

HOPE FOR THE FAMILY

AROUND the FIRE

Spring 2020

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

ALL GOD DESIRES IS A WILLING HEART

By Sarah Perez

"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.

To Him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."

(1 Peter 4:10-11, ESV)

In my position as the Crystal Peaks administrative coordinator, I have the beautiful honor of being a "gate keeper." One of my roles is to receive, answer, and direct all incoming calls and emails that come into the office. In this simple way, I love sharing life with our Ranch supporters.

As I hear myself say, "I would *never* do that," I find it almost comical that God continues to put me in nearly those exact positions. Although I haven't always been fond of talking on the phone, I am grateful that God relentlessly works on softening my heart to see ministry opportunities in *everything*. I'm learning to say "Here I am, Lord. Send me." And it's beautiful how with every intention to serve and impact others with Jesus' love—in return—I end up being served, inspired and filled with hope. God is such a good Father in this way. All He desires is my willing heart.

Recently, I came upon this message:

"Hi, my daughter Rachel is 10-years-old. From the age of 5, she has wanted to start a horse and Bible camp. Around that time, she came up with a name: Prayer Oaks Ranch. She designed a logo, the layout of the barn, facilities and associated things . . . she even chose a board of directors! I would LOVE to surprise her with a visit to your Ranch. She can get a tour and see exactly what it looks like to run a ministry like yours with her own eyes. She is very passionate and serious about this calling God has for her!"

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While reading the message, I sensed God say, “*You KNOW this story. You were once this 10-year-old daughter. You were once this child that was filled with so much fervor for what I laid on your young heart.*”

A deep awareness spread through my soul. God was encouraging me to join her family and help them fan into ignition the flame lit within this little girl’s life. I dove in with the full intention of allowing the Holy Spirit to impact this child’s life through me—I didn’t yet realize how much this child was going to impact my life.

After some wrangling with our Ranch schedule and the family’s road trip plans, we finally settled on a date that worked for everyone.

God arranged all the special details. The tour fell perfectly on a Fellowship day—and—Kim’s schedule allowed her to be present. I was thrilled to be the bearer of this good news! I told the mother and she was excited to make this visit more than a Ranch tour—but a *heart tour*. We kept in touch while we waited for the big day, each anxious to see how this beautiful surprise might unfold.

Throughout my life, God has encouraged me to be the person that I needed when I was younger. With that in mind, I was determined to press into this tour like holy fire into gasoline. My hope was for this sweet girl’s selfless passion to ignite into life. I asked God to use this time to set her heart ablaze and keep her fighting for her calling.

One month later, it was finally time for the big surprise. Meeting the family was such a delight. The mother and daughter were giddy with excitement and filled with awe. Watching the girl process actually being on the Ranch moved me in a way that’s hard to explain. She was lost in God’s wonder, quietly taking in what her calling could look like. In that moment, I sensed God say, “*I placed a calling on your life when you were young too. I want you to return to this childlike wonder. Is your heart willing to believe again?*”

Even though it was God given and orchestrated, I had let my fervor fizzle out and even started to believe God’s calling on my life was too big for Him—how silly!

I’m so thankful we have a good and patient Father. God knew I was going to meet this family. I thought I would ignite the passion and dream of her heart—but He knew all along—she was going to reignite mine.

When our time together came to a close, I was left with awesome wonder that I hadn’t felt in a long time. A little girl encouraged me to dream with God and believe in my calling again.

The next day, I received a beautiful email from the mom:

“I just wanted to thank you so much again for yesterday. That was such an amazing experience for us! My daughter has been passionate about her calling for so long. My husband and I have been a little apprehensive, but visiting the Ranch has really given all of us the vision now and so much excitement! I know you’ll be seeing us in the next 8 years as we wait for her to turn 18 and apply for your internship! She is still just glowing. She also told me that she wants to start having monthly meetings with her board of directors—so they can talk about ideas and pray together. I love that. And after wearing her Crystal Peaks t-shirts so proudly the last couple of days, she’s decided she wants to get her logo printed on t-shirts for her board of directors to start wearing.”



