

My Witness

by Jacelya Jones

14You are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. 15Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it gives light to all that are in the house. 16Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

—Matthew 4 (American King James, "AKJ," hereinafter)

30He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathers not with me scatters abroad.

—Matthew 12 (AKJ)

I don't pretend to be a Bible scholar. That's not my thing. I'm just me—a wife and a mom and a blogger and an amateur photographer who's been writing since sixth grade. And I got saved.

I never knew what it meant to be saved. I thought it was like a denomination. And I never really understood that very big word either. I knew it had something to do with church. And I thought church was just a place. A boring place. A place where they put little kids in basements with window wells and dressed some guy up in a red devil costume with horns.

That happened to me once in Sunday School. They guy danced around with a pitch fork and tried to scare us. So church was that place to me: I had to get up early. I got stuffed into scratchy tights. I had to get picked up by the pastor and his daughter for Sunday School first, because my parents were friends with the family. Unfortunately. It seemed like my little brother and I were the only ones who didn't know all the stories and answers to go along with the colorful worksheets.

At first I was excited to get my own, little Bible. I wrote my name in the front. But by the second Sunday in class, I knew I had not been properly prepared for what was supposed to be 'fun,' and I spent all my time scribbling and drawing pictures wherever there was a free space in the front or the back. I tuned out.

But then Mom and Dad showed up, and we had to sit...and sit...and sit through what felt like hours. Of people thrashing around and babbling and embarrassing me. Or, *speaking in tongues*. Of loud, boring, incomprehensible, passionate shouting. Or, *preaching*. And, on top of it, if you were new, they forced you to stand up. They wanted you to come down.

It was all just some terrible show for people to be on stage and star in. I didn't know what it had to do with God. All I knew was that I got to eat at Bob Evans or Perkins or wherever and to *take off my tights!*

At some point, even for Dad, the primary seed planter of my faith, it all got to be too much. He said something like, God is in our hearts, and we can worship without church. He probably didn't say 'worship.' That's a church word. And though Dad always loved and gathered the sticks of fascination and awe and fear of God, he never used religiosity to build the fire of my faith.

I'm not saying what my dad told me has a Biblical basis or is even true. I learned in law school that there's an exception to the hearsay rule that allows the hearsay to go on the record, arguing that it had a certain effect on one who heard it. I don't know what he meant me to understand, but I heard that it was okay for me to quit pretending I wanted anything to do with church.

The feelings inside of me changed. The turmoil left, because our family was in unity in what felt like a moral and, more important, *intelligent* and *realistic* position. That was pride, but I didn't know it yet. That was judgment, and I had no idea.

Dad says that his parents were believers. I don't really know, because they were never really grandparents. I regret that in a sense that's distant. It's stayed with me, but never touched me, because like the sun or the moon, it's too far away.

Dad had to do a lot of things for himself at an early age. He taught himself to do many of the things that adults usually teach children to do. He read the Bible on his own, and I bless God for that!

He's an incredibly smart man. He has a sensitive heart that surprises me, even after I've been a beneficiary of it personally. He has a mouth that curses frequently. He has demons that chase him. And, he has a love and respect for Father God, Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit that has pulled him by its gravity away from almost certain destruction.

He's a reader. The Bible. Books about the Bible. Books about angels. About Islam. About History. About politics—that is, until recently...

I gave up my political blogging at about the same time and for similar reasons. Basically, we both realized that the source of all goodness, restoration, safety, and hope reside in one Person, and He is our Risen Savior. He was with God, and He is God.

It just occurred to me—as I'm writing this—that God wasn't revealed because of the circumstances surrounding the moment that I think of as my breakthrough; the circumstances were the straw that broke my back.

15Break you the arm of the wicked and the evil man: seek out his wickedness till you find none.

—Psalm 10 (AKJ)

22The light of the body is the eye: if therefore your eye be single, your whole body shall be full of light. 23But if your eye be evil, your whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you be darkness, how great is that darkness!

—Matthew 6 (AKJ)

I prayed for God to come into the cracks in my husband's heart and shine the Holy Spirit in that he might be saved. First I was relying on Romans 10:13: *For whoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.* Then I heard even better news: *31 And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you shall be saved, and your house.*

Acts 16:31 (AKJ). Something you should know about me: I don't know much; I know just enough about God to believe and pray and act as if He can fix big messes that are too much for me—even to think about. I can ask Him to pull me out from rubble I've been digging myself underneath for decades. When I don't even know where I am, I can ask Him, and He'll answer the call.

Joyce Meyer said one day that she kept asking God to fix Dave (her husband), and one day God said: *But he isn't the problem. "Well, who else is there?"* She asked aloud. Now, who knows if she really said or thought that? I can say for myself that my obliviousness, my judgment, my self-righteousness has been similarly hilarious. In retrospect, of course.

My brother and I both kind of believe in curses. Jinxes. It's not godly. But I always half-thanked, half-feared that I'd never broken a bone. My brother broke his arm. But after I saw how itchy a cast is, I realized it wasn't worth the momentary coolness of having people write on it and wearing the sling. He could not *wait* to have that thing off. And his arm had wasted away, lost some of its color and muscle tone...

Thing is, I had a lot of brokenness, spiritually. When that straw I was telling you about finally broke my back, I had to face it that my husband wasn't my problem. It was harder to accept that he couldn't fix me, because he isn't my source. My Deliverer. My Preserver. My *Savior*.

And like my brother's cast, the toughness, meanness, vengeance, rage, depression, judgment, isolation, fear, and idolatry I painted over my brokenness left my spirit atrophied.

13 And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, has he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses; 14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross; 15 And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Colossians 2 (AKJ). I don't exactly know when I was saved, but if it was when I confessed Lord Jesus Christ this year (2013), then maybe my spirit was actually dead till then. I don't know about that either, because the Father sent me to His beloved Son [John 6:37.] I assume that's a spiritual thing. Joseph Prince says that even when the Holy Spirit comes into a person who accepts Lord Jesus Christ by faith that the mind, which has been 'boss' for so long tries to battle with the new direction in which the Holy Spirit tries to take you. The prompting of

the Holy Spirit and not the call of the world is supposed to guide you after you receive Lord Jesus Christ as your Savior.

I wanted to say 'dominate, but that implies intimidation or a lack of choice. But God has given us all free will. Whether we realize it or not, we always choose. And with every choice, we submit. We bow down to the world and its prince, satan¹. Or, we bow down to God and the King of Kings, Lord Jesus Christ.

Beth Moore first presented this notion to me on LIFE Today with James and Betty Robison. When I first heard her—a little after the straw broke my back—I didn't realize how big she is. I just thought she was adorable and easy to listen to. I still remember one session she was ministering (and I should) called "Remember not to Forget" out of Deuteronomy 8. She talked about Galatians 2 during that session, and I still remember "yet not I."

20I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

—Galatians 2 (AKJ)

As much as pride was a problem for me, I know it wasn't me that came between me and my addiction.

I have a history of addiction. Not only to drugs. But to judgment. To vengeance. To rage. To rebellion. To pride and having my say. To working in my will. I didn't know it was sin. I thought sin was lying, but I didn't think lying was that bad. I thought sin was killing, and I hadn't done that.

I'd gotten so drunk that I pooped in a chair in a blackout condition and slept in it till the next day. I was still drunk the next day. One of the girls I'd been drinking with had to have her stomach pumped, and she was a bigger, taller girl. I didn't think that was sinful. I didn't think the fact I lived had anything to do with God either.

I thought homosexuality was a sin, and I told friends I loved (people engaged in that behavior and convinced that it was as much a choice as the high levels of melanin in my skin that make me brown). I just read yesterday a description of sin that explains why I was so lost, why I was imprisoned and didn't see the bars: *When a man or woman commits any sin that men commit by breaking faith with the Lord, and that person is guilty...*

Numbers 5:6 (Amplified). I think the Introduction of Romans in my Amplified Bible calls the book an 'epistle.' I don't know what that means. It took me forever to understand that a lot of the books were written letters. I finally know and believe that the Holy Spirit 'recorded' the Scripture to be included—inspiring its scribes to share particular things in particular ways.

On the other hand, I do know what the Introduction means when it calls the book profound. It is. Ravi Zacharias said that the Bible is simple enough for a child to understand and yet has depths for our world's wise men to plumb—paraphrasing.

On the advice of Joel Osteen, I asked God to help me move further faster. I have started to ask Him to fill me afresh each day with the Holy Spirit. And that renewing is giving me wisdom to see more layers in Scripture each time I look. Sometimes I read a verse and pray, asking in Lord Jesus Christ's name for wisdom from the Holy Spirit, read it again, and sometimes it's like He reorients me and I see it from another angle.

I always thank Father God and the Holy Spirit in Lord Jesus Christ's name when it comes. More and more it does. I trust it to come. As Bishop T.D. Jakes says, You just have to know that it's coming—God's power is coming. The fulfilled promise is coming into a place where human senses can perceive it.

In the dark, I used to fear: I used to be scared of shadows, thinking they might turn to demons. I used to think that monsters from movies might have escaped from the TV screen and show up in the shower or mirror reflections. I was afraid to walk down the hall and rushed into the bathroom to turn on all the lights. Then I'd dread going back out into the dark, because my

eyes had adjusted to all that light. But then I heard Psalm 23:5, Romans 1:18-25 and John 1:5 (Amplified).

That's when I first experienced repentance as I understand it now—metanoia: change of mind, repentance—and changed my mind about God, the devil, and the power of demonic bondage over me. I no longer walk in fear of the dark.

And when it rears its head and tries to take me back, I bind it with prayer. I do what religious people call 'renewing my mind.' It just means I change my mind about what I think about power...and who actually wields it. I change my mind about whose authority I will respect.

5 And the Light shines on in the darkness, for the darkness has never overpowered it [put it out or absorbed it or appropriated it, and is unreceptive to it].

—John 1:5 (Amplified)

4Yes, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for you are with me; your rod and your staff they comfort me.

5You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies: you anoint my head with oil; my cup runs over.

—Psalm 23:4-5 (AKJ)

18For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; 19Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it to them. 20For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: 21Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. 22Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23And changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and four footed beasts, and creeping things.

24Why God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonor their own bodies between themselves: 25Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

—Romans 1:18-24 (AKJ)

Speaking to the me that is still shocked that I am the me I am today (July 2013), I can tell her a little more about the hard heart she has: It is possible to go so long without food, that you can't eat. And it is possible to be dry for so long, that you can't hold water. It was Dr. Creflo Dollar that woke me up. It was a startling feeling to realize that precious, wonderful, educated, Miss Know-It-All me had become numb to the things of God and open to the things of the world.

I guess I could have said that myself, except that I was blind. And there is a reason that the song "Amazing Grace" takes on a new poignancy once you've been saved and are actively seeking God—"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me... I once was lost but now am found. Was blind, but now I see." Though I think Dr. Creflo Dollar relied on Matthew 6:21, Romans 8 puts it this way: For those who are afterⁱⁱ the flesh and are controlled by its unholy desires set their minds on and pursue those things which gratify the flesh, but those who are after the Spirit and are controlled by the desires of the Spirit set their minds on and seek those things which gratify the Holy Spirit. [5 (Amplified).]

I had a leather King James Bible I toted around with me. I never read it. I dusted it off, but never opened the pages. I prayed, but I didn't want to kneel. I might be watching TV at the same time. I was just muttering something, like a shot in the dark—not sure and only distantly concerned whether Someone was on the other end of my apathetic call.

