

HOPE FOR THE FAMILY AROUND the FIRE

Spring 2018

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

THE DIVINE ORDER OF OUR PAIN

By Kim Meeder

Dawn broke on a cool spring day. I was rushing to finish many work-related items before leaving town with Troy for some much-needed rest together. Hustling to complete all my morning chores, I asked Troy if he wanted me to make a quick fire in the large woodstove in our living room since this is where we spent our morning devotional time. While making a quick cup of coffee, he responded “No thanks, I won’t have time to enjoy it, but you can make one if you wish.”

This was the first warm-ish morning we’d had in a very long time. The early spring had brought much cold rain, unusual for our high desert area. Because the sunny morning was so inviting and I would be leaving soon, I decided for the first time this year to *not* make a fire.

Troy rushed down the stairs and off to finish his remaining meetings. I rushed into the kitchen and cleaned up the hasty breakfast mess and loaded all our gear into the waiting truck so we could make a clean getaway. Then—I sat down with my Bible in my lap—next to a cold woodstove.

Acknowledging before the Lord that my morning was all out of order, I apologized that I didn’t sit down with Him FIRST before all the morning hub-bub. I prayed. I worshipped. I felt His pleasure in this time together. I also



sensed an unusual ‘knowing’ about this morning . . . something ‘special’ was coming.

I opened my Bible to the book of Acts, one of my all-time favorites. I read in chapter five where the apostles were doing many miraculous signs and wonders (verses 12-42, NLT). The entire area was bringing their sick and demon possessed to them and ALL were healed. When the high priest and leading officials heard how everyone was flocking to these men, their loving message of hope and the powerful anointing upon them, sadly, their response was not one of reception . . . but jealousy.

Upon hearing truth in love and given the choice between their pride or redemption—they chose pride. Reacting to the ignition of their own jealous envy, they put the apostles in prison for doing nothing more than healing the sick and speaking of hope in Jesus. The apostles were doing *exactly* what He had commanded them to do and what the Holy Spirit was guiding them to do. And when they encountered deep rooted pride, they were falsely accused and thrown into jail. I was left to wonder about the collision of human pride and Heavenly hope.

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Suddenly, I heard a loud scratching, bumping commotion over my head. I looked up and the sound was clearly coming from inside our stovepipe right at the apex where it exits our home. Our front room ceiling is vaulted so the stovepipe is about 15 feet high and it was instantly clear that something was now stuck inside the pipe. I could hear what could only be a bird falling deeper and deeper into a prison that it could not escape. It labored for a long time unable to fly in the tight space. Its claws were useless against the smooth walls.

Finally exhausted by a struggle it couldn't win, I heard it fall the remaining distance into the large firebox. In an instinctual effort to escape this foreign place of pain, the bird slammed hard against the heavy glass door of our woodstove.

I knelt to look in at my unexpected captive.

It was a small female starling. I recognized this species through cautionary tales from my grandfather. Despised, this invasive thief crowds out native birds by sheer number. They consume vast amounts of food sources and take over active nests built by smaller birds. Flying in great number, they devastate crops in minutes and leave behind feces that can host disease. Their destructive behavior has earned them the negative collective reference of a "filth or scourge" of starlings. Preceded by such an unsavory reputation, perhaps some would let the bird before me die in her predicament.

I studied her through the sooty glass. She appeared exhausted from the fight and frightened to be in this black, ash-encrusted place.

Clearly, there was no way out for her. She couldn't rescue, save or help herself. There was nothing she could do to improve her circumstances. She was a prisoner. Left in this dark, charred tomb . . . she *would* die.

My prayer was simple, "Holy Spirit . . . speak Your truth."

I allowed the starling to rest for a moment while I pondered how to release her outside—and not into my home. She needed to be calm or she could perish within the struggle.



Photo by Kim Meeder

My solution was to drape an old towel over the front of the stove so the glass was covered and the box was completely dark. Donning a headlamp so there was only one direct source of light, I carefully opened the door. She was cowering in the very back of the box, hiding in the only way she could. Slowly, I extended my hand toward her. She didn't move. Tenderly, I placed my fingers around her tiny body and held her for a moment. She didn't struggle. She seemed to completely accept this new dilemma.

Gently, I withdrew my arm with a terrified bird in my palm.

Blinking up into the light, she looked at me, and I looked at her.