Photos by Suzi Baxter

I was amazed. This little girl was *not* allowing her age or anything else to prevent her from fiercely chasing what God had laid on her heart. She was already using the tools God had entrusted to her and she was calling them into life. I was powerfully inspired by this girl. Moved by her example, I realized the only thing holding me back from my calling becoming a reality . . . *was me*. I could clearly see how God was just waiting for my heart to be willing to believe again. He didn’t want me to have everything figured out; He wanted to hear me say, “Here I am, Lord. Send me!”

Months later, when I couldn’t think this little girl could get any more inspiring, God poured through her again. I received another email from her mother:

"Rachel turned 11, today. I always ask what she wants her birthday theme to be. This year she said, "Prayer Oaks Ranch." She invited her friends over to play games in the backyard, climb trees and play with the chickens and guinea pigs. She requested that no one bring her birthday gifts. Instead, she found a list of requested donations on the CPYR website and asked her friends to bring items for the kids and horses. Those sweet girls brought gifts of leather gloves, tarps, boots, squirt bottles, bird house kits, safety goggles and other necessary Ranch items. Together, they spent a long time packing the box, making sure it had a happy and healthy dose of birthday confetti sprinkled all over the gifts. The next night was her family party. She had also asked her grown up family members to not bring her gifts, but contribute money so she could send half to CPYR, and put half in her Prayer Oaks Ranch savings account. Her family went above and beyond in supporting her. She was SO excited by how much she was able to send to the Ranch, WAY more than she dreamed. After tucking the cash into the box with all the other gifts, she mailed it, with great excitement."



Young Rachel's inspiration didn't end with me. She also inspired her parents to keep dreaming. Recently her mother wrote about the impact of their trip:



"Our tour was amazing. I can still feel her body leaning into me, shaking with excitement. Her little hand gripped mine so hard that it hurt. Being at the Ranch was not just awe inspiring for Rachel; it was for my husband and me as well. Seeing how God used your property and horses to become His hands, feet and heart . . . now we finally understood Rachel's dream! Up until that point, we supported her and encouraged her, but didn't really understand it, until we were able to experience it at CPYR. Suddenly that cherished book, Hope Rising, came alive. I was humbled—humbled by my daughter's heart. That night after the tour, we were blessed to meet Sarah. She took my daughter out to introduce her to some of the horses. Then we all walked across the road to take part in another emotionally power-packed moment for us, Fellowship. We were so honored and grateful to experience Refuge. It is the potluck/in home church night at the Ranch. And, we were able to meet Kim! That was such a gift. Rachel was absolutely struck speechless. Since I don't suffer from that malady, I told Kim about Rachel's dreams and goals. She not only signed my daughter's book, she prayed over my baby and her vision and dream. It was so powerful, another moment I will never forget in my life. I just stood there with tears and chills as she committed Rachel's ministry to Jesus."

Rachel is 11!

Her beautiful, selfless, tender heart for the Lord continues to inspire me. Everything He has given her—she has given right back to Him. Challenged by her selflessness, I've wondered, "Was I living my life like this? Was I stewarding everything entrusted to me well? Sigh. God is so patient with me. In the most beautiful way, He allowed a child to reflect my calloused heart and the truth that I was still allowing my fears, doubts, and age to stop me from fiercely pursuing my calling. Through a girl, He is encouraging me to believe again.

God reminded me of my favorite verse: *"But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong."* (2 Corinthians 12:9-10, ESV)

It's through our weakness that the power of God shines brightly. He makes the impossible—possible. He moves mountains for us. He reignites flames in us. He brings healing to us. There is *no* limit to the goodness He has in store for us.

Recently, a child taught me that all God needs to make a dream a reality . . . is a willing heart.

A LETTER FROM A FORMER ORPHAN

A friend of mine died last night. I'm overwhelmed right now, so I may ramble a bit, but there is a point to this tribute.

It was so sudden and unexpected. We were just hanging out. I mean, my whole family was just hanging out with him this past week. I now live with the knowledge that I will never see him again, at least, not this side of Heaven. My young girls reacted as befitting to their separate personalities. One wept openly. The other will be thinking about him for weeks. It's so cliché to say, "I wish we'd spent more time together," but I'm saying it now.

Because he lived in the States and I live in Canada, there was that whole "international border" thing between us. But that didn't stop me or my family from loving him well. He was such a great influence on all my girls. And, my wife was the first one of us to meet him when she helped him move into his new place so many years ago.