I didn't know it, even though I'd heard the Scripture before, that cares of this world were my focus. They were on every side of me. The fear of them was in my heart and mind. I was like a woman under God's curse: *But if you will not hearken to Me and will not do all these commandments, your strength shall be spent in vain... And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your sun-images... They shall stumble over one another as if to escape a sword when no one pursues them...* [Leviticus 26:14, 20, 30, 36 (Amplified).]

In my case, I thought the American political process was the source of good and would save me and my family and my future. Not God's grace and mercy and love and wisdom. My own political heroes were the idols I turned to and studied and glorified. Not Lord Jesus Christ. Not Almighty God. The American Constitution was my Bible. The "Star-Spangled Banner" was my worship and praise music. The American Flag was my Cross.

A brother-in-law tried to gently warn me that this might be a problem, but swimming in superiority, I decided that he was (sadly) another person who didn't know how to keep religion and real life in their proper places.

Jeremy Pearsons ministered to me once that the pride has a motto, 'I got this!' Well, I thought I could fix my own life—half-marathon for my weight, secular anger management book and workbook for my relationships, positive affirmations for my self-esteem... And, well, I what did I need friends for anyway?

I had it all in hand, and those who thought I needed more God in my life had too much God in theirs! They were saturated and mixing what belonged separate. God didn't have something to do with *every part of life*, right? I was deep into the eye-rolling stage of my life, just feeling bad for the unintellectual masses who had to rely on God for everything! Who had to bring Him into every argument.

And you know what? I'm probably the only woman who ever ran a half-marathon...and lost not one pound—not during training and not after the race. A minister from Zambia came to our church a few Sundays ago (July 2013) and said to us that Abraham's son, Ishmael is symbolic of doing things in your own strength. It came to me a couple of days after that that reading that anger book (highlighting every page), running that race, smoking pot to calm my frayed nerves (after which I would pray and feel closer to God) —were all Ishmael births, sad fruits of my own labor.

Then I read this today: So then [God's gift] is not a question of human will and human effort, but of God's mercy. [It depends not on one's own willingness nor on his strenuous exertion as in running a race, but on God's having mercy on him.]

Romans 9:15-16 (Amplified). *As in running a race...*

19 For I fail to practice the good deeds I desire to do, but the evil deeds that I do not desire to do are what I am [ever] doing.

—Romans 7 (Amplified)

4 For Christ is the end of the Law [the limit at which it ceases to be, for the Law leads up to Him Who is the fulfillment of its types, and in Him the purpose which it was designed to accomplish is fulfilled. That is, the purpose of the Law is fulfilled in Him] as the means of righteousness (right relationship to God) for everyone who trusts in and adheres to and relies on Him.

—Romans 10 (Amplified)

So, I was listening to Pastor John Hagee this morning, and he was going off on Adam and Eve again—about how he wants to kick them in the shins or the pants. *They ate us out of house and home...* Now don't get it twisted: I respect the pastor. On June 28, 2013, I posted, "The Cross plus NOTHING!"—every time I stop DVR-ing Hagee, God shows out through him!! :-D."

But as the Bible is filled with types of our Lord Jesus Christ and symbols that prophesied His mission and intention, fulfilled on the Cross and by the power that raised Him to life; we are types of Adam and Eve. We are prodigal sons. We have all eaten the forbidden fruit again and again. So, I guess I would tell the pastor that he can kick himself, too.

The only them and us is saved and unsaved, because we've also eaten the true heavenly Bread, the Bread of Life. [John 6:32-35, 58 (Amplified).] We've also drunk the blood of Lord Jesus Christ. [John 6:53-57 (Amplified).] And that important division is one we believers need to be working to erase. [Romans 10:14.]

I feel the call of evangelism on my life the more I understand something I heard on Moody Radio once about sheep and how God sees us. The revelation is tied to something someone said about why God gives us children to foster, too, but I can't remember who shared that wisdom. The man on the radio was speaking at a conference, and he said we miss the depth of descriptions concerning sheep and flock and shepherds today where agriculture might not be part of our everyday parlance or experience.

Sheep, he said, aren't too bright. And when one gets lost—however it happens—he can't get back. Even if he wants to return, he can't get his bearings. He usually ends up dead, killed by whatever causes him to be lost...and probably consumed. He needs a shepherd. God knew that. He wept for us, because He loved us. And because He knew our hearts and how lost we all are without Him.

I began to understand the heart of our Lord that day. Then I heard that or children, which are all unique, are given to us to show us that we can love anyone. He wants us to. We are all different. We are all God's creation, his beloved. And as we learn the love language of our children, as we are not happy while any one of our Littles remains lost, as we would give our very lives to save all of them...God means us to understand that He loves us.

12This is my commandment, That you love one another, as I have loved you. 13Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. 14You are my friends, if you do whatever I command you.

—John 15:12-14 (AKJ)

And God held in his hand a small globe. Look, he said. The son looked. Far off, as through water, he saw a scorched land of fierce colour. The light burned there; crusted buildings cast their shadows; a bright serpent, a river uncoiled itself, radiant with slime. On a bare hill a bare tree saddened the sky. Many people held out their thin arms to it, as though waiting for a vanished April to return to its crossed boughs. The son watched them. Let me go there, he said.

—The Coming by RS Thomas

I was telling my sister-in-law that I haven't shared all of my testimony with her. I don't know if there's a real definition of 'testimony,' but I say it meaning: I have a story. It's the story of all the time I spent lost and dead in my sins. It's also the story of how God saved me, humbled me, and brought me heart back to life.

The Holy Spirit has turned me to a crybaby, let me tell you. I'm crying right now (July 2013), because CeCe Winans was just singing "I Surrender All" on "Praise the Lord." I cry in the car. I cry in my sleep. I cry at church. I cry in my thinking spot (the shower). I cry when I pray. I don't have words to write or say that can exactly explain what God does to me. But it's good. It's awesome. It's a miracle. It breaks me down and brings me to a place that allows me to see all my ugly, suicidal, angry, prideful, selfish, restless, disgusting, isolated, vengeful mess and just be so relieved and thankful that I shake my head and fall to my knees. Or, I shout.

I didn't used to dance. But the Holy Ghost has given me a shimmy. Sometimes I get chills.

I have visions. I have dreams. Sometimes I have a sense of what's coming before it does. I see symbols that repeat themselves in ways that give meaningful context. A lot of people—even believers—think that is a little 'kooky.'

*But he said to them, All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given...
He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.*

—Matthew 19:11,12 (AKJ)

In my Bible study today, I tried to really explain to someone—other than my husband, that is—what it's like when God talks to me. I didn't feel it was received, but what do I know—except, that the covenant of marriage is a good place to be covered by God's grace, and that Hubster is a trophy of His grace in my life—? But I have heard His voice. I have seen visions. I have been changed. I have been lifted up from among my dead life to live again and know that there's a reason for it all...

In April 2013ⁱⁱⁱ, I received into my spirit a vision in my thinking place: An apple orchard with a narrow path surrounded by green grass. Ladders for pickers were leaned up against the tree trunks. And, I was given to understand: *The narrow path we are to walk is as shepherds with shepherd hooks, working for His harvest. Every person we meet, we are to pull onto the narrow path with us. There will be grace and material prosperity (represented by the fallen, edible fruit and low-hanging fruit) along the way, but it is not the goal.*

That's what the ladders were for; like Jacob's ladder [Genesis 28:12.], ascending to heaven...and even better fruit.

None of the fruit is 'bad,' you understand: Every gift of God is grace and all goodness comes from Him.

But as we mature in our faith, growing in obedience to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, we ascend the ladder; and the fruits we find are larger and riper.

As we can plumb the depths of the written Word of God, releasing and receiving the power found therein, so must the heights of heaven be explored.

We are the workers in the orchard. [Matthew 9:38.] We walk the paths and minister God to all we meet. And, in His time, we will ascend the ladder.

As we grow in obedience, we become like the trees that worship Him constantly with their branches, which reach heavenward. And their fruit is the product of the Holy Spirit renewing and remoulding our own spirits. [Colossians 3:10.] Also, the fruit is grace (including the ability to obey), bestowed on faithful servants. And it (the fruit) becomes larger and sweeter as His favor increases upon us. [Proverbs 3:3-4.]

That same month^{iv}, I got locked out of my car at the gas station. The attendant at the station called the police, who asked that I stand by my car and wait. I'd just dropped Sammie off at Kindergarten. Thankfully, Tucker didn't have preschool that day, and they had blankets and coats in the car, because it was cold. He and Charlotte were in the backseat, though you can't really see them back there; we have tinted windows.

To keep myself from panic or fear, I spoke (aloud): "Jesus. Jesus." It was a chant as I waited. Then, I saw a patrol car passing. "Jesus," I said. "Jesus." It was so cold.

The patrol car was not in the turn lane, but as I called out, the car put on its signal and went into the turn lane. It turned into the lot and drove up to me.

A young, dark-haired officer got out of a car emblazoned with my village's police department name on the side. He was handsome and tall, tall, tall, tall... But not skinny or frail. Tall and handsome...

He said to me, "I'm not the officer that was sent, but when I saw you waving, I turned in." But, I wasn't waving at him. I was not waving.

I told him that I knew he had better things to do and blessed him. I must have said "God bless you" at least 3 times. And each time, I felt the warmth that exuded from him, and he would smile. I was surprised, because the young generation tends to slough off these words or be made uncomfortable.

He said to me, "No. You should call when you need help. That's what we're here for." He stood by me the entire time. He told me one comforting story about dropping his keys once, when I kept rambling on about how I never leave my keys in the car. When I spoke to him, he kept his eyes squarely on me. Otherwise, his eyes roamed off in the distance, watching.

He looked into the back of my car from where he was and said: "Oh, you have *two* children in the car." I babbled their names and explained again what had happened, never considering that it would have been next to impossible for him to see what he saw—due to distance and our tinted rear window.

As the officer *sent to me* was arriving, the officer *with me* said: "He's going to give you some paperwork to sign." He explained that it was to cut off liability for any damage to the car from the efforts of the department's officer to open it. I nodded.

While I was waiting, I read his pin. I read: "H-Y-L-A." There was no rank or department next to or beneath it. It looked old. I don't know whether it was bronze or gold or what... Anyhoo, I started to ask him about the name. It seemed 'foreign,' somehow to me. But *he* didn't look foreign. Something kept me from asking.

Later, I asked my dad whether it's normal to have a name, but no rank, because my dad's a Chief of Police and has worked at more than one department over the years. He said, depending on the department they list either the rank, the department and the rank, but *almost never* the name—not on the badge. That's what the name tag is for.

Another thing that struck me at the time, is that HYL A never spoke to the other officer. They never interacted. When I left, HYL A got into his car and drove away to another lot, parked, and that was the last I saw of him.

I thought they would at least greet each other, but the officer who unlocked my door acted like he was the only officer on the scene. I shook HYL A's hand before I left. I shook the other officer's hand before I left, but they never spoke or interacted. My dad said that was very odd. *Very odd...*

Chills came over me when I looked up "HYLA + Hebrew" and got this result^v: "The hebrew characters for the name of the prophet Elijah are: h-y-l-a. Besides being the hebrew spelling, every letter in the hebrew alphabet has a separate meaning."

A good thing came for the last night's fight, as they sometimes do, believe it or not. Afterward, the Holy Spirit informed me of it through my husband (as He often does). I snapped back that it had been a waste of time, but my spirit was pricked even then.

We argued whether the Israelites (Jews) had been 'converted' to Christianity—that is, was Peter, the Apostle, 'converted?' I argued something I'd never argued before—that gentiles are actually converted Jews, because the Jews through whom the true Gospel was spread relied fully upon Judaism.

