

RESCUE THE EQUINE

AROUND the FIRE

Summer 2018

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

LET'S GO TO BETHLEHEM!

By Sarah Robinett

A Deep Need

"Dear Jesus, please send us the right horse."

This was a portion of my prayer as I walked through our herd, surveying the gentle, warrior-like elders surrounding me. Many of our four-footed friends recently stepped across the retirement threshold into a much earned life of rest.

While the other horses would return to the main ranch for the delightful chaos of sessions, these senior steeds would now enjoy our pastures in peace and safety for the remainder of their days. Their faithfulness carried many a child into the loving arms of Jesus. Now, it was time for them to pass the baton . . . *but to whom?*

A few weeks later, Kim, my sister, and I found ourselves venturing down a seemingly forgotten dirt road in Christmas Valley, Oregon. Riddled with enormous potholes, the rugged terrain bounced our truck along as we strained to see through the tall sagebrush. Finally, we spied the old windmill that marked the remote homestead we were looking for.

In the distance, I could see the delicate, finely shaped face of their mare. Her inquisitive ears rose above the sagebrush to greet us. The small flea-bitten grey Arabian, watched us with a sweet curiosity. Although her eyes were soft, they were dramatically highlighted with white eyelashes. During our evaluation, which included grooming, handling, and riding, Kim and I exchanged many knowing glances of unspoken approval. Although the surroundings were rough, there was no doubt this 'off-grid' couple had sacrificed much to care well for their animals. They shared how they'd rescued this mare with the intent to serve as a 'temporary home' where she would be well-loved and regain health and trust. Kind, and quiet-natured, I noticed that the little horse's eyes never left us. She displayed an intelligent and eager willingness to do what we asked.

Debriefing together on our ride back home, Kim and I knew we wanted to bring her to the ranch.



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Photo by Lynn Watkins

Profound Provision

A few days later, a miracle began to unfold.

The ranch received a call from a donor who wished to commit funds to a specific horse in need; in honor of a woman named “Elizabeth.” When the donor was told about the Arab mare and our desire to have her as part of our herd, she immediately pressed in and doubled her original gift. Through her generosity, the Lord gave confirmation and completely supplied the finances for the purchase price of our new four-footed friend—and—the first vet exam, dental float, and farrier trim.

God had chosen a horse for us and was proving it by providing in every way.

At the start of Christmas season a few weeks later, we again found ourselves bouncing down that same old dirt road, but this time with a horse trailer in tow. The sweet couple were amazed and grateful to hear of God’s miraculous provision for their small horse. As for the mare, she was happy to jump into the trailer. It appeared she knew intuitively that it would carry her to her new home.

On the way back to the ranch, Kim and I discussed the many ways God had answered our prayers. We were awed by how much He had already written into this little horse’s story. With a new home, and a new season of her life, we felt it appropriate to give our white-coated friend a new name. Each detail rang out like crystal bells in our conversation, chiming one by one . . .

The place from which she came—was Christmas Valley.

The season in which she came—was Christmas time.

The person through whom God provided—was in honor of “Elizabeth.”

This gift to the ranch reminded us of our greatest gift—Jesus Christ.

What name could encapsulate all this?

Within moments, we settled upon “Bethlehem.”

Bethlehem was the meager city where a new baby King entered our world, birthed in a stable. It was where a brilliant star guided Wise Men to worship Him—where skies split open with angelic voices declaring “Glory to God and peace on earth.”—where shepherds first welcomed the Messiah. Bethlehem was where the world was changed forever because this town welcomed the greatest gift to mankind, our Savior and Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ.

We both agreed, “Bethlehem,” would become the perfect name for a little white horse whom we knew was destined to declare the glory of God.

The Welcome

A few hours later, alert and curious, Bethlehem daintily stepped out of the trailer and onto Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch. Lifting their heads from winter grazing, the entire herd of more than 30 horses thundered close, galloping up to the fence to meet her. Bethlehem looked quietly at them and waited patiently for Kim to remove her halter. She even took a few bites of grass before moving closer to the dividing fence to view the herd. Her entire demeanor, amidst amplified excitement and life-altering change, exuded a gentle and quiet trust.

I marveled at her composure and pondered how much I could learn from her. When life-challenges hit and emotions fly—would I choose to confidently trust the Prince of Peace and rest where He has placed me?

Within the first five minutes of her arrival, the Lord was already pouring through this horse, teaching and declaring His truth. And His gift only continued to increase.



Photo by Kim Meeder

I began to train Bethlehem in preparation for our upcoming session season. Her quiet confidence revealed even deeper roots than I'd previously realized. Bethlehem willingly allowed me to ride her on long trail rides—while holding my 4 month old puppy—a highly advanced skill that requires a very special horse. She even insisted on walking gingerly with the precious cargo.

