

# AROUND the FIRE

SUMMER 2014

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

## THERE ARE NO SLUMS IN HEAVEN

BY NORA SEALE

It's no secret around Crystal Peaks that Zeke is my special equine friend. When I'm with him, he never fails to bring a smile to my face and a sense of joy to my heart. Other than admiring his unique looks and engaging personality, I've often wondered at the deep affinity and connection I have with this horse. Recently, I realized we have much in common.

Zeke was brought to the ranch when he suffered an injury and his owner was unable to afford his care. Thinking that no one would want to take on the challenge of a seriously injured horse, her solution was to have this beautiful boy put down. A phone call from a concerned veterinarian who refused to end his life opened the door for him to receive a new home. Instead of death, he started a new life here at the ranch.

From the day Zeke arrived, I've been fascinated by him. I spent as much time as possible at the quarantine paddock where he was recovering from his injury. Because his body needed healing, he had to be kept separate from the rest of the herd for nearly a year. In a special way, I felt I could relate to Zeke through my own understanding of the separation that occurs when trauma and shame invade a life.

In our fallen world, childhood is often filled with difficult and traumatic events. Incidents of violence and sexual abuse often create patterns that continue into adulthood. Without the Lord's intervention, the aftermath of pain and shame

created by repeated physical violations can propel a young person down destructive paths. My life reflected this pattern and as an adult, I made terrible choices. When faced with an unwanted pregnancy as a result of sexual assault, I chose abortion. Worse, even in different circumstances, I again chose abortion as an acceptable solution.

The guilt and shame I experienced was all consuming.

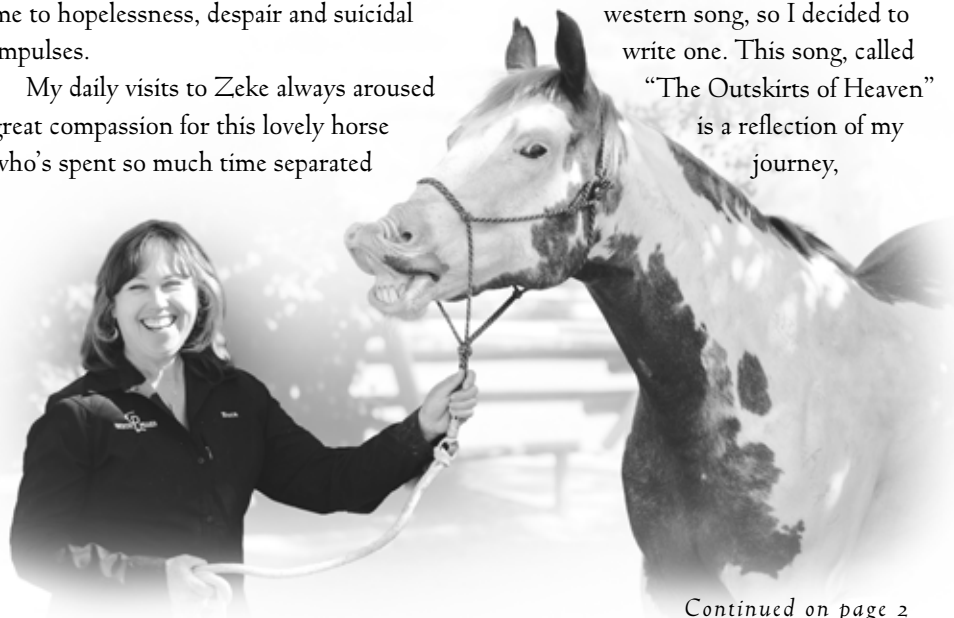
Even when I came to know Jesus, I couldn't accept His forgiveness. In my distorted thinking, my sin was *larger than His grace*. The presence of physical damage and illness that I directly linked to my 'choices' became my personal confirmation that I was 'unforgivable.' I felt separated from God for many years. This pain drove me to hopelessness, despair and suicidal impulses.

My daily visits to Zeke always aroused great compassion for this lovely horse who's spent so much time separated

from the main herd. My heart would stir as I watched him gaze longingly over the fence at the other horses. For a long time, I lived in a ... 'quarantine paddock,' created by my own shame and self-condemnation. Like Zeke, I longed to be free from the isolation I was convinced I deserved. I secretly held the ungodly belief that even in heaven, I would be separated from the presence of God.