The issue that split the Jews was not a one whether prophecy had been fulfilled by the Wondrous Person of Lord Jesus Christ. Judaism made provision for resurrection (though there was contention among Jews about this) and for a Messiah (though the Jews didn't fully agree about what a Savior would look like and exactly what role He would fulfill...or, how).

Reading Acts and Romans, I am struck by the way Paul uses what Christians call the Old Testament, hammering points and explaining and highlighting Scripture that was already well known to Jews and readily embraced. He tries to breathe the Life of Lord Jesus Christ into what they're blind to, though they are familiar and conversant with Jewish prophecy and history.

This morning, reading my chapter in the New Testament, I saw that God did something He's always doing. Something that always awes me... He sent the Holy Spirit to speak through me. Or, maybe I should say that Holy Spirit prompted me to say things, speaking on the deep things of God.

I realized this morning, I basically quoted Scripture I'd never read before: 13 But now I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle to the Gentiles, I lay great stress on my ministry and magnify my office,

14 In the hope of making my fellow Jews jealous [in order to stir them up to imitate, copy, and appropriate], and thus managing to save some of them.

15 For if their rejection and exclusion from the benefits of salvation were [overruled] for the reconciliation of a world to God, what will their acceptance and admission mean? [It will be nothing short of] life from the dead!

16 Now if the first handful of dough offered as the firstfruits [Abraham and the patriarchs] is consecrated (holy), so is the whole mass [the nation of Israel]; and if the root [Abraham] is consecrated (holy), so are the branches.

17 But if some of the branches were broken off, while you, a wild olive shoot, were grafted in among them to share the richness [of the root and sap] of the olive tree,

18 Do not boast over the branches and pride yourself at their expense. If you do boast and feel superior, remember it is not you that support the root, but the root [that supports] you.

19 You will say then, Branches were broken (pruned) off so that I might be grafted in!

20 That is true. But they were broken (pruned) off because of their unbelief (their lack of real faith), and you are established through faith [because you do believe]. So do not become proud and conceited, but rather stand in awe and be reverently afraid.

21 For if God did not spare the natural branches [because of unbelief], neither will He spare you [if you are guilty of the same offense].

22 Then note and appreciate the gracious kindness and the severity of God: severity toward those who have fallen, but God's gracious kindness to you—provided you continue in His grace and abide in His kindness; otherwise you too will be cut off (pruned away).

23 And even those others [the fallen branches, Jews], if they do not persist in [clinging to] their unbelief, will be grafted in, for God has the power to graft them in again.

24 For if you have been cut from what is by nature a wild olive tree, and against nature grafted into a cultivated olive tree, how much easier will it be to graft these natural [branches] back on [the original parent stock of] their own olive tree.

25 Lest you be self-opinionated (wise in your own conceits), I do not want you to miss this hidden truth and mystery, brethren: a hardening (insensibility) has [temporarily] befallen a part of Israel [to last] until the [c]full number of the ingathering of the Gentiles has come in...

I actually have heard something subtle and ugly from Christians when it comes to Jews and our Lord Jesus Christ. Scorn, maybe. Superiority, possibly...

But it's all vanity, and it's all wrong, because all Israel will be saved. [Romans 11:26.]

Especially in America, race has a negative connotation—as a divider and a basis upon which hostility has been justified. It's been the foundation of what I'll just call bad policy. More than race, God's focus on the Jews is about a promise—God's promise...to Abraham and Israel's forefathers—one, which He's keeping with their descendants for their sake. And the vanity of some Christian believers, our pride...forgets that we sneer at

God, if we sneer at the Jews...whom God chose to reveal Himself through. [Romans 9:4-5. (Amplified).]

A woman in my Bible Study taught me how to fast. I was almost convinced that I couldn't do it. And I wasn't even thinking about whether I was doing it properly. I thought I had figured out the *if* and *why* of fasting—*Yes* and, *to help me hear God better* (as opposed to 'making' Him speak to me).

But a vessel filled by the Holy Spirit made me realize that I wasn't thinking about fasting from the right angle. To make a long story short: Fasting is about what you do in the absence of what you're putting to the side—food, drink, media, etc., which is prayer.

She said that she would prepare meals for her family in advance of a fast. She described a fast during which she eliminated some of her favorite things from her diet, but not all food. And when she felt hunger pangs, she would do a little "popcorn prayer"—a short prayer.

And this is key: The content of the prayer would be the reason for the fast in the first place! I never thought of that! There should be a challenge, issue, fear, ongoing test over which the fasting individual was going to battle...with prayer.

I don't pray for specific things, but I love the idea of being prompted to pray by my hunger pangs. And I do have a crawl-in closet that I can squeeze in, ball up over my, knees and pray secretly—pulling from Psalms (29, 33, 69, etc.). I'm a work-at-home mom, but "popcorn prayers," like, *God give me strength, in Jesus' name! God, help me control my temper, in Jesus' name! God, please send your angels to minister to my sister's spirit, in Jesus' name! God, please touch my children wherever they are with your Holy Spirit, in Jesus' name!* could work anywhere. Walking down the street. In an office restroom. At your cubicle. In the car. On the train or bus...

God hears your prayers, and He answers. [John 16:24.]

Bishop T.D. Jakes put it this way, Lord Jesus Christ disciplined his flesh with the fast in the wilderness; He fought off the temptation—satan's offering His flesh what it wanted, but which He was denying it—with Scripture.

That's a fast. Now that I have some guidance, I'm understanding how and why it brings me closer to God.

4But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.

7Jesus said to him, It is written again, You shall not tempt the Lord your God.

10Then said Jesus to him, Get you hence, Satan: for it is written, You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve.

—Matthew 4 (AKJ)

I wake up at 3AM every night. I've done that for 6 days or so. I wake up praying or feeling the urgency to pray. For 3 days before these 6 days began, I would open the curtains in our bedroom, look up to the sky and come into fellowship with the Lord Jesus Christ. I would feel his presence—as if I was coming into His actual, almost tactile presence. It never happened, but each time, it would feel like He might peel back the clouds and come again, bringing His angel army with Him.

The funny thing is this: I would do the same thing in either case—that is, whether terrified and feeling the onslaught of demonic aggression...or, praising and speaking to the Lord—I would speak the Word. But my heart felt it differently. My spirit felt it differently.

One night I must have prayed on and off for a few *hours*! I don't know how much I prayed last night (2013); but the night before that, I prayed for *half an hour*! I know some people pray 4 and 5 and 8 hours. I actually read in Steve Foss' book, "Satan's Dirty Little Secret: The Two Demon Spirits That All Demons Get Their Strength From" that he came under a *spirit of prayer* and prayed for days or weeks!

That's not me. Not yet, anyway...

But I've been praying and praying. I keep thinking that satan will appear to me visually, laughing so I can hear him.

The battleground of the mind is right, Joyce Meyer, because once I read about what some people experience during the period called the "fourth watch," it got inside me—the spirit of fear.

Last night I took the advice I posted on my social sites and which I got from Aquilla Nash (of "The Prophetic Whisper"); I said, "I am grabbing on to the Word. I will stand on it!" And finally, after 6 days, I felt my heart unclench in ways it hadn't the whole time before.

What can I say about that? What am I to conclude? I have to meditate on it, honestly, before I can say...

I was like Joyce Meyer for the longest time, and when the devil was sifting me, I just gave my symptoms worldly names and thought I was a kind of person meant to be driven over a cliff into insanity. I believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, but I hadn't (as Joyce Meyer says) asked Him to be my Lord.

And, as she says, there is a difference.

The biggest difference I see is that at least I recognize when the devil is coming against me. I have an idea, at this point in my walk, why. I almost wrote 'when I'm under attack,' but then I remembered that we're above and not beneath. The head and not the tail.

Remember when God told Moses to take the snake by the tail, and it turned into a rod?
Remember the rod that bloomed as a warning to the Israelites that they ought not murmur against
the man he'd chosen as their high priest? Remember that His rod and his staff comfort us?

12 Everything is permissible (allowable and lawful) for me; but not all things are helpful (good for me to do, expedient and profitable when considered with other things). Everything is lawful for me, but I will not become the slave of anything or be brought under its power.

—I Corinthians 6 (Amplified)

What does it mean when you drop a call (or, your call is dropped)...and neither one of you bothers to call the other person back?

Maybe nothing.

Maybe I had this thought, because I'd just had a talk with a woman who's in another spiritual position in her walk...and I judged her, feared I was judging her or, felt I was being misunderstood.

Doesn't it make sense that we would all be in spiritually distinct places in our lives at any given time? Yes, we are equal and fellow workers for God [I Corinthians 3:8-9 (Amplified).], but the same chapter reminds us that we will all receive our own (distinct) reward, *according to his own labor*. [I Corinthians 3:8 (Amplified).]

It occurs to me that my concerns over the discourse during the call might all be the fruit of the spirit of suspicion. I heard of that once, and I knew right then that it exists. It has wreaked havoc in my mind and life.

I was telling the woman on the phone what I think I see going on in her life, my interpretation of what she's been saying and experiencing lately. I don't know if it's my place to do that. So, maybe it was my doubt that made me decide to judge. That I was being judged...

It's hard when you are being led by God in a way that is distasteful or incomprehensible to the hearts of unbelievers. I know I seek or expect confirmation and encouragement, and sometimes we can find these things in our friends and fellow believers.

Often, we must seek them in prayer.

I don't know what it is, and too much conjecture and assumption and trying to state the motives of others is trouble; but, I often feel more alone in the world—the closer I get to God. The more I am awed by His Word. The more I try to literally walk in what I read in Scripture. The more I bring Him into the things I say and the things I do and the decisions we make as a family...

I was unable to sleep for about a week and a half, like I said earlier. Spiritual warfare and demonic oppression waking me up every night at the same time... Well, God blessed me through the words of Marilyn Hickey. She was on another minister's show whose name escapes me. She was answering his question about what really began to change and shape her life with regard to her ministry. She says it was ruminating on the Word.

She described the way she started out memorizing Psalms and Proverbs. Apparently, she can remember entire *books* in the bible!

Anyhoo, I have to write this before I forget: Marilyn says the last thing that passes before your eyes before you sleep goes through your mind 7 times.

That was it! I committed *right then* to read the Psalms and Proverbs I'd been praying over (as well as the Scripture I was standing on, coming alongside others in prayerful intercession or, for my own family) *right before* I went to bed! I read the Word of God, each chapter or verse over and over, out loud.

Let me clear something up. When I say I was "standing on" Scripture, I'm talking about telling God that I know He's promised things and prayerfully receiving them as I reckon on His faithfulness in keeping His promises. "Coming alongside" someone in prayer means to stand on Scripture with another person as they walk toward victory over their challenges.

And "victory" means God always wins. Amen!!

The Storm

I sometimes wonder why. I think about all of the things that I've done. I think about all of the times I've thought I was about to turn it all around. And I see now the ways that God has been planting seeds in my life. Or, He's been dropping crumbs. As I drifted, I would come upon a handful of these Broken Pieces. I would pick them up and put them in my pockets. Then one day, in my fear and desperation, I found them and ate them: I confessed the name of Jesus Christ.

I said the Sinner's Prayer.

I'd looked for churches and tried some out as an adult. I went to Sunday School as a child. I came to the point where I believed I didn't need church. Subconsciously, I came to a point where I believed I didn't need God.

But there was something about my sister and brother-in-law that made me want to be like them. I wanted to have what they had. I coveted it. I doubted it. And at the same time, there was a part of me that was desperate to believe what they had might be real. Because if it was real, I might be able to find a way to have what they had, too.