She was beautiful. Perfect in every detail. Her feminine bill was long and slender. Her black eyes were shiny and alert. Although her deep gray plumage was smudged with soot and she was

completely covered in ash—she appeared to be okay. I walked out onto our deck and slowly opened my hand and flattened my fingers. I didn't need to tell her what to do next. Hardwired with her life's purpose, she *instantly* flew away.

On this day, a small female starling was simply doing what she was created to do—and things went terribly wrong—but they didn't *stay* terribly wrong. As a matter of fact, surrounding her cataclysm, there was purpose. There was order, divine order.

This was the first morning of the year where no fire was kindled. Because the prior evening was mild, we didn't stoke the fire for hot coals to remain until dawn. My initial perspective of this morning was jumbled, out of order, chaotic. My normal routine of meeting with God first thing got all tangled up in the unexpected demands of getting ready to leave town. When I finally sat down with my Bible in my lap, it was nearly an hour later than *my* plan.

Returning to my chair, I repositioned my Bible and continued to read. "*The high priest and his officials, who were Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But an angel of the Lord came at night, opened the gates of the jail, and brought them out. Then he told them, 'Go to the Temple and give the people this message of life!' So, at daybreak the apostles entered the Temple, as they were told, and immediately began teaching.*" (Verse 17-20, NLT). Indeed, this is what *they* were hardwired to do.

As only the Holy Spirit can, I started to understand the parallelism before me. The apostles were also considered a 'filthy scourge', scum of the earth, a rabble to be despised, even destroyed. (Matt. 9:11, Mark 2:16, Luke 5:30, Acts 5:33, NLT). Like the starling, the Apostles were doing what they were created, commanded to do

and things went terribly wrong—both ended up in a very dark place—but God’s loving ‘divine order’ was there first and both were miraculously delivered. And not only were they released from further suffering, through their actions, they chose JOY in the process.

After being beaten with whips, “The apostles left the high council rejoicing that God had *counted them worthy to suffer disgrace for the name of Jesus.*” (Verse 41, NLT).

It’s a fact that within every life, hard things are going to happen. As we pursue Him deeper into His will—at some point—we will each end up in a charred, black prison of our own mistake or another’s prideful envy, false accusations and explosive rage. It’s HIS light that exposes darkness. When sin is revealed by the light of His love, there’s only two genuine responses. We can soften in the Presence of His loving truth, repent of our sin and change direction. Or, we can harden our hearts and reject His loving truth, and continue headlong down the black path of self-justification and pride.

When I peered into the firebox and saw the starling, I had a choice to make. I could love her by rescuing her . . . or reject her and let her die in the black tomb she’d fallen into.

Likewise, when God the Father looked into the firebox of this world and saw me, covered in soot, doomed to die in the black prison of my sin . . . He chose LOVE. And by His love, this life was rescued and released into His freedom. The Father’s love always results in freedom . . . freedom from **every** prison.

Second Corinthians 3:16-17 proclaims this truth, “*But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.*”

FREEDOM. Although forged in pain, it’s always birthed through His divine order.

Whether you’re in a dark prison because of your own sin—or the aggressive sin of another—makes no difference to God’s ability to lovingly heal and free you. When we’re entrapped in a painful place, the truth is this: it’s the Father’s love that’s holding the door open for us to escape. Once the Holy Spirit led the apostles out of prison, they didn’t run back inside and close the iron gate behind them. Once I opened my palm, the starling didn’t fly over my shoulder and back into the firebox. I didn’t have to convince, beg or plead for the captured bird to fly into the freedom being offered. When it comes to leaving our painful circumstances, God shouldn’t have to convince us either.

You and I have this same choice . . . a choice that no one can make for us . . . *but us.*

We can choose to stay locked in our pain, a self-appointed prisoner in a charred tomb—or—we can choose to fly into the FREEDOM that Jesus gave His life to purchase for us. No matter what pain you’re facing, know this; right now, HE is holding the door open for you to step out into the FREEDOM that He has already purchased for you.



Friend, Jesus didn’t die on the cross so that you and I could stay locked up in our junk or the junk of those around us.

Indeed, Jesus did die on the cross. But He didn’t *stay* dead. Nor did He stay confined within the prison of our sin for one minute longer than necessary. He *rose* and left that prison behind—*never to return.* And in the doing, He rolled the stone away . . . and that stone can NEVER be rolled back. Because of this truth—*today*—we can follow His lead and walk out of our painful tombs with the same confidence that Jesus did.