Deep inside, I believed that heaven must have its own 'quarantine paddock' for folks like me. In a candid moment with a friend, I expressed the feeling that if heaven had a slum, that's where I belonged—that I would be condemned to live on the outskirts of heaven. As I said this out loud, I recognized the utter lie that had invaded my heart. At the time, I commented that this notion sounded like a tacky country

western song, so I decided to write one. This song, called "The Outskirts of Heaven" is a reflection of my journey,



Continued on page 2



*I started my life in sickness and in strife.  
Victimized, abused, full of shame.  
I carried that load down a long and rocky  
road.*

*I didn't know that's why Jesus came.*

*How could I be free?  
Didn't know God loved me.  
Livin' on the outskirts of heaven.*

*Three pregnancies ended by me,  
just added to my guilt and my pain.  
Though I heard Jesus call my name,  
I couldn't reach him through the shame.  
So, in condemnation I remained.*

*I wasn't free.  
How could God love me?  
Livin' on the outskirts of heaven.*

*I knew salvation in my head.  
But my heart was filled with dread.  
Livin' with the consequence of sin.  
Those bad choices that I made,  
almost put me in my grave.  
Shame and sickness were killin' me within.*

*How could I be free?  
Questioning his love for me.  
And livin' on the outskirts of heaven.*

*Well, I finally realized I'd been listenin' to  
HUGE lies!  
And His blood covers ALL my sin.  
Though my body may not heal,  
His love for me is real.  
And redemption did finally sink in.*

*I'm singin' now I'm set free.  
His grace is enough for me!  
I won't be livin' on the outskirts of heaven.  
I'll never live on the outskirts of heaven!  
There's no such place as the outskirts of  
heaven!!!*



Praise the Lord for His great mercy! His love and grace broke through all my years of lies. Now, I'm able to accept forgiveness and healing. I love the sweetness of His presence and know that I will bask in it for eternity and be *in the center of His love*. There ARE no slums in heaven!

Nearly all the horses that arrive at the ranch are given new names. The names are carefully and prayerfully considered to reflect hope in what God will do with these wonderful animals. The name "Ezekiel," which means "God will strengthen," was chosen for my special friend, Zeke. The Lord fulfilled the promise of this name by healing and strengthening this beautiful horse. These days there are an abundance of names and characteristics I could joyfully claim for myself. My favorites are *redeemed, restored, hope and beloved by God*.

The Lord is fulfilling the promise of these names in my life everyday.

At my workstation in the Trading Post, I have a perfect view of the horse paddock. I watch in delight as Zeke thrives in his new environment. He's healthy, strong and responsive. Once scheduled for death, his redeemed life is now a gift to many wounded children.

I can't help but contemplate the parallels in our lives. Once I was full of despair and headed toward death. My self-made 'quarantine paddock' of guilt and self-condemnation kept me isolated from God. But in His great mercy, the Lord rescued me. He's brought me to a place of health, wholeness—and most importantly—hope through His goodness and faithfulness.

God, who began the incredible work of redemption is always faithful to see it through! (Phil 1:6).

I laugh frequently as I observe Zeke's playfulness within the herd. He's full of the joy that accompanies a redeemed life. These days I too have frequent times of intense joy, knowing that—like my equine friend—I am *fully* redeemed. My whole being resonates with the Psalmist when he proclaims, "Shouts of joy and victory resound in the tents of the righteous: the Lord's right hand has done mighty things! The Lord's right hand is lifted high; the Lord's right hand has done mighty things! *I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done*" Psalm 118:15-17 (NIV).



Photos: Katie Jacobsen Photography

# Freedom is like

# Cantering

BY JUDY JEFFERY

Halo shifted his weight. The golden gelding positioned himself near the mounting block so I could reach his back with ease. After placing my feet in the stirrups, I rubbed under the blonde mane cascading off his neck, thanking him for his patience. Perhaps by doing so, I was also extending a bit of a peace offering. My first riding experience occurred when I was in the fifth grade. It ended in two minutes, as the strong-willed steed brushed me off his back into a barbed wired fence. Today, despite feeling a bit tense, my quiet horse proved there was no need for a peace offering. Halo sensed my apprehension and his gentle demeanor put me at ease.