My sister-in-law wanted to go to the Holy Land. I wanted to go, too. She started a journey through the entire Bible, reading every day. I tried to read my Bible, too. I gave up, but she finished. I fought with my husband all the time. Even our public façade had cracks that revealed the ugly home life that was so much a part of our time together as a family. My sister-in-law and her husband went to church.

So, I got it in my mind that we needed to try again. This time, we went to their church.

It was a mega church, but the doctrine was right. The worship was uplifting, though it overwhelmed me at the time. The preaching and teaching style was compelling. But you know what really *got* me? My sister and brother-in-law tithed *every* Sunday. The amount boggled my mind. Ten percent of their income, divided into the weeks of the month is *a lot* of money! And, come to find out, they weren't even members! But they didn't flinch.

They gave me my first taste of obedience and sacrifice. And by the grace of God, they loved each other. They lived in what I now call "God's consecrated vision of marriage."

So, even after we quit making our sporadic trips to their big church, I would get my taste of God by watching online videos of Pastor James MacDonald's sermons. The few times I'd been there, I don't remember an altar call or anyone leading us in the Sinner's Prayer. Back when we went, I don't think I even knew what an altar call was.

It's when the pastor offers salvation through confession and prayer during a church service. Sometimes, they 'call' you to raise your hand, to stand, or to come up to the front to receive prayer. I think it's only happened once during the four or five months we've been

attending (2013) at our current church. If you've ever watched classic episodes of Billy Graham revivals, then you know what I'm talking about—when people would come streaming down from the stands.

That always gets me.

Anyhoo, this time, as the video sermon was finishing up, Pastor James MacDonald said something like: It's on my heart to extend the opportunity for salvation. He said the Sinner's Prayer.

More important, I said it with him.

I'd never said that before. And Romans 10:9 was something I'd never understood—that is, if I'd ever even heard it. I still haven't read the entire Bible (2013), so I don't think I'd ever read it...

Now I think the gift of the Holy Spirit might have been given to me in December 2012 or in January 2013—whenever I confessed Jesus Christ—when I said: "Jesus is Lord,' and [that I believed] in [my] heart that God raised him from the dead... [Romans 10:9 (New International Version).]

When the storm came, my husband was off somewhere with the kids, and I was folding laundry in the area of the house where the fireplace is. I was on the blue foam mat I use for exercising and yoga (when I used to do yoga), and it came on strong outside. It matched the turmoil inside me. And I think I wanted it over. I hoped it was the end of the world and not just thunder and lightning. Every time I was shaken by what was going on outside, I started to cry out.

You have to understand, I'm remembering this. Who knows how much I'm embellishing or cutting out? All I know is that I was literally crying out. I was bawling, like I was dying. And my cries asked God: *Why? Why was it all falling apart? Why didn't He get it over with already? Why did my kids have to be born during this tumultuous and dark time of the world?*

It was a breakdown. I remember driving around town one day, dropping off for preschool and running errands. The day was sunny. And the beautiful day mocked what I was feeling inside. I actually thought or said, 'It shouldn't be sunny. This is not a time for sunny days.' Even the weather was oblivious.

I cried out and then rushed to turn on my newly-discovered Trinity Broadcasting Network to comfort myself.

The day of that storm did something. I cried. I kneeled before God. I felt stripped bare.

I started taking notes from Joyce Meyer and learning about spiritual warfare and my real relationship with God. I learned, and I even put on a post-it^{vi} note: 'I have the right to call Almighty God, 'Father.' I didn't know that. She also taught me: 'You don't always have to DEFEND YOURSELF!' 'STOP JUDGING & EMBRACE MY OWN CALLING.' 'GOD IS IMPRESSED W/ HEART MOTIVES, NOT WHAT WE DO!' 'FORGIVE, PRAY, & BLESS MY ENEMIES. TRUST GOD.' 'FIT IN WHERE GOD

WANTS ME! HUMILITY.' 'MEEK = STRENGTH UNDER CONTROL.' And, she directed me to the Scripture, "Still your anger. Hold it back," from Proverbs 29:11.

I went from thinking it was so nice for them to 'let' Joseph Prince, a man whose accent I could barely understand, have his own show...to putting up Pastor Prince post-its: 'AS JESUS IS, SO AM I ON THIS EARTH I JOHN 4:17.' And, 'Thank Joseph Prince for the good word that: [my children] must not be made to feel 'out of fellowship with me.' He also said, and I wrote down: "I am Christ risen at our Father's right hand. God looks at Christ, finding delight in my new identity through Him." —I wrote down that he cited Romans for this, but I don't find it...

Pastor Prince (Our church pastor is also a Pastor Prince) taught me to pray for "God to give me a hearing heart [and to] let me keep on hearing." Joyce Meyer taught me to think of "all things in my life [as] trophies of God's grace!"

I started talking to God. I would cry sometimes, when I'd think about how far I'd come and how much had changed—everywhere I looked! My favorite place to talk to God was in the car. Just myself or, the baby and me (2013). That way, I could think and not startle anyone with my tears or my truth. Not that I wouldn't cry or pray with the kids in the car. It's part of how they learned Who God is and how to praise Him.

At the time, I didn't even know any religious radio stations, so I just used the iPhone turned up as loud as it goes. I'm sure there must be some kind of device that plugs into the ashtray or something, but I don't have one to this day. I discovered Christian music. I like contemporary and country style. I also like Gospel and R&B style. My favorite used to be the kind that talked about the kinds of things I was going through.

At some point—after I'd been reading the Bible awhile—I started to notice that some of the lyrics didn't match with the Word. And, believe it or not, it turned me off. No matter how catchy. I realized that I couldn't always understand the layers of meaning in some of the songs—until I read more Scripture. So, some of the songs that had gone off the playlist came back on...

I stopped watching "Scandal—" right after I told my mom how "devilishly" good it was. It twisted something inside me, right when I said that. Conviction came, and the show had to go. A lot of shows left the DVR lineup, including the news, which was all I used to watch. Soap operas had to go. A lot of movies don't sit right with me anymore. No more secular radio for me.

And God's cleaned up my mouth. I grew up hearing and being used to cursing. I thought it was cool and strong. But it helped make a wedge between my husband and me. It made our home an unstable and unhappy place to be.

I failed at so much before I confessed Jesus... I remember when I prayed that He wouldn't let me fail at this—at being saved and being changed...

I only stopped engaging my addiction with prayer. The Holy Spirit convicted me about it first. And I started to feel myself entering into a negative force field or something when I would approach it. For a while, I would ignore that sensation. But I started to get such a heavy feeling about doing it—dread and such a certainty that I'd done the wrong thing.

And when I was high, I would pray. But I wouldn't be able to worship and look to the sky, as is my habit. A lot of things go on in the sky that I never noticed before. I couldn't look at the sky, because I didn't want God to see me. That's how I really realized I had to quit.

I realized that before I even wanted to stop.

I asked God to cleave between my flesh and my spirit. I don't know where or if I read that, but I thought I'd read or heard it was possible for Him to do it. I asked Him—that is, once I decided that I wanted to quit. I wanted to quit for Him, before I wanted to quit for my family or

for me. And...He did—cleave between the desire of my flesh and my spirit that was being renewed, remolded...and convicted to repent and turn away from sin.

I realized that I wanted to memorize some Scripture. I started with Isaiah 53. I'd picked up a few verses before that. I do count the Lord's Prayer.

5 For although there may be so-called gods, whether in heaven or on earth, as indeed there are many of them, both of gods and of lords and masters,

6 Yet for us there is [only] one God, the Father, Who is the Source of all things and for Whom we [have life], and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through and by Whom are all things and through and by Whom we [ourselves exist].

—I Corinthians 8:5-6

I was witnessing to a man. He knew about Jesus. He'd read the Bible, but he kind of talked and approached God as one of many so-called gods. When I told Him, I believe there is one God, I learned how powerful the Word is, on another level. He listened to me with wide eyes, even as I felt the resistance of his worldly sense and reason, which cannot submit to God. [Romans 8:7.] He was like Caiaphas: "49And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said to them, You know nothing at all, 50Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. 51And this spoke he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; 52And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. 53Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death." [John 11 (AKJ). *Emphasis mine.*]

Even though he didn't believe, the man I was witnessing to said something about Him that was more right (having more spiritual layers) than he could have imagined, when he said: "Love is sacrifice."

He didn't say it about Lord Jesus. He said it about his perspective going into his now broken marriage—saying that he knew going into marriage that it wasn't about receiving, but giving. His 'ex-wife,' he said, didn't understand that.

I call her his wife—Rhodes Scholar and alcoholic mother of a beautiful, caring daughter in the primary custody of her father, who says: Divorce is permanent; he can forgive an ignorant person, but not a 'smart' one; and that wisdom is the practical application of knowledge.

It sounds good at first, but the Bible calls Lord Jesus Wisdom. [I Corinthians 1:30 (Amplified).] And worldly wise men are "futile and godless in their thinking." [Romans 1:21 (Amplified).] I said to him, "She sounds like a prodigal daughter with a restless spirit. She went out into the world and spent her substance. She'll find herself eating with pigs, and we have to pray she'll come home." I told him that high I.Q. scores and our categorizations of intellect don't keep us from having spiritual faults and deficits. I said, not knowing exactly from where I was drawing or whether I had it right or not, "Our wisdom is foolishness to God." [I Corinthians 3:19.]

Anyway, the experience went on in a way that really felt guided by God. And trying to sleep the other night, I woke up. I had commanded fear and insecurity and inferiority and doubt to go in the name of the Lord. I started praising the Lord and trying to work out the meaning and power of the following Scripture: "Now faith is the assurance (the confirmation, the title deed) of the things [we] hope for, being the proof of things [we] do not see and the conviction of their reality [faith perceiving as real fact what is not revealed to the senses]. For by [faith—trust and holy fervor born of faith] the men of old had divine testimony borne to them and obtained a good report. By faith we understand that the worlds [during the successive ages] were framed (fashioned, put in order, and equipped for their intended purpose) by the word of God, so that what we see was not made out of things which are visible." [Hebrews 11:1-3 (Amplified).]

In certain places, like the car by myself or, in the shower (my thinking spot), I will come into a place that really allows me to stand in my identity in our Lord. Sometimes I really believe I have my inheritance. That I am a child of the Most High God. That I am as Jesus is on this earth. [I John 4:17.] That night was one of those, and I started interceding in prayer on behalf of those on my prayer list, for the body of Christ, for our church in particular, and for those who have no one to pray for them. "Let there be light," I usually proclaim in these prayers. It reminds me to receive that I, being as Jesus is on this earth, am a speaking spirit with power and authority and even His mind [1 Corinthians 2:16.].

And then I was shaken by a revelation: Our Lord Jesus came to the earth to reveal the things of heaven. He came to make known to us—to reveal God—as the only One who had ever been in heaven and with God. [John 1:18 (Amplified).] He came to show God's power, steadfastness, mercy, wisdom... And His *willful love*: 17 For this [reason] the Father loves Me, because I lay down My [own] life—to take it back again.

18 No one takes it away from Me. On the contrary, I lay it down voluntarily. [I put it from Myself.] I am authorized and have power to lay it down (to resign it) and I am authorized and have power to take it back again. These are the instructions (orders) which I have received [as My charge] from My Father. [John 10 (Amplified).]

It came to me that night, that while we often focus on the wrath of God and His judgment, we do it in the wrong way. We do it with one eye closed, and forget that we also care about justice. We also think it's right that people be judged and condemned for committing crimes against us and against others. But we forget this when we self-righteously judge God for doing that which we wholeheartedly support and which, He does better than we ever could!