The First Sessions

Surprised, I saw Samantha waiting patiently for me at our Greeters Station. I hadn't seen this 12-year-old in months. Without explanation, she missed our last six scheduled sessions. Her absence left me with the choking sense that her family background of domestic violence had resurfaced and I might not see her again.

But to my delight, there she was. We reunited in a warm embrace. She asked if we had any new horses for her to meet. I smiled and told her that, in fact, *we did*.

Off we went to Bethlehem.



Photo by Sarah Robinett

As we groomed and talked, I eyed our new horse carefully, hoping I would be able to let Samantha ride her off-line. Though incredibly kind, Bethlehem still seemed to be somewhat hesitant of her new place at the ranch. She stood alert, with her head up, as if she were holding her breath, still uncertain of what we expected of her.

Turning my attention to Samantha, I asked, "So, how've you been?"

"Um," she began hesitantly, "I was taken away from my mom before Christmas. Since, I've been in six foster homes."

Her words, full of deep sadness, hung in the cold air between us.

My young friend went on to confide that she was afraid of breaking the rules in her current foster home. She had

only been with this new family for one week. I glanced back at Bethlehem, and recognized a similar *uncertainty* of "breaking the rules." Praying under my breath for wisdom, an idea occurred to me.

"You know what Samantha? I believe God has chosen the perfect horse for you today. Do you see how this horse is standing with her head high and seems to be a bit tentative? I think she's also afraid of *breaking the rules* while she's getting used to her new home."

In rapid-fire, dots of understanding began connecting in my heart as I continued to speak.

"It just occurred to me, Bethlehem's been in her own version of 'foster care.' The people who rescued her before us couldn't keep her and she's been adjusting to her new home here." Then, the realization hit me full force, "She's been adjusting to her new home during the EXACT same time you've been adjusting to yours."

I watched the same realization sweep across Samantha's face. No man could've planned or imagined what God had so perfectly orchestrated. We both knew it. God powerfully displayed His love for this girl through a four-footed messenger that He had chosen. The sadness in Samantha's eyes was swept away by a fresh flood of wonder. A brilliant smile spread wide across her open mouth. In that moment, the Lord was meeting both horse and child in this sacred place of mutual, wordless understanding and love. They both knew what it was to be displaced. They both understood the confusion and fear of finding their role in a new home and family. And, as only God can, through each other, HE was reminding both of them that they were not alone.

Samantha was the first child to ride Bethlehem off-line. Together, they looked radiant, gaining confidence with each stride. A precious girl left that day—not relieved of her challenges—but knowing that she was not alone in facing them. God knew. He showed her that He was at her side, that He was working things out for her good.

"Let's go to Bethlehem!"

As I've shared Bethlehem's story with the children, most are curious about her name; one even blurting out, "Huh? Well, THAT'S weird!" I'm always eager to tell her story and ask what they know about "Bethlehem" in the Bible and how it relates to Jesus. One little child excitedly exclaimed, "Let's go to Bethlehem!" I wondered if she knew she was echoing the shepherds of old:

"Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." (Luke 2:15)

Yes, let's. Let's all go to 'Bethlehem' and explore the hope and gift of Jesus Christ. He is the One who resides today with us, not in an ancient town or forgotten stable—but in our very hearts.

Indeed, the miracle is still unfolding. Jesus *did* send us the right horse. Like this little mare, let us live a life of 'Bethlehem,' choosing to welcome our King and inviting others to come and worship Him with us.



A TANGLED, BEAUTIFUL MESS

BY LYNN WATKINS

During the winter months when the ranch riding season is closed, the horses receive a well-deserved rest by spending time together in several large pastures across the road. Shortly before sessions begin, the herd is moved back and prepared for the upcoming season.

One of the interns and I have been spending some preparatory time grooming the herd after a long winter. Because they're shedding their winter coats, this necessary service is in high demand. Be warned, if you're up to the task of brushing these wooly beasts you need to leave your Chapstick and fleece jacket at home because the hair flies everywhere!

On this day, the air was cool enough for a light jacket, but the warm sunshine felt good on my back. Overhead, blue sky embraced puffy white clouds that looked like cotton. It was blissfully quiet. The horses alternated between napping or munching the first tiny shoots of grass. It was my idea of a perfect day.

I started grooming a sweet gelding named Covenant. This kind gelding has a deep mahogany body with black legs and a flowing black mane and tail. He has a splash of white down his face and large liquid brown, inviting eyes. He's quite the beauty. I haltered him with ease and threw the lead rope over his back. Clearly, he was in no hurry to go anywhere. I thoroughly brushed over his body to loosen any shedding hair before moving on to his elegant mane and tail. For non-horse people, it would



Photos by Bill Watkins

be easy to liken this job of grooming a horse to washing a Saint Bernard—but I assure you—it's not. Grooming is relaxing, even peaceful, and it gives me time to think.