Kim was already seated on Covenant, her gelding. She strolled up beside me with her familiar *'do you trust me'* twinkle in her eye. I've come to realize that this special twinkle often surfaces when she knows something I don't. Because she loves me, I've learned to trust her.

After an hour of lessons on basic horsemanship, my riding coach was encouraged that I was catching on quickly. Halo was the perfect gentleman as we circled the arena in a trot. Glancing at Kim with a questioning look, she simply nodded. I gave Halo the cue and he powered into a smooth canter. Around and around the arena we rode.

At first, I bounced in the saddle waning side to side. With one hand loosely gripping the saddle horn and the other reining my horse, I struggled to find my center of balance. Over time, something began to happen. As my frustration gave way to determination; I found myself making a choice. My breathing, muscle tension and heart rate settled as I chose to trust my horse.

Finally moving in unison with Halo's gait, I let go of the saddle and took up both of my reins. With rider and horse

moving as one—stride by stride—I was overwhelmed with a profound sense of peace. The Lord was illustrating something. He wanted me to know something new about *Him*.

My testimony would affirm that I'm no stranger to a painful past. Kim has stood beside me through some of my greatest difficulties. When Halo and I slowed to meet her, it didn't surprise me when she asked, "What's the Lord telling you?"

I usually need to gather my thoughts before I speak, but not this time.

"I think the Lord's showing me, not only what freedom looks like... but how it feels!"

Taking my feet out of the stirrups I dismounted and continued, "I've been captive to my past, bound by the lies of the enemy. To be honest, I've chosen to be a slave to my own painful history. It wasn't until just now—when I relaxed and let go of the saddle horn and put my full trust in Halo—that the riding experience transformed from a struggle into *freedom*."

"This life is all about what we choose to hang on to; our circumstances or

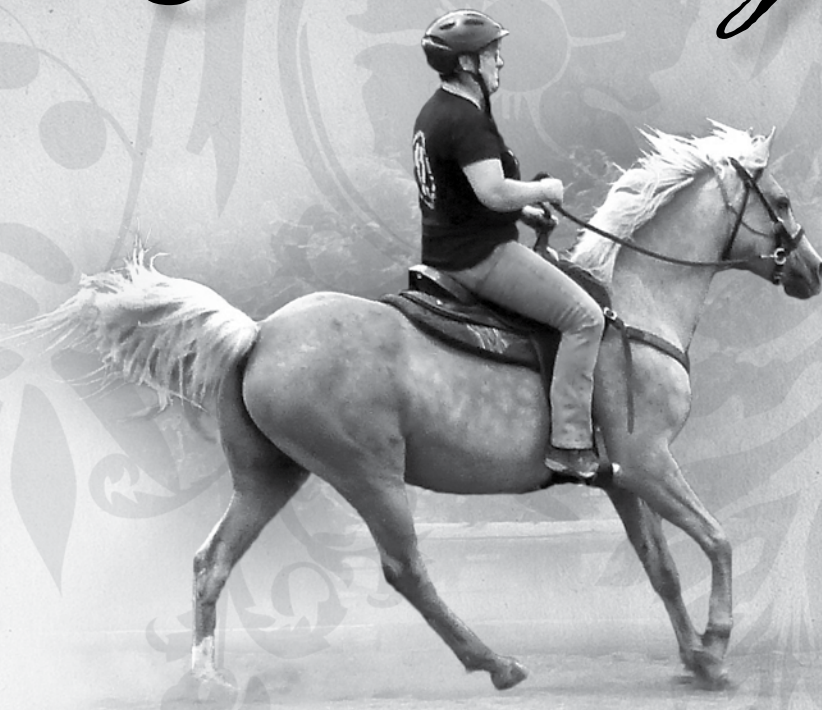
freedom... and Who we choose to trust in for that freedom."

"Boy, that'll preach!" Kim said with enthusiasm. Then she continued. "Galatians 5:1, says, *'It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.'*" For the first time since giving my heart to Jesus, this verse finally made sense!

I'm free! Freedom reigns in my life because of Jesus Christ.