Also, we highlight and intimately acquaint ourselves with this aspect of God—judgment—trying to see how He will condemn us. But we pay less attention to and have less hope in the love He has demonstrated. We do not act in assurance (faith) of His love for us.

Even the unbeliever knows that love is sacrifice, as Lord Jesus says Himself, "No one has greater love [no one has shown stronger affection] than to lay down (give up) his own life for his friends." [John 15:13 (Amplified).]

And so, reading about faith... Witnessing to that man at the library... Thinking about the idea that came to me in the middle of the night—it made John 3:16-17 stand up in 3D for me! I lifted my hands in the dark and praised God.

And then I felt the Holy Spirit telling me I needed to share this with the congregation at church.

Nope. Did not want to do that. There were a million reasons. The spirit of suspicion has been making me think that people are kind of annoyed by me. That they think I'm a show-off already. And then there was just the spirit of fear trying to keep me from it.

I told my husband though. I told him that I thought I was supposed to share it, but I didn't know if I was going to.

I didn't count on how well he keeps His promises. How well He *loves* me. I asked Him and His Holy Spirit to be loud in my life. And you know what, while we were worshipping that Sunday morning, Hubster turned to me and said, smiling, and speaking over my daughter's head and the music: "You should go up there and say that thing!"

We were singing...about the love of God. I had my hands up in the air. I had prayed for the Holy Spirit to fill the place. He was. I was feeling Him...and about to sin against Him...by being disobedient. But then my husband turned toward me, God looking out of his eyes, and the Holy Spirit spoke out of his mouth.

Do you know what my church's Pastor Prince said to me when I told him I was terrified?

"Good. I'm glad you're here. So often the Holy Spirit prompts us, but we let fear hold us back."

So, I said a prayer—Scripture I just memorized: "Do not fear sudden terror. Nor trouble from the wicked when it comes. For the Lord shall be your confidence, and will keep your foot from being caught." [Proverbs 3:25-26.] And then the mic came my way.

I heard the words, "I'm so afraid, but here goes," or something along those lines, followed by a timid, uncomfortable laugh coming out of me—in my head. But...

The Lord was my confidence, and I never said anything like that. I looked around, met eyes, and even got a little preacher bounce going! And when I came down, Taylor said it was "perfect."

All GLORY goes to God!

9 For our knowledge is fragmentary (incomplete and imperfect), and our prophecy (our teaching) is fragmentary (incomplete and imperfect).

10 But when the complete and perfect (total) comes, the incomplete and imperfect will vanish away (become antiquated, void, and superseded).

—I Corinthians 13 (Amplified).

Dreams

I've had a lot of dreams that I've shared since God found me. I started to write, 'since I found God.' But that doesn't really happen.

Sometimes I don't know what to do with them.

Last night I dreamed about my dad. I've dreamed about him before—since my salvation. But all I could remember then was enough to write his name on a post-it I kept on my desk for that purpose: I'd add names of people I dreamed about...and cross them off as I did what I thought God wanted me to do concerning them. I had a perplexed frown on my face at that time, and the only thing I did then was call him.

It was enough.

This time I dreamed that my dad...and I were on hard drugs.

I've been so trashed with alcohol that God had to have saved me from being poisoned and dead. I used ecstasy^{vii} once, and it was horrible. It distorted my mind. My pupils dilated, and I prayed through it, till the normal world came back to me. Pot was my thing.

But in the dream, I had a needle. I tried to prick myself, but the needle broke on my skin. Like the skin of my inner left wrist was too tough to get through.

In the dream, I'd seen my dad scrape some white powder into something, roll it up for smoking, and tell someone who asked, "Don't worry about what I'm doing."

He'd been cleaning up, too—washing dishes and putting them away, and I think that reassured me in the dream. I mean, I think it conveyed to me a sense that he was still in control.

Writing now (2013), I remember Jeremy Pearsons (sitting in on "Believer's Voice of Victory" for the Copelands) saying, "I got this," is the theme song (or something) for pride.

Anyway, it was dark where we were. And it was as if Mom was gone, and I didn't have a brother. Our place was kind of dark and stark. Not quite dingy. I felt like we lived together, like I had no husband and didn't have children in the dream.

I think that reassured me. Like I was telling myself we weren't in crack house or anything...

Then I followed my dad out into the sunny day of the dream. Again, nature was oblivious.

Dad was standing, talking with a man. He was a crack dealer. I knew it, in the way you know things in dreams. He had dark skin. He was neat. He would have drawn nothing but good attention to himself. Personable. Bright-eyed...

Like the devil.

He was talking with my dad, trying to convince him to fall down or jump up into the next tier of usage: He wanted him to come get some crack. At first my dad was talking strong back to him, saying he didn't want anything to do with him. But the dealer kept on talking. Then, my dad sat down beside him on the bench.

Something hit me in my gut in the dream.

My dad pulled out a belt and pulled it tight around his right ankle, and I realized it was so much further into darkness than I knew...or, wanted to accept before.

"You've got a problem with that leg," the devil was telling my dad. "You need something stronger." I don't know if I saw him get up and walk away with him, but when I saw he was gone, the needle appeared in my hand.

After it broke, a bus pulled up next to me. A group of girls in brightly-colored dresses—pink, violet, yellow, ruby—with knee-length, ballooning skirts (like updated "The Adventures of Ozzy and Harriet" style) got off and made a half-circle around me. Like they didn't see the needle as I dropped it, they asked me to get on the bus with them. I think they represented my church and the divine connections I've made since being saved.

Suddenly, we all had laundry in our hands. It was as if the driver accepted our dirty laundry in the place of money. All the girls had tiny containers that I could have held in one hand. They set them down neatly and headed toward their seats. I had two huge, overflowing baskets, like the kind on my bedroom floor and piled up (clean and waiting to be folded) on our folding table and on my bedroom floor. Mine clunked down beside theirs, and I took my seat.

Later, I got off and followed a lady through the downtown of a big city—a mail worker, who was telling me how hard it was to do her job when she started her day late. She dropped something, and when I picked it up, it was pictures of me and my family. I didn't look happy in any of the pictures, and none of the photos made me feel good.

It made me think of the days that I used to get high and pray. I would be on my knees before the window. As I do today, I looked up and saw God. For some of you, that may be hard to understand or believe, but some of you know what I mean.

I would be praying when it would *boom* in my heart. *Knowledge would boom*. Fear. And I would back up and back up and back up, till I was up against my dresser at the opposite end of the window. I know you don't know what my bedroom looks like, but you can barely see anything, if you back that far on your knees. Still, it wouldn't be enough, and I'd scoot over to the right. Just at the end of my dresser, the corner of our king-sized bed would be in front of me. And even then, I'd have to tip my head down. Pressing the top of my head into the mattress, I'd continue praying.

The fear wasn't a fear of God; I was praying to Him. Fellowshiping with God.

I knew that I'd have to quit. I was dishonoring God. I was coming into His presence as I actively and knowingly sinned. The fear came, because I knew I had to quit.

And, I wasn't ready.

31 But earnestly desire and zealously cultivate the greatest and best gifts and graces (the higher gifts and the choicest graces). And yet I will show you a still more excellent way [one that is better by far and the highest of them all—love].

—I Corinthians 12:31 (Amplified)

God loved me in a way that allowed me to ease out of the darkness. He knew what had to change in me and my life, before I did. And He revealed it to me, pressing me in just the right way and at just the right times.

People around me didn't always understand the urgency to change, but I did: I've spent about a good 2 decades drifting in darkness, under the shadow of suicidal thoughts and uncontrollable anger. Seeking vengeance and being isolated from life, with a sense that *dreams* were for children and *purpose* was a word that only applied to certain people, who were not like me.

They were like Moses. And Martin Luther King, Jr.. And George Washington. And Abraham of the Bible. *Perfect* people.

Yeah, I realize now that none of us are perfect. [Romans 3:10.] But I'm telling you about my honest perspective, looking back. And my point is that I didn't need any more of this life and doing it my way. Why?

It got me exactly nowhere. *A dying marriage, certain failure as a mother, no friends, doubt about whether I was a fit daughter and sister...*

But God showed me His power. His grace made me a worshipper. I don't know who told me that that's the way it works—Joseph Prince may have said that. It's true, whoever said it.

And this came to me today (2013) about the love of God: Love is so important to Lord Jesus and emphasized so much in Scripture, because it is sacrifice...of everything.

...37And He said to him, "'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND.' 38'This is the great and foremost commandment. 39'The second is like it, 'YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.'... [Matthew 22 (New American Standard Bible).]

We have to give up everything and lay it all down to love. All means *all*, people.

And, it's best understood, not as greater than hope or faith [I Corinthians 13:13 (Amplified).], but as a demonstration of hope and faith [Hebrews 11:1-3 (Amplified).] at work. For instance, think of the love we have for our loved ones who are no longer with us.

We love them. We ruminate on our time with them. We honor them. We remember them to ourselves and to others. We recognize on a habitual basis what they've done and added to our lives. We don't see them or hear them or touch them—on a basis that is unspiritual, I mean—and yet, the way we cling to and trust in their value evidences faith. We rely on what they told us, though we don't see them anymore. We hope to see them again, hope that they are in a 'good place.' We believe in their love for us and our love for them, which is "proof of things we do not see and the conviction of their reality...." If it isn't, I don't know what else to call it.

And so, when we love, we honor. We hope. We believe. We keep faith. We hold on when there's no sensual (based on our senses) reason, no carnal (self-fulfilling to our worldly appetites) basis.

But we hold on to love, because it fulfills our spirits.

What is greater than the hope we have in our Lord, Jesus Christ?

"...We shall not all fall asleep [in death], but we shall all be changed (transformed) 52 In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the [sound of the] last trumpet call. For a trumpet will sound, and the dead [in Christ] will be raised imperishable (free and immune from decay), and we shall be changed (transformed). 53 For this perishable [part of us] must put on the imperishable [nature], and this mortal [part of us, this nature that is capable of dying] must put on immortality (freedom from death). "[I Corinthians 15:51-53 (Amplified).]

The Changes

5 For just as Christ's [own] sufferings fall to our lot [as they overflow upon His disciples, and we share and experience them] abundantly, so through Christ comfort (consolation and encouragement) is also [shared and experienced] abundantly by us.

6 But if we are troubled (afflicted and distressed), it is for your comfort (consolation and encouragement) and [for your] salvation; and if we are comforted (consoled and encouraged), it is for your comfort (consolation and encouragement), which works [in you] when you patiently endure the same evils (misfortunes and calamities) that we also suffer and undergo.

—II Corinthians 1:5-6 (Amplified)

You want to scare some saved Christians? Ask them if they want to evangelize—as in "open-air preach" the gospel of Christ Jesus—with you.

Open-air preaching is always boiled down this way, 'Oh, you mean go preach on a street corner somewhere?' And that's one way of doing it.

But I never think of it that way.

I always see myself on a crate in a square somewhere. Yesterday, in my thinking spot, I saw myself and people from my church huddled in anxious, excited prayer, about to begin. We were quoting Scripture—Isaiah 53, to be exact. Another day, I saw myself, alone. I had a wheelbarrow. I was walking down a main street, picking up trash. In my waist pouch thingy, I had some gospel tracts. Gospel tracts are pamphlets that have the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ printed on them. People hand them out. They can be very imaginative or very stark and simple. In my daydream, I saw myself passing people who were standing around—waiting for the bus, or something. Or, if folks were friendly, I'd strike up a conversation.