Covenant's mane was in great shape so it untangled quickly. Then, I moved on to his heavy tail. In the realm of horses, tails are as different from horse to horse as hair on humans is head to head. Some tails are short and stubby while others are fine and thin. Some have heavy, coarse hair that's hard to comb out while others are flowing and silky to the touch. Some always look unkempt while others never seem to tangle at all.

As I started to work on Covenant's tail, from my perspective, it was perfect; long, flowing, heavy, and black. While working to comb out the first few strands, I could feel something hard, thick and stuck deep inside. Further investigation led me to find that it wasn't a foreign object—but a HUGE solid ball of wadded up hair. It looked like some creature had built a nest in it! I've combed out bad tangles before . . . but this thing had a life of its own! All I could do was stare at it and ponder how in the world was I going to get it untangled.

I didn't want to cut it out because it would severely damage his tail. I couldn't comb or brush it out because it was a solid mass with no beginning and no end. I had never seen such a mess. Finally, I decided to start on the outer layers that weren't part of the mass. I combed all around it until I got what I could smooth and tangle free.

I laughed to myself that only moments ago, I thought he had a spectacularly beautiful tail. But, I could only see the outside—not the inside—not the hidden part. As I stood there combing and trying to figure out a plan, I started to think about another mess . . . the heart of man.

On the outside, we can appear smooth and "tangle free," acting like we have it all together. When the truth is, on the inside, we're a mess. Perhaps our mess started long ago with mistakes in our past. Maybe we're discouraged and not willing to trust God with our lives. Perhaps we've been hurt and we're not sure how to move forward. Maybe we've lost someone we love, or we're angry and have chosen not to forgive.

At some point in every life, we all face a mess that seems too much to overcome.

Just as I carefully started on the outside parts of Covenant's tail, Jesus carefully starts on the outside of us. He sees the giant wad of unforgiveness, disappointment and pain inside our hearts and He has a unique plan to untangle the mess.

"It is His love for you that wants to make your tangled mess . . . beautiful."

Rarely does He go in and cut it out. Instead, He mercifully works little by little, piece by piece, lovingly restoring us to the beautiful son or daughter He created us to be.

He started on our mess the day He took our place on the cross. Because of love, He willingly took our tangled mass of pain. In doing so, He has released us to choose a daily intimate relationship with Him.

God's Word promises, "Being confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus." (Phil. 1:6, NIV).

I'm so glad Jesus gives us the opportunity to become all He created us to be. I'm thankful He can create something beautiful out of something broken. Covenant didn't have to do anything. He just stood there and allowed me to work. Just as Covenant stood patiently and willingly while I combed out his tail, we too can come to Jesus with a humble and open heart and choose to allow Him to untangle our pain.

I'm grateful for a God who loves us so much that He wants to unravel the mess that is us. Before such love, I want to have an open heart towards Him. I want to be willing to let Him into the deep hidden places so He can transform me into the woman He wants me to become.

How about you? On this day, would you be willing to invite Jesus into the chaotic places within? It is His love for you that wants to make your tangled mess . . . beautiful.

As for me, I'm still working on Covenant's tail. In a few more combing sessions I think I'll have it back to its long, beautiful, flowing self. This makes me excited for that day when Jesus' love will be complete, beautiful and flowing inside me.

So, dear friend . . . here's to an open heart towards Jesus.

BEAUTIFUL INTENTIONALITY

BY KIM MEEDER



Photo by Randy Boverman

Although the calendar said it was spring, the air was still crisp on this high desert day. Some friends and I had just finished grooming our wooly horses in preparation for a trail ride. I carefully layered my horse's tack over my left arm and headed out to gear him up. Stepping into the brilliant glory of a cloudless day, I was left to smile at how thankful I was for my tattered but warm, Carhartt coat.

While crossing the ranch main yard, I looked at the handsome gelding which the Lord had provided for me. He was the only foal born out of C.L.C.'s Freedom. She was a tall, bay, Anglo-Arab mare who was among the first horses Crystal Peaks had rescued 23 years ago. In honor of all that Jesus had started through this lovely mare, the ignition to build a ranch for broken horses, children and families, I felt led to name her only heir "Covenant."

While he was being formed inside her, I dreamt of every powerful body type and bold color combination known to mankind. Finally, I laid my will down and simply asked Jesus to make the horse HE desired for me to have. On the day of his birth, Covenant did not come out a stunning blue roan or buckskin. He came out the most common of all horse colors . . . bay. He was as bay as a bay horse can be . . . just like his mother. Except a narrow white band on the right hind and a generic blaze down his face, his appearance was as ordinary as a colt can get.

