Aly, He also healed the souls of her daughters. The ripple effect of this miraculous testimony will continue to glorify the Lord Jesus Christ.

Our Savior is ALIVE!

It’s true, every person’s walk is different, personal and intimate. Jesus does heal bodies and souls, minds and spirits because—like the name of James and Aly’s ranch—upon us all . . . His GRACE FALLS.

P.S. Aly’s left leg was tested multiple times by her physicians and therapists. Today, it’s not only stronger than her right leg, it’s stronger than either of her legs have ever been.



A PILE OF ROCKS

BY SARAH AYDT

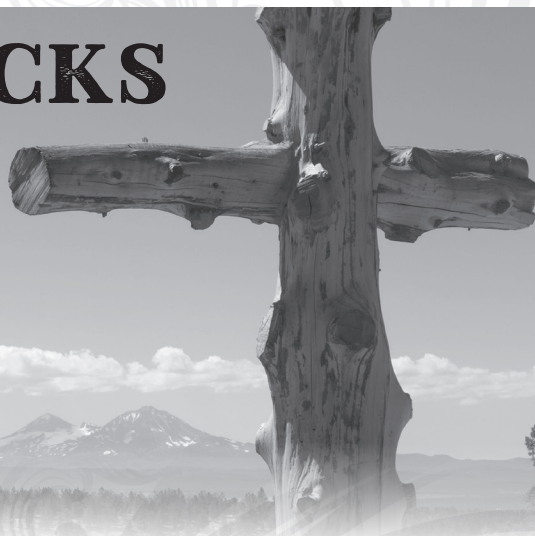


Photo: Sarah Aydt

A pile of rocks? I thought to myself. Why rocks?

It was Thursday, the second day of Crystal Peaks' Deeper Conference. Everyone, attendees and staff alike were encouraged to find a quiet place on the ranch for individual prayer time. I found a nice spot to sit at the West ranch by the pond. Slipping my shoes off, I allowed the water to gently tickle my feet as I began to pray. "Lord, reveal how You might use someone like me at an event like this?" Resting in His presence, I sat in awe of what He had already started the day before.

Jesus had spoken softly to my heart, "Collect some rocks." In obedience to what He'd said, I started to gather rocks and put them in my coat pocket.



Photo: Judy Jeffery

As I carefully chose each rock, I prayed over its purpose. I knew the Lord was on the move and had something AWESOME to say—What I didn't realize yet, was what that 'something awesome' would mean.

I'd met Julia earlier on the first day of the conference. The Lord pointed her out to me. I sensed she was someone He wanted me to get to know. When I first sat down beside her, she seemed hesitant and didn't say much—but I felt Jesus prompting me to just sit with her, despite the silence.

After our morning quiet time, I greeted Julia with enthusiasm because I knew the Lord had something special for her. I could tell she was still a little apprehensive but the ice was broken and she offered a bit more conversation. She was starting to trust me and began to open her heart. I sensed that Jesus—at some point—wanted the two of us to pray together up at the cross. There was a mixture of excitement and a bit of fear in her eyes as I relayed to her what I was discerning. The Lord allowed this response to show me how to pray for my new friend.

From that moment on Julia and I talked freely whenever we had the chance. In fact, after dinner we stayed late into the evening. By the time we left the ranch, it was so dark we couldn't even see each other's faces! We talked about life; making decisions, listening to God, and everything in between. She'd

expressed to me some areas in her life that needed prayer. She felt God wanted her to fully surrender those things to Him before she left the ranch. To my surprise, she ASKED ME when we could make time to go up to the cross and pray!

In my heart I praised God. "Thank You JESUS that this quiet young woman, so moved by Your Spirit, is willing to face her fear and walk forward in what You are speaking to her heart."

Suddenly, feeling weight in my pocket, I understood what the rocks were for!

Friday evening rolled around. The time we'd planned to meet had finally come. The sun setting behind the mountains looked like Jesus had taken the time to paint a beautiful picture of His love for us. We sat on the little bench under the cross and gazed at the colorful sky. Tears began to flow down Julia's face. She repeated over and over, "I don't know why I'm crying; I never cry. I never cry!"

In that moment, the Lord opened a door for me to encourage her through. I shared with my friend that she was experiencing the deep and profound presence of her King—Jesus. As her tears continued to fall, I pulled from my zipped pocket a small bag. Handing her five carefully chosen rocks and a Sharpie pen, I explained that it was a gift from Jesus.

In a quiet voice, I encouraged, "Julia, if you're willing, Jesus wants you to

release the burdens you're carrying. You can leave them right here with Him tonight." I explained how the Lord led me to pick up rocks earlier in the week.

Now, He was revealing to us both the purpose for the rocks.

Through falling tears and prayer, Julia was able to name the things that were weighing her down. Then she inscribed those names on the rocks. She finished writing and slowly approached the cross, just her and Jesus. Thoughtfully, she laid the stones down at the foot of the cross. Next, she spoke out a simple, wholehearted prayer to the One who loves her most. Once finished, she turned back toward me with a big smile across her face.

Julia walked away from the conference victorious—vastly different then when she came.

The troubles that once weighed her down are now laid at the throne of God.

Left behind—released. Now they ARE just a pile of rocks.



Photo: Kim Meeder

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne."
Hebrews 12:1-2 (NLT)



Photo: Sarah Aydt

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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. All 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.

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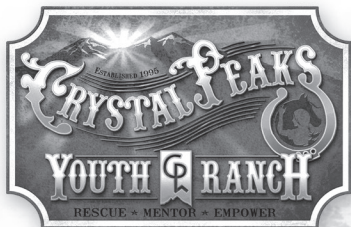
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