I only know one way to 'preach' the gospel, if I may be so bold as to characterize what I've tried to do out here. Witnessing—that is, sharing my faith. I ask, "Do you know Jesus?" *Every time*. I've tried to think of 'better' ways to open. But I'm starting to think God doesn't think there's a better way—for me.

How long, I wonder, can I justify my fear by pointing to other folks' fear? How long can I use others' hesitancy to justify my own?

I told an associate pastor and a youth minister about the urgency in my spirit to do this as soon as possible. My impression of them was of deer in my zealous headlights. Turns out my headlights are judgmental, too. Because the youth minister said, when I finished, "I think that's what's missing... Boldness." And the associate pastor replied, when I said he looked terrified, "No, I'm *excited*."

Well, he'd written about two 'words' on his pad, and he did *look* terrified...to me. But the Holy Spirit is teaching me that my senses often lead me astray—into reading motives and minds and hearts, when I don't have the capacity to do that.

The thing the enemy^{viii} highlighted for me, to justify my cynicism, is that "a meeting" with the senior pastor was suggested.

Now, a meeting with the—*our*—senior pastor is totally reasonable. But I'll just speak for myself now: I have a tendency to want to *pray*, rather than *do*. I have a tendency to want to *give*, rather than *do*. I only want to *do* things that don't have to do with prayer—that is, praying *with* and *for* other people—and sharing the Way of Salvation.

Though I am learning to have greater respect for the power of prayer, when I hear people say, 'I'll pray,' I find myself backsliding into my eye-rolling self again. I hear it, and I translate it to a brush off, a religious escape hatch. But am I in the place of God^{ix}—to judge? I know a lot of the doubts that have shown up in my life lately are wiles of the devil [II Corinthians 2:11 (Amplified).], trying to separate me and mine from places and relationships of covenant.

Written on a post-it right here next to me, I read, "BLESSED PLACES & PLACES OF COVENANT: 1) Marriage 2) Ministry (Church Message) 3) My Purpose/Mission."

Who is among you that feareth the LORD, that obeyeth the voice of his servant, that walketh in darkness, and hath no light? let him trust in the name of the LORD, and stay upon his God.

—Isaiah 50:10 (KJV)

Never doubt in the dark what God has shown you in the light.

I have now 2 witnesses to the fact that the devil is trying to oppress me by separating me—with doubt, inferiority, and insecurity—from friends I've just made, from family, and from my church.

I also have some pretty weird experiences with connections *I* decided were 'divine,' because *I* concluded these folks are 'saved,' trust in and cling to Jesus Christ as their Savior and Redeemer, Who reconciled them to the Almighty God as heavenly Father. [I Corinthians 1:40 (Amplified).] I have to remind myself that I'm nowhere near "in the place of God," like Joseph said to his brothers. [Genesis 50:18 (Amplified).] I *can* say that I'm leaving my reaction to God's judgment.

"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 (NASB).]

So, I'm leaving it to Him to tell me where to draw lines. We know that God drew no lines. He poured out His very soul to save us from our just punishment.

We also know that I'm not God, even as He lifts me up and brings me as close as I will allow Him toward spiritual resurrection! [Philippians 3:11 (Amplified).]

I can't even look at handsome people.

I heard Pastor Robert Morris on "The Blessed Life" say that (2013). It sounds crazy, but it's just the kind of thing that parents should say to their kids. Yeah, they might bow down to lust anyway. But they wouldn't be able to forget such 'crazy' advice.

When we don't seek after the high standards set forth in the magnification of grace [John 1:16 (KJV)] and law by Jesus Christ during the Sermon on the Mount through the Beatitudes, there are repercussions: Namely, we build up 'tastes' for perversity, wickedness, and worldly "desires that spring from delusion." [Ephesians 4:22 (Amplified).]

The example the pastor used was one that pierced me to the heart: He said that when you live together, out of wedlock, you teach yourselves to have a taste for sneaking around and associate it with love. While you heed the rationalization of the devil, who says the only thing at issue is a piece of paper ('If you love each other, what difference does a piece of paper make?'), you harden your hearts to lying to your family and anyone you don't want to know about what

you're doing—that is, the details of the ways you're sinning. The depth of the darkness you're functioning in... You teach yourselves to have a taste for that darkness, and the association of that with love and youth leads to a lot of impure hunger, says Pastor Robert Morris.

I can tell you as one who lived that life, I agree.

Mid-life crises, growing apart, losing the spice, etc.... We call it a lot of things and put a lot of clichés in our mouths. Creflo Dollar calls it the high thoughts—accepted diversion from the law of God and holy, consecrated vision He has for us as His slaves, subject to His authority. We rely on these high thoughts when we want to excuse ourselves to fulfill the impure hunger we birthed during our diversion from purity. When we don't cast "down imaginations, and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ," [II Corinthians 10:5 (AKJ).] we end up creating tastes for worldly and destructive behaviors.

Back to why I can't even look at handsome people: The iniquity that begins inside ends in trespass (or, *transgression*). What we see builds the imaginations in our minds. Then we act on what our soul man's reason, thoughts, intellect—his mind—has worked up. Speaking through the pastor, God made it clear to me: It's all sin, for which God has paid. [Isaiah 53:5 (Amplified).] For the sin we cooked up in our heads, after we looked and imagined (our iniquity), Lord Jesus was bruised. And for the sin we acted out, based upon our imaginations (our transgressions), He was wounded with stripes we could see for the sin we could see.

Lord Jesus says, "But I say unto you, That whosoever *looketh on* a woman *to lust* after her *hath committed* adultery with her already in his heart." [Matthew 5:28 (KJV). *Emphasis mine.*] God's shown me the way sin begins—with where we cast our eyes—through a lot of sermons. Pastor Robert Morris raised Job's covenant with his eyes [Job 31:1.]. Eve saw the tree was good and ate the forbidden fruit [Genesis 3:6.]; "That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair," led angels to sin and create the giants [Genesis 6:2.]; and Proverbs speaks of looking straight ahead. [4:24-26.] Joseph Prince says that the certain way to depression is self-examination—that we must keep our eyes on Jesus.

So when I let the mind of Christ Jesus be at work in my life [Philippians 2:5.], God teaches me and mine the way we should go and counsels us with *His eyes upon us!* [Psalm 32:8.] When I let my eyes and my mind wander, I forget to seek *His face* with my whole heart. Without meaning to, I'm lusting after flesh, distracted from "knowledge of the majesty and glory of God as it is manifest in the Person and is revealed in the face of Jesus Christ (the Messiah)." [II Corinthians 4:6 (Amplified).] Taking my eyes from Him is like burying that knowledge of the truth. A pastor at our church quoted somebody who says, in that case, I'm "justly denied further knowledge."

I've always been extreme—in the sense that I've been all the way in or, all the way out. That's a good thing, once you're saved, and if you're all the way in...Christ Jesus. A friend of mine sent me a text to encourage me that says, "Consider the postage stamp. Samuel Johnson said, Its usefulness consists of the ability to stick to one thing until it gets there!!" So, I press "on toward the goal to win the [supreme and heavenly] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward." [Philippians 3:14 (Amplified).]

So, I've had this...ability...to keep going. I described it as being a "realist" or a "pessimist," while "living like an optimist. Applying for positions I didn't think I was qualified for is one way that played out. Taking on schedules and projects and attitudes I didn't think I could maintain is something else I did.

Today (2013), I realize that I can still do that...or, I can walk in faith. I can walk in the authority of Jesus Christ, which I have as a Christian. They look alike, I guess—like pressing in. But where faith is confidence and assurance [Hebrews 11:1.], I was throwing spaghetti at the wall. I was putting my head down and crossing my fingers.

Maybe God has opened my eye of understanding [Ephesians 1:18.] and allowed the ability I have—to challenges and approach things optimistically—to be anointed and used for His divine purpose in my life. Maybe my ability has been made new, too.

Maybe it was always a seed, waiting for my spirit to catch up and drink of the Holy Spirit [I Corinthians 12:13 (Amplified).]. Waiting to sprout and become a tree of faith, rooted in Christ Jesus and nourished by His blood...

15For this reason I too, having heard of the faith in the Lord Jesus which exists among you and your love for all the saints, 16do not cease giving thanks for you, while making mention of you in my prayers; 17that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. 18I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you will know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19and what is the surpassing greatness of His power toward us who believe. These are in accordance with the working of the strength of His might 20which He brought about in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in the one to come. 22And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church, 23which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

—Ephesians 1 (Amplified)

I am convinced that there's power available to me, and I'm not making proper use of it. After reading Satan's Dirty Little Secret: *The two demon spirits that all demons get their strength from* by Steve Foss, I am sure of it: There are believers living and walking in authority I've only read about.

I'm not sure how to obtain the faith and blessing to walk in that kind of power. But I think God gives us our faith. [Romans 12:3.] And it takes faith to take hold of "the riches and glory of His inheritance" in us, as believers. [Ephesians 1:18 (Amplified).] Steve Foss says I need the spirit of wisdom and revelation to help me see where I want to go with respect to power and anointing.

Lots and lots and lots of people have different judgments about why I'm not where I want to be: I don't tithe. I don't tithe properly (giving the first fruits of our income, which keeps the rest of the income from being redeemed). I haven't fully repented of something(s)—even something(s) from my high school days. I'm not keeping the commandments. I'm not pure in heart, motives, or intention. I'm not praying enough...or correctly...

Kenneth Copeland used some Scripture to say that we have to keep our eyes on the Word, literally. I'm not sure what he relied upon, but it is biblically-supported. He concludes that healing Scripture works, not only by quoting from memory; we also have to keep that Word before our eyes. He says this is because we often put words out of place—things like 'who' where the 'which' should be, and the like.

It's true.

I have found that when I go back to look in Scripture, I've often got many words out of place. I've deleted words. I've moved phrases around. Once, I took out 'from generation to generation!' [Psalm 146:10 (Amplified).] I don't know if God did not hear my prayers, because I quoted incorrectly. That doesn't sound like God, Who heard the "sighing and groaning" of the Israelites and remembered, though they didn't cry out for God but "because of slavery." [Exodus 2:23.] He doesn't act, because of our nature and what we've done.

He acts, because of His nature and what Lord Jesus has done.

There are other folks who say that it's incorrect to think that what our senses perceive as victory (every bill paid, every sickness banished, every affliction sent packing, etc.) will always be presently visible, if we are presently in right standing with God. God was on Daniel's case for 21 days, before it became apparent to His servant:

2In those days, I, Daniel, had been mourning for three entire weeks.³I did not eat any tasty food, nor did meat or wine enter my mouth, nor did I use any ointment at all until the entire three weeks were completed.⁴On the twenty-fourth day of the first month,

while I was by the bank of the great river, that is, the Tigris,⁵I lifted my eyes and looked, and behold, there was a certain man dressed in linen, whose waist was girded with a belt of pure gold of Uphaz.⁶His body also was like beryl, his face had the appearance of lightning, his eyes were like flaming torches, his arms and feet like the gleam of polished bronze, and the sound of his words like the sound of a tumult.⁷Now I, Daniel, alone saw the vision, while the men who were with me did not see the vision; nevertheless, a great dread fell on them, and they ran away to hide themselves.⁸So I was left alone and saw this great vision; yet no strength was left in me, for my natural color turned to a deathly pallor, and I retained no strength.⁹But I heard the sound of his words; and as soon as I heard the sound of his words, I fell into a deep sleep on my face, with my face to the ground.