If you ask ten different people to describe somebody, you'll get ten different answers with some degree of sameness. While I can't speak for others, this is how I saw him and what he meant to me:

His background was that of an athlete equipped with very high ability. His chosen event was the high jump, and he had the medals and trophies to prove his status as a two-time national champ.

Personally, I never saw him jump over so much as a tumbleweed. But behind his age-softened eyes and encroaching gray hair, I recognized a fierceness merely muted by the hands of time.

His passion to work with children who'd been marginalized, neglected, and suffered multiple types of abuse was his new calling. Having been every one of those things in my childhood, I watched him with



great appreciation. He was present and attentive, and worked to bring wholeness to all. His gentleness with kids was abundantly clear. If his heart were a comforting blanket, he shared it well.

What else can I tell you? When describing another, there is so much to say. Well, he definitely had a reputation . . . and it wasn't always stellar. Like me, he was the smallest in any crowd and could always be expected to challenge the biggest and toughest in short order. For him, pushing buttons and pulling pranks was not merely a behavior; it was a way of life! He got the short end of the stick a few times, but for the most part, he got away with his antics time and again.

With me, he wasn't overtly emotional, but more the strong and steady type. You had to earn his trust, or at least, I did. And once I was within his circle of friends, even then I couldn't count on him for any outward signs of emotion. As often as we could, we would drive the nine hours to the ranch to visit him and our "far-away family." Typically, we would first be happily overwhelmed by seeing Troy and Kim, Jeff, Sarah, Anne, and the rest of the gang, always so good for my soul. But him? Pah.

I would literally have to seek him out and give him a gigantic hug. I could clearly see how uncomfortable this made him, so I did it as often as I could . . . HA! He would return in short order to whatever it was he was doing beforehand. Then, he would wait for me to start babbling all the usual small talk and family news that was needed to bring him up to speed. He knew that when I ran out of things to say, with trepidation, I would bring up the more serious stuff—like my brain cancer surgeries—and the resulting effects on those I love.

Even while writing this, I hear others' voices ringing in my ears. They remind me of how deeply blessed I was to know him, and that I should remember all the joy he brought to my family and me. In this moment, all I simply comprehend is that he made our lives richer and fuller, and it is for that very reason that I will miss him so much.

Last night, after we received the awful news, my wife uttered profound words of wisdom. In reaction to my feelings of complete shock and pain, I blurted out through angry tears, "Loving anything really STINKS for all the hurt and pain you feel when you lose it!" Without missing a beat, she said with gentle love, "The things we love the most . . . cost us the most."

As a Christian, I am keenly reminded of how God's love for the lost—for me—was so great that He sent His only Son into this world. As the church, we celebrate Christmas for the birth of Jesus with thanksgiving and joyfulness. Yet, the exclusive purpose was for Him to eventually die . . . for us.

Jesus left the side of His loving Father and the glory of Heaven with a willing and obedient heart for one reason only. He came to this earth and bore the suffering for all humankind—Why? Because He loves us so very dearly.

It's a true statement, "The things we love the most . . . cost us the most."

What Jesus loved the most cost Him everything. And He freely gave all He had—His life—so that you and I could have everything—life in His love.

With realization that our days are so precious, I encourage you to fully embrace what costs the most—and yet is completely free—the love of Jesus Christ for you.

While thinking about these truths, I close this tribute to my beloved friend Jacobi. He was a handsome, compassionate, impish, bay gelding once rescued by Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch—and through the love of Jesus Christ—went on to rescue me.

Postscript from Ian

As a side note, it is important to share how incredibly honored and humbled I was when the Ranch gave Jacobi my name. I never dreamt after my first Ranch trip back in 2004, that anything like this would happen.

As an adopted boy, Troy, Kim and the staff welcomed me into their Ranch family, and into their equine family—and most important—encouraged me deeper into the truth that I belong to God's family.

Throughout my journey of being single, to married, to having kids, Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch has always been a part of my life. Now, as my family comes down to engage this place, I want them to make their own special memories of what the Ranch means to them. My hope is for them to have a place to visit where they feel safe and loved—after I'm gone—whenever that might be.

For Troy and Kim's friendship I will be eternally grateful. I mean that, because they have been 'Jesus, with skin on' to me.