“Lord Jesus, I come to You now. I ask that You open my eyes and help me see what You see. Help me fully understand that the tomb of pain I feel locked within, isn’t locked at all. By choosing to languish in the pain I face, I personally nullify the power of Your freedom in my heart. Jesus, I didn’t fully understand this truth before—but I do now—and on this day . . . I choose YOU. I choose Your freedom over my pain. I choose to follow You out of my tomb and into the brilliant glory of Your All-Consuming Love. From this day forward, I evict the pain that’s been trespassing in my heart and I ask YOU to take Your rightful place as King of my life. Today, I proclaim with my actions that pain is no longer my god. Jesus . . . I proclaim that YOU ARE MY GOD.”



NEVER, GIVE UP HOPE—EVER

BY JUDY JEFFERY

My alarm sounded at 2:45 am. It seemed like I'd just drifted off to sleep. Still tired but excited, I rolled out of the comfy vintage bed in Kim's office. After readying myself for the day, I met Kim at her kitchen table. Side by side, we spent time in God's Word with a hot cup of coffee. Once fueled by truth and a little 'wake-me-up' we gathered our things to leave for the airport. As is her way, my friend knelt to say "good-bye" to her canine kids. While stroking them affectionately, Seven, understood this farewell but Zip looked hopeful that she'd be invited to come along. Kim turned off the light behind us and quietly closed the door. We tossed our luggage in the back seat of her truck and embarked on yet another journey the Lord prepared for us.

I've been intentional to embrace these 'middle-of-the-night' trips to the airport as treasures. The cab of the truck fills with prayers of worship and thankfulness to Jesus that we *get* to go out and share the Gospel. This time embodies the sweet expectation that His providence over our journey won't return void—and it never has.

After takeoff, I looked out the small oval window of our plane. From 37,000 feet, the dark-indigo sky filled my view. As time passed, a lighter shade of blue fell over the blanket of clouds, signaling dawn was approaching.

'Looking out' has always given me a sense of calm. I've learned within the stillness to go deeper into the Lord's Presence. In this place of pause, I no longer look down at the temporal cares of this life. It affords me a broader perspective of all that He's done, is doing, and will continue to do.

It was late fall and the view across the cloud tops that morning was glorious. With the white canopy spread out far below me, images of my mom filled my heart.

Only nine days prior . . . she had passed away.

My thoughts flowed into a prayer, "*Lord, I'm so grateful that reconciliation isn't hard for You.*"

The reality that Mom was no longer on this earth was surreal. I reflected on the years of broken relationship between us. I marveled at what Jesus does with the word 'impossible' and how His desire to redeem began at the cross . . . and has never stopped.

Our past and all its pain can become a powerful weapon against us when left within the enemy's deceptive hands. Always locked and loaded to torment, he loves to remind us of prior offenses and taunts us into believing life will always hurt. This is his perpetual lie. Yet, for most of my life, I

believed his deceptions. One of those lies was accepting I'd never have a loving relationship with my mother. Throughout my life, I worked hard to bridge the gap between us, only to see it fall apart again. Several years earlier, the break between us was so brutal that our relationship was completely severed. I chose to endure years of painful offenses—but one final blow of personal betrayal—I couldn't. The enemy's venomous strike through my mother was so vicious that I was certain I'd never breathe right again.

As if a chapter was pulled from the book of Job, unimaginable loss and pain was entrusted to me. Only I could choose which direction to go—the world's way or God's way.

Once I fully acknowledged Him as my **SOVEREIGN** Lord, He offered me an opportunity to embrace HIS hope. "*What kind of testimony would you be of Me, if you stayed in this painful place? Will you trust Me and WAIT FOR ALL that is to come?*" I understood the world's way of remaining self-justified never solved anything—so I chose His way—and waited in hope.

Seven years passed.

I had little to no contact with my mother. In simple faith, I trusted in the Lord's Sovereign plan—and made it my ambition to *pray*.

Within this season, Mom started to experience excruciating head pain. An MRI revealed she had multiple aneurisms in her brain. Opting to not have surgery, the

doctors sent her home to wait out the inevitable. During this time, Jesus did the impossible. By following His way, His timing, genuine forgiveness closed the cavernous distance between her heart and mine. As only *He* can, our relationship was so FULLY RESTORED that I sat beside her as she gave her heart and life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. At 91 years of age, my momma took His hand of hope—and truly embraced His salvation.