¹⁰Then behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees.¹¹He said to me, “O Daniel, man of high esteem, understand the words that I am about to tell you and stand upright, for I have now been sent to you.” And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling.¹²Then he said to me, “Do not be afraid, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart on understanding this and on humbling yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to your words.¹³“But the prince of the kingdom of Persia was withstanding me for twenty-one days; then behold, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I had been left there with the kings of Persia.¹⁴“Now I have come to give you an understanding of what will happen to your people in the latter days, for the vision pertains to the days yet future.”

Daniel 10:12-14. And isn't it faith to believe that God is framing things—that He is creating things—that will be seen...which are not yet visible? Isn't that faith?

Maybe I'm circling back on myself and not taking the question towards its answer. I do know that some of the suggestions about why things are not yet in evidence in my life are stumbling blocks to my faith. They pull my eyes down off of Christ Jesus and His power...back down to myself. And my stumbling and my failures and my imperfections...

Jacelya, My servant, I hear your prayer. Now arise and (go)^x live your purpose.

—God, my heavenly Father [Monday, August 26, 2013.]

I hear your prayers. When you come into the kingdom, you will not be a stranger. And, yes, you have rewards; you will have more. (Tears) I see you. I have you in the palm of my hand. You are walking in, living your purpose. Keep walking. Keep believing, and you will be great. I have you in the palm of my hand.

—God, my heavenly Father [Tuesday, August 27, 2013.]

Tell the truth...in love. Trust the Holy Spirit. Do you think I did not equip you? Remember that I love you. Do you love Me? This I know—before I can answer. And, I hear the tune to "Jesus Loves Me," and children's voices singing—a reminder of the day.

I don't think I know you, I think, and before I can finish the thought—*You don't...but you will come to know Me with a fullness that satisfies.* I am reminded of the manna in the wilderness, which satisfied all, whether they took more or less.

I love you. That's the most important thing. It's another reminder—something I wrote via social media during the day, "...the God we love and, most important, Who loves us!!"

God so loved the world, I thought. *You are the world, He said. "I am the world," I repeated. "You are the world." He spoke in bullet points.*

—God, my heavenly Father [Tuesday, August 27, 2013.]

Conviction

3 For the vision is yet for an appointed time and it hastens to the end [fulfillment]; it will not deceive or disappoint. Though it tarry, wait [earnestly] for it, because it will surely come; it will not be behindhand on its appointed day.

—Habakkuk 2 (Amplified)

I was talking with a friend about her sense that things that used to matter had become useless. She felt useless. The filter was political. But there are many worldly filters we look through and see hopelessness: We've all been in the wilderness, drifting 40 years while we're only 11 days from salvation. [Deuteronomy 1:2 (Amplified).]

I spoke to that bleak place as a frequent resident:

...we were so utterly and unbearably weighed down and crushed that we despaired even of life [itself].

9 Indeed, we felt within ourselves that we had received the [very] sentence of death, but that was to keep us from trusting in and depending on ourselves instead of on God Who raises the dead.

10 [For it is He] Who rescued and saved us from such a perilous death, and He will still rescue and save us; in and on Him we have set our hope (our joyful and confident expectation) that He will again deliver us [from danger and destruction and [c]draw us to Himself]...

II Corinthians 1:8-10 (Amplified). I've been so afraid I was nearly paralyzed. As my senior pastor said one Sunday (2013), I *rationalized isolation*. I looked on everyone with suspicion and fear. I was so insecure in my world, I could hardly breathe. I was sure I would die early. Of a heart attack.

I rationalized getting high. I needed to calm down to avoid that heart attack, which floated around my mind like an ominous cloud. "Evil foreboding," Joyce Meyer called it. It can keep you so tense that you can't enjoy what you fear will be stolen from you. It's why I tell my daughter to stop planning tomorrow: Today is special in its own way. Thinking about tomorrow will make you miss it.

Lord Jesus had another way of saying it: 33 "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. 34 "So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." [Matthew 6 (NASB).]

My senior pastor says "the cause of Christ will not go forward on your shoulders," if you can't risk throwing away your fear.

Did you ever think killing your flesh would be this hard? My friend asked me, and I almost did that thing I can do; *I almost lied*.

Instead, I told her I didn't know it would be this hard: *Real deal surrender isn't just a song*, I finally wrote back.

That conversation was still in my head while I talked to another friend about her dream. It—her dream—is apparently on hold.

I reminded her of a sermon we heard one day. The pastor said that sometimes we have dreams, but God has a vision for our lives. Suddenly...she started crying. I almost kept talking, but then I hugged her.

I'd started crying earlier—while speaking with a woman about our decision to home school. We were talking about how it was going, and she was encouraging me... I hadn't felt really scared about it. I hadn't felt really worried about it. I had, in fact, been feeling excited about it. Sometimes, in the midst of it, I will just thank the Lord Jesus. I feel such gratitude. That my baby is with me. That I get this opportunity to see her learn. That I am not giving away something so valuable to the world.

Even if I don't know what I'm doing, the Holy Spirit is prompting me. God will glorify Himself through her success.

But I started crying. I was disconcerted. My flesh tried to tell me I was sad. Later, another friend said it was the Holy Spirit moving. I think it was.

I told my friend—the one whose dream is delayed—that I would pray for her. I said I didn't know what Scripture I would be standing on for her, yet, but it would come.

Standing on Scripture... That means I find a promise in Scripture. Then I confess it—say it aloud. And I say something like, 'I claim this promise by the Word of God in Jesus' name!' Or, 'I come into agreement that this promise will manifest for so-and-so. I am in agreement that this promise is for so-and-so in the name of Christ Jesus!' It's been pointed out to me that many figures in the Bible pointed out God's promises to them...and stood on them.

Anyway, there were 3 of us standing there, and when I couldn't call any Scripture to mind, we all kind of laughed. But when we talked about the notion of God's vision for our lives again, suddenly it was there—in my mouth:

"He has a vision... Though it tarry, wait earnestly for, because it will surely come. It will not be behindhand on its appointed day." I don't know if that made sense to her, but she nodded. And I was amazed. My fragmentary knowledge of the Scripture started coming together...and I realized that it was *perfect* for the moment.

Is it blasphemous to say it was a "God kind of a thing"? An apostolic Pentecostal minister I met at IHOP said that—"This is a God kind of a thing"—about our meeting and discussion. I was looking for a music teacher...and guidance about the baptism and gifts of the Holy Spirit. As a minister, that's what his focus is. And his wife is a psalmist...whose mother is a music and voice teacher.

Well, giving me Scripture when I am reaching for it is just the kind of thing God seems to do for me again and again.

I've become repetitious. Reading Scripture has freed me from the fear of being repetitious. So I repeated what my friend and I were talking about earlier. Throwing up my arms, I asked the sky, "We didn't know how hard it would be to surrender it all did we?" We all were shaking our heads.

"But," I said, "I think if we're willing to lay it all down, give up on our own dreams and our own will...God will reward us." I quoted Oprah, who said, "God dreams bigger dreams than we could ever dream for ourselves."

Even if we've read Matthew 6, we all know the feeling of wanting to be in control. Of praying to God for deliverance...and immediately proceeding to try to deliver ourselves.

My dream was to write all my life. After I got saved, some of the more perverse, dark, and just sick stuff that I wrote—entire novels—had to go. *Control + A and delete*, if that means anything to you. I still don't know if some of the novels I'm working on are 'okay'.

I don't think anything I can write glorifies God, because He glorifies Himself. [John 5:41; John 8:50,54 (Amplified).] But I don't want to write anything that is not within His purpose and vision for me. So, my writing is something that I'm learning to lay down, to surrender.

On the way to church one day (2013), I was explaining this to Hubster saying, "I'm learning to hold things loosely."

God's taught me a lot in short time about how a person acts, if she's been delivered. If she's been redeemed...

17If you address as Father the One who impartially judges according to each one's work, conduct yourselves in fear during the time of your stay on earth; 18knowing that you were not redeemed with perishable things like silver or gold from your futile way of life inherited from your forefathers, 19but with precious blood, as of a lamb unblemished and spotless, the blood of Christ. 20For He was foreknown before the foundation of the world, but has appeared in these last times for the sake of you 21who through Him are believers in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

—I Peter 1 (NASB).

The devil uses Doctrine to Divide

"...if I [or any others who have taught that the observance of the Law of Moses is not essential to being justified by God should now by word or practice teach or intimate that it is essential to] build up again what I tore down, I prove myself a transgressor. 19 For I through the Law [under the operation of the curse of the Law] have [in Christ's death for me] myself died to the Law and all the Law's demands upon me, so that I may [henceforth] live to and for God. 20 I have been crucified with Christ [in Him I have shared His crucifixion]; it is no longer I who live, but Christ (the Messiah) lives in me; and the life I now live in the body I live by faith in (by adherence to and reliance on and complete trust in) the Son of God, Who loved me and gave Himself up for me. 21 [Therefore, I do not treat God's gracious gift as something of minor importance and defeat its very purpose]; I do not set aside and invalidate and frustrate and nullify the grace (unmerited favor) of God. For if justification (righteousness, acquittal from guilt) comes through [observing the ritual of] the Law, then Christ (the Messiah) died groundlessly and to no purpose and in vain. [His death was then wholly superfluous.]"

—Galatians 2:18-21 (Amplified).

I still don't know what I think of repentance—that is, if it means confession and asking forgiveness.

Right now I'm pretty sure that confession of sin is our way of saying: We don't believe that Lord Jesus paid it all on the cross, and the work of confession will fill in the gaps His blood doesn't cover. We don't believe we come to the Cross and rely upon the sacrifice of Christ for our salvation. Or, we think the covering of His blood is temporal and not eternal—that is, if we sin, our salvation somehow becomes void.

I don't know how Christian ministers...or, members of their congregations read and understand Galatians 2:18-21, but confession feels like a religious ritual to me. No disrespect intended toward people like Joyce Meyer who teach continuous repentant confession for every sin; but when I tried that, it felt like religious obsessive compulsion. I look forward to embracing Joyce Meyer at heaven's gates, because she's had such a role in my salvation. But, I think I'm done with continual confession.

It put my condemning eyes on myself (and off our Lord and Savior). And it intimates that we're not wholly and solely justified through Christ.

Of course, my knowledge is only fragmentary. [I Corinthians 13:9.] It's just enough for me to exercise my personal convictions as in God's presence. [Romans 14:22.]

We've been redeemed, justified, reconciled to the Father of glory, consecrated [I Corinthians 1:30 (Amplified).], and made joint heirs with an inheritance as the body of Christ Jesus, Who is our Head. [Ephesians 1:18, 23.]

Every day (several times a day) I change my mind about God and my identity in Lord Jesus. I set my mind to turn from sin. I even ask for purity and to be cleansed, renewed, and remolded in a lot of my morning prayers.

I used to think doing that meant I didn't accept the finished work of Jesus Christ. But I am not there yet—fully renewed and remolded into the creation He envisioned when He breathed life into men. I was saved as soon as I accepted Christ Jesus into my heart, deciding to believe His blood covers my sins, and that He is my resurrected King, Who paid for my redemption by what He did on the Cross 2000 years ago. The renewing and remolding is sanctification and consecration, I think.

I had a dream once (2013) that big, white, 3-D crosses were coming forth out of the skies. One cross, in particular, was so immense that it scared me. I screamed and went inside. But I was glued to the glass, sliding doors. In the dream, we were back in the duplex I did a lot of my growing up in.

Dad was there again. So was my brother and at least one of my Littles. I didn't get the sense that I was without my immediate family in this dream, though not everyone was present.

There were smaller crosses, too. The clouds were full and billowing, gray and steel. There were 2 characters, unbelievers, who tricked my dad into coming outside. (He always seems to get a raw deal in my dreams.) Outside, they held him and stabbed him...to death.