From a former orphan who is now a son,

Ian Jacobi

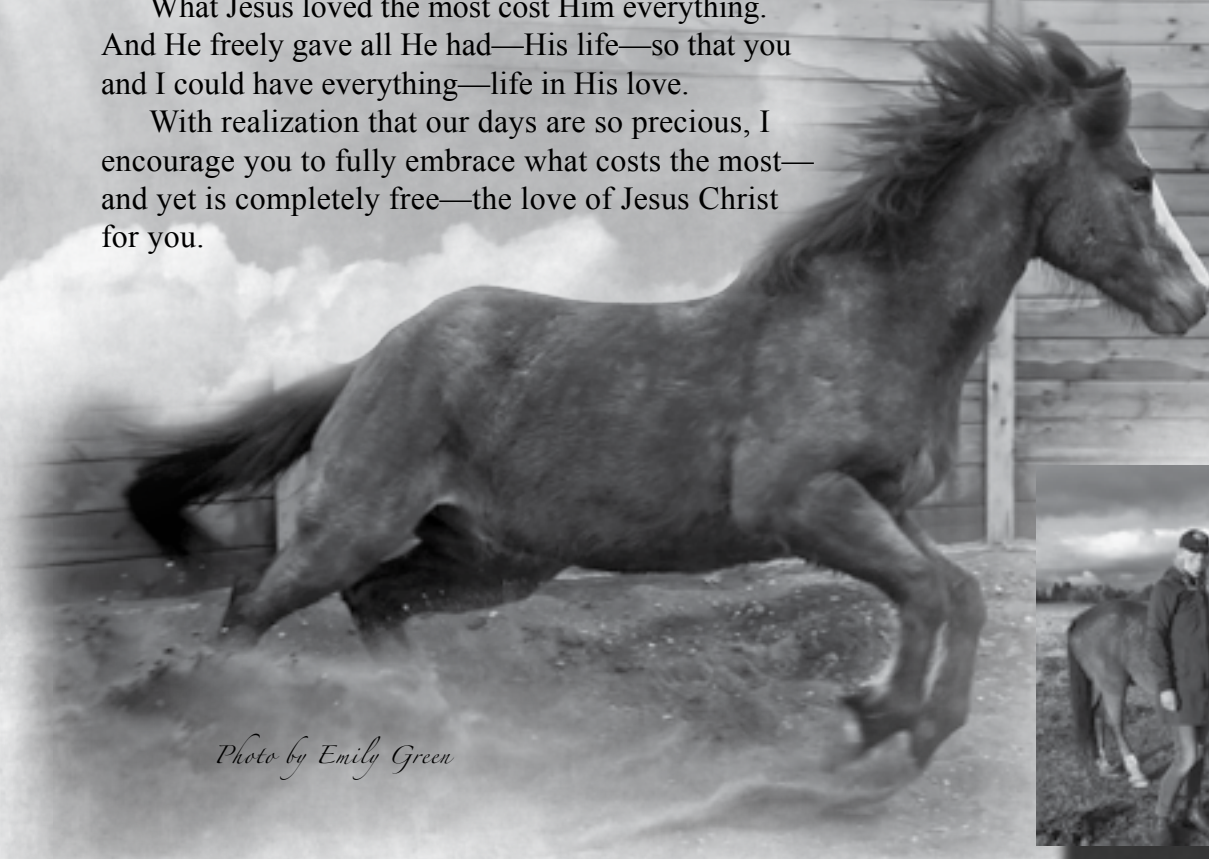


Photo by Emily Green



Photo by Maricke Jacobi

GENUINE REFUGE

BY Troy Meeder

Genuine refuge . . . a condition of being safe or sheltered from pursuit, danger or trouble.

Lately, I've been deeply troubled by the recent visceral assault on the church and its leadership. Let me be *very clear* here, I am not speaking of what God's Word calls "false teaching" or words contrary to scripture. False teaching *must* be called to account. The attack I speak of is leveraged from personal pride and position. It is not based in scripture nor is it shared in love.

History records that the body of Christ—the church—has been under attack since the resurrection and ascension of Jesus. Confrontations against the church then and today can be expected from those in opposition to the things of Christ. Sadly, today's primary opposition is pouring through social media like putrid sewage . . . and the pointing finger is pouring through those who call themselves . . . *Christian*.

The body of Christ is at war with itself.