After seven years of distance between us, I invited Momma to come stay in my home for four days. Her heart change was honest and sweet. She said things like, "I had my faith in God all wrong. I always felt like I had to *see* to believe. That isn't faith." And, "Did you know that Jesus *wants* to do miracles?" Then she'd share a 'glory story' to support that truth. Further evidence of her transformation came each night when I tucked her into bed—she'd place her hands on both sides of my face and say, "I love you Judy. I appreciate you so much."

From the abundance of her heart flowed words of genuine repentance; genuine love.

The Holy Spirit gave us a powerful covenant of scripture. "*Now all glory to God, who is able, through His mighty power at work within us, to accomplish infinitely more than we might ask or think.*" (Ephesians 3:20, NLT). Jesus gave me what I could only believe would be possible through Him—a woman in my life who was more than a mother and sweeter than a friend. He gave me a dear sister in Christ!

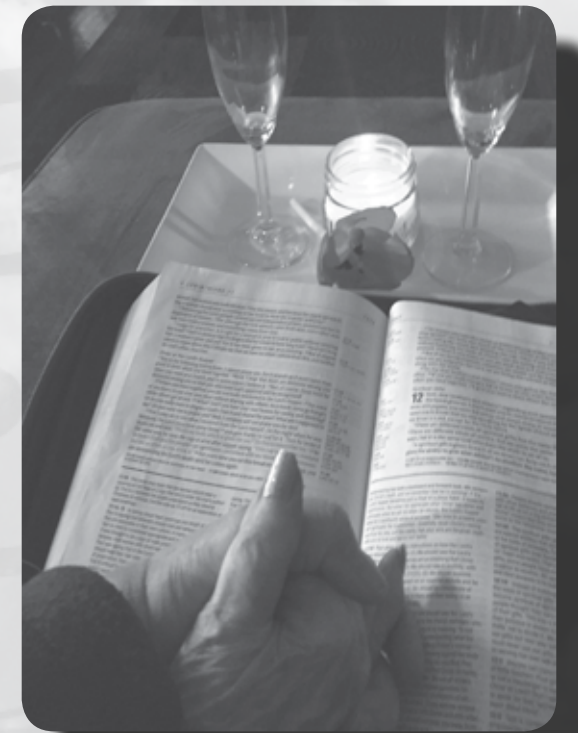


Photo by: Judy Jeffery

"Momma and I sharing communion together for the first time, January 1, 2017."

Our new ‘normal’ was to chat on the phone every week. Though her spirit was full of Jesus’ joy, as the months passed, I could hear her voice weaken. She was losing strength.

Beyond the aneurisms, she started to mention other pain in her back, abdomen and joints. In September, mom was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer. The disease had spread throughout her entire body.

A month later, knowing that time was running out, I called to check on her. Her voice was faint and she slurred her words. We made sure nothing between us was left unsaid. Momma spoke tenderly and encouraged me to not worry about anything. She’d spent time in thought and concluded that her life had come down to two essential things; love for Jesus and her family.

There was a quiet break in our conversation. Then the daughter became the mother. It was my turn. I encouraged her through tears. “Momma, don’t worry about anything. Your family loves you and will be fine. You can go be with Jesus. This last year has been incredible. You’ve been MY BEST mom. I love you so much.” She let out a deep breath and simply replied, “Okay. I’m in so much pain. I’m so tired. I’m ready to go. I love you Judy.” Our call ended with joyful thoughts of Heaven and how we will spend eternity together forever.

Just when I thought it was all over. Jesus had one more hope filled blessing for us.

Two days after our phone call I went to share Momma’s last moments with my siblings. God’s timing is perfect. We’d spent most of the day together and were going to step out of Momma’s room and stretch. As Janis, my sister, bent down to tell her we’d be right back, Momma opened her eyes.

I knelt on the opposite side of her bed and we each took one of her tiny hands. With our siblings gathered around the room, Janis suggested that we sing “Amazing Grace.” After that there was silence.

Remembering I had recently downloaded lullaby songs of scripture set within music, I placed my phone speaker close to Momma’s ear. As “Be Still and Know” (Psalm 46:10) and “Peace of God” (Philippians 4:7) played, we felt the Lord’s Presence come. I raised my open-hand and prayed out loud, “Holy Spirit, please have authority over this room.