But every emotion regarding what they had done was muted...because of something Dad said as soon as we saw that humongous cross: "Jesus is coming today. This is the day."

So, the murderers even conceded that we would see Dad again in heaven.

What perplexed me was the fact that the dream's killers rationalized their isolation from God's love, which was even then available to them. They *would* not receive salvation. They were talking about all the things that kept them in their rebellion—relationships with men. Just the tail end of Romans 1:20 came to me: "So men are without excuse—altogether without any defense or justification..."

I am being made—beaten like precious metal—into His holy workmanship. But like Jacob, I have to wrestle with God, holding on to Him, no matter how rough it gets in the natural. [Genesis 32:24-32 (NASB).] I have to press on, till I take hold of the "prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward." [Philippians 3:14.] The alternative is to backslide or, to stand still. But I say it like this, "I want to be promoted!"

I don't want to live the rest of this life without anointing and power manifest in my life. I prayed in my thinking spot (2013) that I would pour out my own soul unto death of worldliness and be filled with the spirit of revelation and wisdom that are revealed in the face of Jesus Christ (the Anointed One). I want to know the majesty and glory of God in my inmost heart. It all comes back to Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...and the pure in heart shall...see...God.

I want that.

I do confess, therefore, when ugly memories interfere and weigh heavy—like when I drank wine when I was pregnant (trying to please someone who only cared about whether I joined her in her misery). That I got so deep into the darkness and carnality of pornography in its various forms...

The devil holds these transgressions up before me like evil postcards. If I get distracted by those, he knows I'll stop wrestling through my trials, my tests, my sin, and my shame. The devil knows that if he can distract me, I'll look in the mirror and let go of God.

I think of it like this: Sin crouched at my door, desiring to have me. [Genesis 4:6-7 (NASB).] Failing to master it, I opened the door, and *it* mastered *me*. I was kidnapped by the devil and thrown into a dark trunk. Blindfolded and bound, he drove me around, until I just about gave up hope. But when Jesus Christ paid the ransom the devil never imagined he would, I was suddenly freed. Though it was almost day, it was dark out. [Romans 13:12.] As I stumbled, trying to get my bearing, the devil approached me as an apparently harmless passerby—a jogger.

And when I asked where I was, he said, 'I'm not sure. I think you might be pretty far from home.' But he knew the truth: I was only a few steps from home, from victory. From restoration. From deliverance. From transformation. A breakthrough...

The question is always the same: *Will I fall back?* Will I turn back? Will I give up? Or, will I never let go of God? [Genesis 32:24-28 (Amplified).]

We are hedged in (pressed) on every side—troubled and oppressed in every way, but not cramped or crushed; we suffer embarrassments and are perplexed and unable to find a way out, but not driven to despair;

We are pursued (persecuted and hard driven), but not deserted—to stand alone; we are struck down to the ground, but never struck out and destroyed...

—II Corinthians 4:8-9 (Amplified).

I looked up Scripture once...to justify getting high. I was trying to define intoxication and drunkard...using cross-references I found in Strong's Concordance. Thing is, my conviction was painfully strengthened in the pit of my stomach.

I admired the ways of the wicked and hoped my children would be the bullies in this world where tormenters do exist and traumatize their 'nice' prey.

I *do* repent of that.

29 He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the groomsman who stands by and listens to him rejoices greatly and heartily on account of the bridegroom's voice. This then is my pleasure and joy, and it is now complete. 30 He must increase, but I must decrease. [He must grow more prominent; I must grow less so.] 31 He Who comes from above (heaven) is [far] above all [others]; he who comes from the earth belongs to the earth, and talks the language of earth [his words are from an earthly standpoint]. He Who comes from heaven is [far] above all others [far superior to all others in prominence and in excellence].

—John 3:29-31 (Amplified).

However, let him who boasts and glories boast and glory in the Lord. For it is not the man who praises and commends himself, who is approved and accepted, but it is the person Whom the Lord accredits and commends.

—II Corinthians 10:17-18 (Amplified).

My hair smelled like 'poop.' I was covered in garlic and wondering: what is a 'clove,' exactly? As I washed my hair in my thinking spot, the Holy Spirit helped me to understand how to have the power and anointing I've been seeking.

My prayer has to be: In Jesus Christ's name, Father, let me become lesser, while you become greater.

I was reminded of this Scripture [John 3:30.], because one of the Littles joined Girls Everywhere Meeting the Savior (GEMS, hereinafter), and it's this month's theme.

There's Scripture that says we are born of a free woman, by virtue of God's promise. [Galatians 4:28 (Amplified).] Two examples of free women are Abraham's wife, Sarah and the mother of Lord Jesus, Mary. God promised the impossible to each one. One woman was barren, and the other woman was a virgin. Sarah bore a son, and Mary bore the Son of God, fulfilling the promises of God at the appointed time...by means of the personal agency of the Holy Spirit. [Genesis 21:2; Luke 2:5-7.]

These impossible births were remarkable in their own ways, because they gave neither woman a worldly reason to boast—except in the Lord.

And if I can become a barren woman, empty of every source of worldly vanity—self-reliance and rebellion to the will of God—He will fill me more fully.

The bond woman and her descendants [Galatians 4:24; Genesis 21:10.] are slaves who scorned the descendants of the free woman. They are bound by the—flesh—focus they place on themselves and what they can do.

When you know you've done nothing, earned nothing, have nothing worthy of God—nothing valuable to Him, except your faith...

Then, you're on to something. You're about to pour out all the pretense and self-deception of your soul. You're about to be filled by the remarkable, which you sought.

I think of bell peppers—cutting the core out with a blade and then scooping out the red or green or yellow flesh for the seeds. Then I rinse mine in water, turn them upside down to drain, and prepare them to suit my purpose.

Lord Jesus is being rewarded by Father God, because He poured out His soul unto death. [Isaiah 53:12 (Amplified).]

I pray to pour out my soul, and now I know I'm onto something. Less of my mind, heart, and willful emotion gives place to the grace of God. It is when we surrender and bow down and place our own souls on His altar to be burned—until nothing is left but His will and His predestined plan for us—that we can live the good life which He prearranged and made ready for

us to live. [Ephesians 2:10 (Amplified).] Only then, can we become His handiwork and move in the Spirit. [Ephesians 2:10 (Amplified).]

*16 Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed.
The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.*

—James 5:16 (KJV)

I saw a documentary about a Jewish Lebanese woman, who became a spy for Israel and underwent unfathomable torture. Hearing and seeing the dramatization of nails being driven into her hands—after the ones in her feet were pulled out... Of her being hung from the ceiling with ropes around her ankles, naked, and whipped by two men—one man whipping high and the other man whipping low, in open court—until blood ran down her body, with buckets of water thrown into her face to awaken her and a doctor standing by to check for her heartbeat... For *life*... And it went on and on.

She prayed to be able to hold on. She prayed to do God's will. Even when she began to feel like a mental patient, she prayed. The torture entered a realm that she says it would be improper to discuss aloud. She prayed for the strength to put His will at the center of everything she would do and say.

Hearing her story scared me. I know I'm not entitled to anything. The fact that my senses all function at any level is a trophy of God's grace. That revelation—that everything I take for granted is a gift from God—is becoming real to me. This woman wasn't just given the cold shoulder, unfriended on facebook, or unfollowed on Twitter, or told to stop e-mailing folks with whom she wished to share the gospel of Christ... *Real persecution* gives me chills. Because I don't think that God is respecter of men...or our bodies. He wants to save our spirits and draw us to His beloved Son.

That's scary, if you let yourself be drawn into anticipatory foreboding of what you might be called to do—to sacrifice—on behalf of the Lord. For His glory...

It's a source of hope when I think about my babies. I know Jesus and the Holy Spirit are inside my children, just as *they* are in Christ Jesus. And God did that. My heavenly Father drew them and attracted them to the manifestation and revelation of His majesty and glory in the Person and Face of Jesus Christ. And it is His will that because they have seen the Lord, they not be lost, but lifted up on the last day. No matter what senses say at any point, *that fact—that my children have seen Lord Jesus, believe in Him, and He will not lose one*—is more real than any rebellion I will ever see or hear from my children. Because it is God's will. And they have His Holy Spirit. If they should ever flee to the mountains and leave the flock, Lord Jesus Himself will go out after them to bring them home! And in Him is authority and dominion over every name that is named, in this age and the one to come! Nothing can stop that—no matter what my senses tell me.

Children uprooted from the Way is one fear that I think many people can verbalize. Maybe that's because it's common.

I didn't want to say exactly what my fear was after catching the end of the documentary about the woman arrested and convicted by the Lebanese government in the late 1950s, spending seven years in prison—where she was repeatedly tortured—before she was released in 1967,

following the Six Day War as part of a prisoner's exchange. Because, oddly, it *wasn't* a distant fear.

It made me cry out to God as I never have. "Father," I said. "Father. Father! Father!" Pretty soon I realized that something was happening to me. The Holy Spirit was stirred in me, and I felt myself pushing against something. I don't know what it was I was pushing against, but I'll tell you the truth: I backed away from it as I felt it continuing to rise. It was like stepping back from the edge of a cliff.

I was speaking to Father God in a way I never have. In a familiar way. In an...insubordinate...or, pressing way...and, I don't think He was angry with me.

When I looked back at that moment, through the filter of Scripture, words stand out, but I see the image of fire: Fervor. Agony. Desperation. Her good courage highlighted my fault and a fear I've try to avoid since being saved—the fear that comes with believing that God wants me to step out there and act with *His* heart, rather than a *worldly* heart filled with fear at the prospect of rejection.

Anyway, when I stepped back from whatever was happening inside me, whatever was stirring up inside of me...I prayed for the words—for the *truth* of what was upsetting me about what I'd seen.

And it came: "God," I said, "I don't ever want to go through that. But...I want to do it for you, if you want me to do it."

It was the same with my addiction. I didn't want to quit for anyone. Only my growing comprehension and love for God, Who delivered me made me want to quit. That was my prayer, and He answered it.

I'm learning that the miracle isn't that He heard me or cared. He proved that more than 2000 years ago. The miracle is that I asked, that I believed, and that I received.

The endurance of that woman is evidence of things yet unseen in my life. But I believe—more and more everyday—that all things exist in the spiritual realm, waiting to be taken by we, who would believe. They are prepared, blessed, and laid out by our Lord Jesus Christ and provided by His affliction, oppression, death, and resurrection. What is available to the faithful, who love God and are the called according to His purpose are as real as salvation by faith through grace for the glory of God...and *more* real than anything our senses tell us about this fallen world and the unregenerate remnant of worldliness inside us.

ⁱ I refuse to capitalize this on purpose.

ⁱⁱ I used 'after the', rather than 'according to the,' because I saw this substitution recorded in Numbers 7, where in verse 19, "after the shekel" replaces "according to the shekel" from verse 13 and remains "after the" for the remaining descriptions of the dedication offering for the altar from the leaders of Israel on the day it was anointed.

ⁱⁱⁱ From a social media post I wrote (April 20, 2013).

^{iv} From a social media post I wrote (April 25, 2013).

^v <http://www.behindthename.com/bb/fact/633606>

^{vi} All post-it note references are written exactly as they still appear, wherever I have them stuck, except the ones that are quotes that do appear in Scripture.

^{vii} I choose not to capitalize and give honor to the drug.

^{viii} Another name for the devil, satan, etc..

^{ix} Genesis 50:19 (Amplified).

^x Parenthetical because I'm not sure He said that word, or I'm remembering it incorrectly.