I've ridden many, *many* horses, and each is a unique experience of communication. Some respond with an arrogant pride that seems to question every 'ask' for specific movement. Their response usually feels something like, "Oh-alright! FINE! Are ya HAPPY now?!" Some fearful or insecure horses respond with, "Because I don't *want* to trust you, I'm going to evade EVERYTHING you ask!" Some horses who are complacent and lazy usually answer with something that feels like, "Yah, whatever. I'm glad that's important to you—but it isn't to me. I couldn't care less." And some horses are nervous and so anxiety riddled that they feel as if you're astride a shaken can of soda that might blow up at the slightest suggestion.

All these horses will spend *much* time in the round pen, allowed to willingly run in countless circles until their attention is fully acquired.

No matter the personality, the continual challenge is to find the method of communication that will help each horse move *forward* into greater understanding of the will of its

rider. And this understanding would be followed by a willing compliance that *wants* to please its master.

Despite Covenant's common appearance, there's nothing common about his nature. Of the hundreds of horses I've contacted in my life—the horse Jesus chose for me—remains as one of the most sincerely *kind* individuals I've ever known. Yet, as kind as he is, beneath his deep compassion lays a well of sensitivity that I've never encountered in *any* horse.

Riding Covenant is a profound experience. His sensitivity is so acute that he rarely needs a 'command.' Instead, he responds to my infinitesimal body changes of what I'm thinking. Thoughts like; "*Let's, turn right, watch out for that stone, let's canter, lift your belly through this brush, now it's time to slow down and breathe deep.*" Each produces subtle changes in my posture and he *feels* them and responds. For Covenant, wearing a bridle is more for my insecurity than his, as it is rarely needed.

This beautiful intentionality between a horse and master always makes me ponder *my* intentionality between me and *my* Master.

How am I responding to the subtle cues of the Holy Spirit? Am I acting like a spoiled horse with a, "FINE!" retort? Am I treating Him as if He is untrustworthy by continually choosing to evade His Presence? Maybe I simply don't respond because I value my complacent comfort over His will? Or, am I so busy trying to please Him that I blow past every opportunity to actually *know* Him?

What I love most about my sweet horse is his quiet example. I desire to become the Believer that he already is. He's such a tangible reflection of what it means to *listen carefully* to my Master. He knows me so well that he *feels* my intentions for him and does his best to comply. I want to know my Master so well that I *feel* His intention for me—and I do my best to comply. I desire His thoughts to become my thoughts, His will to become my will, His 'ask' to become my utter delight.

I don't want to spend another minute running in circles before my God as He patiently waits for *me* to give Him my full attention. How often we do this, running for days, months, even years—seemingly unable to move forward through our sticky spots of unforgiveness, fear, pain, and complacency. And then, we fall into the trap of blaming HIM that we cannot hear His voice in our times of hardship.

But the truth remains, God doesn't want to lead, heal, fill 'part' of our attention, part of our heart. His desire is to wait until we are willing—to stand before Him—and offer ALL our heart. It's within this place—when both our eyes lock onto His, when both our ears are listening for His slightest breath—that our life yields and is filled with the beautiful intentionality of moving deeper into HIS will.

Just like my sweet horse, I want to listen with beautiful intentionality and please my Master. I'm learning to follow Him wherever He wants to go.

"Come to me with your ears wide open. Listen, and you will find life." (Isaiah 55:3, NLT)



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Encountering Our Wild God is a collection of miraculous true stories. Each chapter highlights the wild, beautiful, powerful and profound nature of our God in a way that invites the reader to take the next step of going deeper into His Presence. The primary purpose of the book is to encourage readers to trust God—His Holy Spirit—more than our senses, logic, experience or comfort. He's calling each of us to move beyond a life of simply viewing Him from the safe distance of our human understanding. He's created His kids to run and jump into the River that is Him. It's within this place that we will experience the limitless nature of our untamable God.

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**ALSO AVAILABLE . . .
AN AUDIO VERSION OF
ENCOUNTERING OUR WILD GOD**

We are so excited for this new opportunity of ministry and outreach. As many of you might already know, Kim's next book, "Encountering our Wild God" was released on June 19th. What you might not know is that she was recently invited to Oasis Audio, a sound studio in Chicago, to record the book in her *own* voice.

After two days of sharing passion, laughter, tears and love through a microphone, Encountering our Wild God is now complete and available in an audio version through your favorite book seller.

It remains our continual prayer that everyone who experiences this book will encounter the Spirit and presence of God so powerfully—they would never be the same—each would be completely transformed by His all-consuming love . . . *for you.*

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.