We ask that Momma would feel You with her now. Please peacefully carry her home to Heaven.” Before I could say, “Amen,” I saw my precious momma shift her body and set her jaw. As if to muster every bit of her remaining strength, she drew a long deep breath through her nose and let it out slowly.

With her beautiful powder-blue eyes focused straight ahead, everything within her indicated she was running hard to finish the race of her life. Janis and I cheered her on. “Go Momma!” “You’re doing so good!” “We’re so proud of you!” “You can do this!” “You’re almost home!” “You can

go to Heaven . . . go Momma go . . . just go!”

Before all present her eyes widened in sudden expectation. I had a strong sense of what she saw and exclaimed, “Mom! It’s Jesus, He’s here for you!” Her eyes darted upward above our heads. “You can see Him . . . take His hand . . . go with Him!”

I will never forget the look in my mother’s eyes as her soul waited on the edge of eternity. She was about to embrace Perfect Love in a way she never experienced here on earth.

Then Janis looked up at me and exclaimed, “Judy, can you feel that?”

An electrical current pulsed through Momma’s hand. Where her finger tips lay on my wrist, a warm laser-like sensation raced up my arm, across my chest, and pierced the top part my heart. Then the sensation shot straight across my back and exited through my scapula. Fully expecting to see Jesus Himself, I quickly turned to look behind me.

In that moment, I heard Him speak succinctly to my soul, “*It’s finished. I have your mom and all your painful past; ALL of it.*” I looked back to see Momma’s eyes close. Just like that . . . she was with Jesus.

My dear momma was *home*. She was in Heaven—held within His arms of eternal hope.

The plane bounced through light turbulence and my thoughts jostled back to the present. Lost in the wonder of all I’d experienced with Mom, only now did I notice that the clouds below had cleared. A panoramic view of the Rocky Mountains stretched far beyond the horizon. Once again, looking out over this beautiful scene provided profound perspective.

*“Jesus looked at
them intently and
said, ‘Humanly
speaking, it is
impossible.
But with God
everything is
possible.’”*

Matthew 19:26

Bad things happen. It's a part of life in a sin-riddled world. It's true that sin leaves incredible wreckage and devastation. But Jesus didn't die on the cross and rise again so that we could *live* in our despair. When we choose to hyper-focus on our painful circumstances it makes us hyper-vulnerable to the enemy's lies. Jesus gave His Spirit of TRUTH to comfort, counsel, and offer His genuine peace through everything we will ever face. (John 14-16, NLT).

It was within this Spirit given place of peace that my heart found the courage to wait on His plan. *"And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up."* (Galatians 6:9, ESV).

I've reminded myself over the years that God has a plan and a purpose for my pain—even though I had no idea what He was doing. I only knew to WAIT on Him, to TRUST Him and NEVER, GIVE UP HOPE—EVER!



Photo by: Judy Jeffery

I shudder to imagine what my life would be like if I'd chosen the world's way. The enemy, and our flesh, wants to justify that 'giving up' is easier. Yet easier is *not* what's best—because brokenness festers within past unresolved wounds. What Jesus healed within me through those years of perseverance *far* outweighed the pain.

"For as the Heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9, ESV).

By choosing God's way, *my* impossible . . . became His *possible*. Through Jesus, complete reconciliation was forged. The Holy Spirit *accomplished* more than I could've asked or imagined and today, 'MY JOY' IS COMPLETE!

Now, it only makes me smile to remember that my precious momma's name was—*Joy*.

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2018 SIMILAR MINISTRY EVENTS



Photo by Katie Jacobsen

Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch will be hosting two 'Empower the Ministry' events in 2018.

Our 'Information Clinic' will be held May 9th – 12th. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn how to start a new ministry and shoulder with others who are also pursuing God's heart and plan. If you've never been to a Clinic at Crystal Peaks and feel that God is calling you to be a part of serving kids and families in a similar way, we encourage you to join us in May.

Our 'Deeper-Jesus First-Ministry Conference' will be held April 25th-28th. Its sole purpose is to encourage, challenge and strengthen each participants relationship with Jesus Christ. It's designed for those who have attended past Clinics and are actively leading or working within a Similar Ministry.

For more information or to register, please visit our website:

<http://www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org/our-4-pillars/empower/>