I know with every bump in the road, every attack from the enemy, every inevitable trial or temptation of this life, freedom will ring true. Inexpressible joy comes at the very thought of cantering around the arena on Halo's back. This image reminds me that freedom is like cantering. Freedom affords me peace, grace and the ability to choose Christ over all my circumstances.

Because Jesus has broken my chains of suffering and pain... the tribute of my life... is to live free in Christ... and *remain* in that freedom.



# ★ QUESTIONS ★

BY SCOTT GWIN

*“Lord, I want answers. I desire to know what You want. I want to know You. Give me answers.”*

*I hear the Father say, “My son, you seek to know Me and what I want. The answer is no, I will not give you answers, because answers will not make you seek after me. I will give you questions.”*

Long ago, I heard this commentary, “Questions are like pimples. While some people have more than others, and different types are hard to resolve, everyone has at least a few.” These words of wisdom were spoken by an old man whose comment stayed with me long after his name was forgotten.

I’m talking about the ‘hard to get rid of,’ important questions. They’re the questions that challenge and change us the most. They’re the ones that drive us to find the answer.



“Where’s home?”

Con conversationally, I started to dig a little deeper into the handsome boy before me. He’d been coming to the ranch for several weeks. I knew he’d been struggling with being in a new place. It had been a while since the boy had been *home*. Currently, he was living with other boys that had been removed from their residence for various reasons. None of the reasons were healthy. None of them were good.

Little did I know that the questions to follow would be a step into the ‘everyday miracle’ that would become this young man’s story.

“Home is where you’re from,” he responded to my question. “You mean where you were born?” I clarify.

“Yeah,” he says with satisfaction. “My home is in Washington.”

We’ve haltered his favorite mare, Elska. Our little Icelandic horse—by that definition—she is far, far away from home. That becomes my next question. I ask the boy, “Is Elska’s home, then, in Iceland?” There’s a pause. With our fuzzy little horse in tow, we hear our own steps as we walk through the paddock. “No, she seems at home here,” he says. We quietly tie the small mare to the hitching post and get our brush bucket to prepare her for riding.

“She wasn’t always at home at the ranch,” I say. “She had to leave her prior life behind to get here. When she did arrive, it took some work for her to find her place and feel comfortable.”

“Then, I think home must be where my family is,” he says confidently as he looks out across the herd.

“Hmm,” I counter. “What if you have to move away from your family for your job when you’re older? You will not be living at home until you come back, right? If that’s the case, then we should probably send Elska back to Iceland to be with her family.”

“I think she has made a new family here,” he responds. “She seems pretty happy.”

“You’re right. She has been adopted here for good,” I conclude. “But what about you?” I ask. “Where does that make home for you?”

The brushing stops and his eyes roll upward as he thinks. The quiet seems as thick as the horsehair floating in the air

around both of our heads. It’s springtime and that means a great deal of brushing, specifically for Elska, who always grows a winter coat thick enough to endure an Icelandic winter.

His response takes the form of a question, “Maybe home is just where I am right now?” I watched his face contort into an unpleasant look, clearly revealing he doesn’t like that answer. He’s wanted to go home for so long. He’s mentioned it every time I’ve seen him. It’s his motivation. It’s his hope. If this is the answer, it means he’s home here, a thought that he doesn’t want to deal with.

“If home is wherever you are right now, then when you go to stay at a hotel, you’re home, right?” I prompt. “That means Elska would’ve been *home* when she was in the trailer making her journey to us and you would be *home* if you spent the night at your friend’s house.”

He answers, somewhat relieved, “No, that really doesn’t make sense.”

As we continue to talk, he rides as he always does—bareback. At the end of the session, we return Elska into the paddock with her ‘new family.’ Once again, horse and boy have gotten to know each other better by asking each other questions in their own horse-to-human language.

*“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness,  
and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

—MATT. 6:33 (NIV)

A week goes by. He mulls over the unresolved question. He returns with no answer.

His slumped posture and tiresome plod up the driveway reveal he's thought about the question—wrestled with it—and it has beaten him. This question is hard for him to resolve.

The small talk goes by faster today. It's awkward. He knows what I will ask, and I know he doesn't have an answer. I cut to the point, “So, what do you think? Where's home?”

“I don't know,” he says. “I can't think of a real definition that I like. They all seem to have holes in them.”