Social media has become the battleground of the twenty-first century church. Vocal platforms like Facebook and Twitter, once used to communicate with friends and family, has degraded into a bloody theater used by Christians to eviscerate faith. Not unlike Saul who persecuted the early church, we who call ourselves "faithful" are attacking our own brothers and sisters . . . the beloved of Christ.

"But Saul was going everywhere to destroy the church. He went from house to house, dragging out both men and women to throw them into prison." (Acts 8:3, NLT)

Saul was a Pharisee. A man of precise religion. From childhood, he was trained by the church elite. But when faced with the love of Christ, he chose persecution because the teachings of Jesus did not fit into his religious worldview nor his messianic beliefs. In arrogant presumption, he sought to destroy what he didn't agree with. (Acts 9)

Are we not doing the same today? Although different in application from the extreme actions of Saul, are we not destroying each other when we throw the 'beloved' of Jesus into verbal prison with our words? Our Father's heart breaks every time we attack those who don't "do church" the same way we do. Instead of positioning our heart over Jesus' truth regarding the speck in our neighbor's eye, (Matthew 7:3-5) with the stroke of a digital key, we send into the global network words of condemnation over those in whom the Lord delights.

We scoff at every aspect of a pastor's life, right down to his wife, cars, clothing, family and friends. We gossip about evangelists who fly first class or even have their own plane. Instead of speaking His love, we shoot criticisms like flaming arrows at churches where the music is too loud, the music is too modern, the music is too dead, they dance, or they sit like lumps, the pastor speaks line by line or the pastor shares conceptually. On and on the arrows fly, as we position ourselves like judge and jury, slamming down the verbal gavel over what we feel is wrong . . . instead of simply *loving what is right*.



So, how do we change?

Saul became Paul. The destroyer of the church transformed into the protector of the same. How? He was fully confronted with Jesus' love. Paul was forever changed—heart—soul—mind—strength—when he saw Jesus face to face. His spewing slander and pointing finger withered in the presence of the Author of pure love. When Paul encountered Jesus—truly saw Jesus—he saw nothing else. (Acts 9) His religiosity melted in the furnace of loving freedom.

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free." (Gal. 5:1a, NLT) The same church he once sought to destroy became the same beloved body he would later give his life for. Such is the power of the transforming love of Jesus.

As individual members of this body, we each have the same opportunity. We can also be changed if we wholeheartedly seek the presence of the Author of Love—Jesus Christ. Our arrows of judgement incinerate when we walk into the presence of the One who endured the cross for our sin—for *my* sin.

By design, the church is a refuge for those reaching for salvation . . . not a retreat for sin.

The body of Christ was meant to be a place of safety and freedom for all sinners. Because, "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23) ALL have fallen short. ALL are lost without a Savior. Since we're united by our fallen nature and now redeemed by Jesus' love . . . shouldn't we instead gather together and celebrate the One who has redeemed us? Isn't it time to exchange pointing fingers of accusation for raised hands of adoration? Isn't it time to raise a hallelujah for the One who reigns forever?

THIS is our desire for the "Refuge."

Currently, Refuge meets the second Tuesday of every month. Our doors are open for all who seek to receive Jesus' love and in return, give Him adoration through worship. Our gathering is simple. Dinner is served at 6:00 pm followed by worship and a straightforward message. Come when you can, leave when you must.

Everyone is invited . . . because the love of our Lord and Savior . . . is for all. Come and share a meal with us and find refuge in the power of His love for you—a beloved member of the body of Christ.

Within this place, there is freedom to worship the One who has set us free.

THIS . . . IS GENUINE REFUGE.



Photos by David Pinkerton

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REVIVAL RISING, EMBRACING HIS TRANSFORMING FIRE.

Understand that most of the world around us is dying without hope. Friends, co-workers and family members are struggling to find their way through the darkness of sin and suffering. But Jesus has not abandoned the souls He came to save; He wants *you* to make a difference! He is calling *you* to carry His life-giving love into places of brokenness and sorrow.

Genuine revival happens when passion for God breaks through our human restraints and ignites one heart after another with the flame of His love.

With enthusiasm that will set ablaze your passion to reach the hurting, Kim Meeder encourages us to let the holy fire of God's presence fill our heart, soul, mind and strength. As our fear and pride melt away, those around us who are losing their battle for hope will be transformed by encountering His redeeming love in you. This—is Revival Rising.

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