“What are the holes?” I ask.

“Well,” he starts, “It's not a place you go to for just a short time. Home needs to be somewhere that you stay.” He pauses before speaking again. “And it needs to have people there that love you, like family or friends.”

“What else?” I ask.

“I don't know, but it needs to be fun. Well, not fun exactly, but you have to want to be there.” His eyes sparkle as he dreams of this place. A place he thought he knew well, but has now become a mystery.

“That sounds good,” I agree. “I think all those thoughts are great. And they seem right to me too. So if ‘home’ needs to be these things, where is it?” The light in his eyes dim as he grasps for answers that are beyond the reach of his outstretched arm. His brush stops moving and his gaze drops to the feet of the little mare that he loves. “I don't know. I can't think of anyplace.”

“Hmm. That sounds like heaven to me,” I say. “It's permanent. Once you arrive, you never leave. Someone lives there that loves you more than anyone else. And from what I know, it sounds fun and I can't wait to go.”

The gleam returns to his eyes as they rise to meet mine. His curiosity overflows into simple questions, “What do you think it's like? What's fun about it? Who's there that loves me? Is my family there? Is my dog there? Are there horses there? How do I get there?”

So many questions.....

*“Thank you Jesus for not giving all the answers. He's seeking. I'm seeking. We both are wondering more about You than we did before. With each small answer there are so many more questions. We're both learning. You are giving. You are amazing!”*

*“But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”*

—Matt. 6:33 (NIV)

(If you have questions like these, please feel free to call the CPYR office at 541-330-0123 and talk to one of our staff. We don't have all the answers, but we would love to seek His answers with you).



# OPPOSITES ATTRACT



BY JEFF WOODFORD

**H**ave you ever heard the term “opposites attract?” Often this little quip seems no more than skin deep. I’ve found the hearts of two attracting *opposites* are sometimes better described as kindred spirits.

This spring, my theory proved true as I entered my first session with Caleb—a 17 year old from a place called Bridges Academy. Little did I know, I was about to witness kindred spirits align between a horse and boy in a manner I would’ve never guessed.

For the last three years, Crystal Peaks has partnered with Bridges—a local therapeutic boarding school for teenage boys who are struggling with emotional, behavioral, and/or academic issues. It would be easy to expect the young men from this program to be difficult to work with. Yet, I always look forward to my sessions with these guys. They’re some of the most willing, respectful and teachable young people I’ve been blessed to know.

I love seeing the new faces among the Bridges boys when they arrive. What will this guy be like? What’s his story? Where’s he coming from? I’ve learned to not hold back my questions. Despite the fact that they’re less than happy about being in a group home—which is rarely by choice—they’re usually willing to tell their story.

While Caleb and I stacked firewood, I discovered through our conversation that he was from my hometown. He went on to mention how close he was to his dog and how much he missed her. I didn’t realize it, but the Lord was already working on a special connection between us.

With our chore completed, we strolled



©True Blue Photography

through the herd, looking for the right horse for his first session. Caleb’s timid approach revealed his ‘newness’ around horses. I was introducing him to Buckshot, a small Appaloosa gelding that I’d all but chosen for him, when a tall mare named Ele approached Caleb from behind. She nudged his back and he jumped. Until that moment, Caleb was unaware that she was even there.

I quickly explained that Ele’s not really part of the session program. She’d been Kim’s personal horse and endurance racing partner for many years and now she was retired.

Refocusing on Buckshot, I began to place the halter around his neck. I turned to see that Caleb had figured out Ele *really*

likes having her neck scratched. Her expression showed that she thoroughly enjoyed his company, or at least his strong fingers digging through her shedding winter coat. As I waited for Caleb to finish with Ele, the Lord placed a question in my mind. I’d already picked out Buckshot, but the Lord said, “*Why not Ele?*”

I gave Caleb the choice. We could work with Ele, but only do ground work. I briefly explained how people can have very meaningful *conversations* with horses by learning to communicate in the way an equine understands. I shared a short summary of Ele’s history, explaining how she’d been physically beaten in her younger years and consequently required a very sensitive handler. Yet, for those who earned her trust, she’d run through fire to help them.

Caleb didn’t hesitate. He chose Ele.

I didn’t expect this tough, muscular boy to bond with such a meek, graceful horse. But as we groomed Ele, Caleb told me about the home he’d left behind only a few weeks prior. He shared more about his dog, and the inexplicable bond between them. My initial assessment of this young man was blown away by his deep sensitivity.

Pondering his childhood, I wondered if there were more similarities between him and Ele than I’d realized. Gears were turning within each of us. Suddenly, the picture made sense in my mind. Caleb’s closeness with dogs, the fact that Ele had ‘chosen’ him just minutes before—were all by God’s design—not mere coincidence.

Caleb untied Ele and we walked to the

*Time seemed to stop as leader, boy and horse soaked in the moment. It no longer mattered that Jack was far away from home, his dog and his family. This horse loved him and wanted to be with him.*

round pen. I reminded him of her sensitivity and how she would quickly respond to our every action, body position and cue. We worked through the basics of round penning and proper horse communication. I removed her halter so she had the freedom to choose whether to stay close or walk away.

I watched Caleb focus, paying close attention to his body language and how easily the mare responded to him. He didn't always get it right, but that only made him try harder. Ele was quick to forgive and seek his next request.

Toward the end of our session, I exited the round pen and coached Caleb from the gate. Appearing tense, I asked if he was nervous. "No", he responded. I reminded him to breathe. He exhaled deeply, allowing his shoulders to drop and his body to relax. Ele—who'd been cantering around him—similarly relaxed into an easy trot. I could see the trust between them grow. She was mirroring him, following his lead.

I often get goose bumps watching someone communicate well with a horse; I found myself on the verge of tears. Caleb could see that working with Ele consisted of more than just correctly following his instructions. Cue by cue, Caleb was learning the gentle simplicity of communicating with a horse. I watched as his novice stammering turned into an entire conversation with Ele... without speaking a single word.

Realizing she was ready to accept his leadership, Caleb asked Ele to stop. The goose bumps on my arms returned. Calmly, quietly, I instructed him to turn away from her, take a deep breath and relax. As soon as he turned around the mare dropped her head in soft submission and silently walked toward Caleb. He tensed slightly as Ele's breath streamed across the back of his neck. Softly, I instructed Caleb

from the gate. Step for step, Ele matched her new friend as both traveled together around the pen. Periodically, he stopped to turn around and give her a reassuring rub. Caleb was beaming.

Time seemed to stop as leader, boy and horse soaked in the moment. It no longer mattered that Caleb was far away from home, his dog and his family. This horse loved him and *wanted* to be with him.

Without words, I broke the silence as gently as I could by handing Ele's halter and lead rope to Caleb. As a 'thank you' for trusting in him, Caleb rubbed the mare's neck. Her gratitude flowed in response as she nearly melted into his arms.

Returning Ele to the paddock, it became clear that she would be 'Caleb's horse' for the season. I reminded him how Ele might need a little brushing up as she comes out of retirement. I asked if he'd commit to helping me with her as long as he was a part of Bridges. Caleb's face lit up as he nearly shouted an enthusiastic, "Absolutely!"

At the end of our session, I was beaming too. I realized this moment was only the beginning of a story to unfold. These two opposites clearly demonstrated their kindred spirits. Ele's own sensitivity had uncovered the same within Caleb. Learning from each other, they forged a bond of trust.

For me, this story is a perfect reminder of how the Lord communicates with us. He waits for us to respond, to genuinely *want* to come into His presence. We often become entangled with the *stuff* of life. We forget that Jesus is waiting for us, calmly and quietly, to simply turn toward Him. What in your life is keeping you from fully submitting to and trusting His leadership? He wants us to rest in Him, to rest *with* him, and all we have to do is respond.

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

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*Round up 'yer crew and join us! It's time for*

# **CPYR'S ANNUAL**

## **\*\*\* HOE DOWN! \*\*\***

**July 26, 2014**  
**4:00 pm – 8:00 pm**

**W**e encourage ya'll to come wearin' yer best cow-folk duds. You'll need a fittin' western name and don't forget yer best southern drawl!

Come ready to play games, win prizes, swing yer pardner in line dancin', sit for yer family 'pig-tures,' enjoy a teachin' from the Word of God and a big BBQ dinner.



*The ranch provides all the food and fun. No need to RSVP... Y'all just come!*