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I had the privilege of attending the Arise AZ Conference in Sedona, Arizona September 29-30. There were well over 650 women in attendance! This year's theme was: **Even if . . . God is Good.** ***"But even if he does not, we want you to know, Your Majesty, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up."*** Daniel 3:18 We were asked to fill in the blank of what our . . . represented and then to remember that no matter what we are going through that God is Good! It reminded me of the song ***Even If*** by MercyMe and ***Death Sentence*** by Mark Batterson.

### ***Even If***

*"It's easy to sing when there's nothing to bring me down. But what will I say when I'm held to the flame like I am right now. I know You're able and I know You can save through the fire with Your mighty hand. But even if You don't, my hope is You alone. I know the sorrow, and I know the hurt would all go away if You'd just say the word, but even if You don't, my hope is You alone. You've been faithful. You've been good all my days. Jesus, I will cling to You come what may 'cause I know You're able, I know You can. They say it only takes a little faith to move a mountain. Well, good thing, a little faith is all I have right now. But God, when You choose to leave mountains unmovable, give me the strength to be able to sing it is well with my soul."* – MercyMe

### ***Death Sentence***

"It was a death sentence. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego knew that if they refused to bow down to the ninety-foot-tall statue of King Nebuchadnezzar, they would be executed. But these three Jewish expats obviously feared God more than they feared death itself. They would rather die by the flame than dishonor God. So they made a defining decision to stand up for what was right rather than bow down to what was wrong. It was all or nothing. It was now or never. It was life or death.

To be honest, I could have come up with a dozen rationalizations to justify bowing down. *I'm bowing on the outside, but I'm not bowing on the inside. I'll ask for forgiveness right after I get back up. My fingers are crossed. I'm only breaking one of the Ten Commandments. What good am I to God if I'm dead?* When we compromise our integrity, we don't leave room for divine intervention. When we take matters into our own hands, we take God out of the equation. When we try to manipulate a situation, we miss out on a miracle. Stop and think about this.

If Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had compromised their integrity and bowed down to the statue, they would have been delivered from the fiery furnace. But it would have been by Nebuchadnezzar, not by God. And it would have been *from*, not *through*. They would have forfeited their testimony by failing the test. And while they would have saved their lives, they would have sacrificed their integrity. It was their integrity that triggered the miracle. It was their integrity that was their fire insurance and life insurance.

It was integrity that got Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in trouble with Nebuchadnezzar, but it was that same integrity that found them favor with God. So which is it? To bow or not to bow? Because you can't have it both ways! I'd rather get in trouble with King Nebuchadnezzar than get in trouble with God. And I'd much rather find favor with the King of Kings than with King Nebuchadnezzar." - Batterson

***God can deliver us from a trial, or He can miraculously sustain and strengthen us in a trial.*** – Spurgeon

## Four and a half years ago . . .

I was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis. I was encouraged by the initial diagnosis informing me that it had been caught in the early stages. I was put on medication and began a new journey regarding my health. I must confess that I shed some tears over this but "**nevertheless I wanted to trust God**". I knew He was sovereign and His plans for me were good. As I read Hebrews 11 that day, I was reminded again that God is pleased when I walk by faith.

Six weeks later I went in for my follow-up appointment. I was convinced I would continue receiving good news. However, the rheumatologist informed me that I had an "aggressive" form of RA. I just sat there and cried. The Doctor was so gentle as she reminded me, I would be ok, and I would get through this. I was also thankful that my dear friend, Pam Lyons, was with me and encouraged me when we got back to my house!

Proverbs 3:5,6 is a very precious promise to me and one I run to when my trust is wavering. **Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will make your paths straight.**

Through my tears I prayed: *Lord, I confess that I am having trouble trusting you right now. In my own understanding this looks like a difficult path for me. I know you're still in control, but I'm very discouraged right now. I want you to direct my path because I know you love me and have only the best in store for me. Help me to trust You and to walk by faith!*

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My medication was changed and a few weeks later I had to have blood drawn. While Jeniva was drawing my blood, we chatted about her life. She shared that she was living with her boyfriend, her mom was Catholic, her dad a Jehovah Witness, and she was confused about spiritual things.

I shared how I had been married for 35 wonderful years and her immediate question: "*So what's the key to a happy marriage?*" What a wonderful opportunity to tell her about Jesus, how He changed my life and how she too could know Him! Before I left, I gave her a *Would You like to know God Personally?* booklet. I continued to ask the LORD to touch Jeniva's heart and open her eyes to "The Way, the Truth and The Life."

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As I left Sonoran Quest, the LORD encouraged me by whispering to my heart: *I have you on this journey with RA because there are people you will encounter who need Jesus.* I told the Lord that if He could use me in some small way to see eternal addresses changed because of HIS work in my life, it would be worth it all! He is faithful, He is sovereign, and He is my good, good Father!



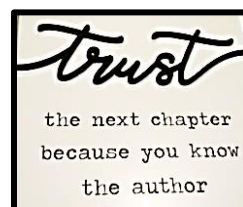
I love telling people about Jesus and I also love meeting those who already know Him! What a blessing office assistants, Janine and Angela, were to me as they eagerly greeted me with their beautiful smiles and caring hearts at my appointments. I discovered early on that they both knew Jesus. They were delighted with the resources I gave them and what a JOY it was to talk about our Savior.

I am currently getting monthly injections and am grateful for the difference this path has made in my journey! I am thankful for the opportunities the Lord has given me to share my faith with each office visit. Last month as Ana was helping me, she told me that she and her husband want to have children, but she had recently had a miscarriage. She shared how they were trusting the Lord and I said, "*You must know Jesus*" and she said, "*Absolutely!*" I shared how God had been faithful to me during my three miscarriages. I gave her a set of the Hope Cards - **There is Hope and Encouragement for Difficult Times** - 31 verses on a key chain to encourage her in her walk with Jesus .

As I was leaving my appointment, the Lord impressed me to ask the parking lot attendant, Shana, how I could pray for her. She shared with me that she was in the midst of having her time with the Lord. I left filled with the JOY of the Lord encouraged by Ana and Shana!



**What do we do if "God spells the answer differently than we spelled the request."** -Batterson



**"My cancer was such a blessing in that it gave me a wonderful chance to turn to Jesus and get to know his amazing love."** I was deeply touched by these words which Cathy, my friend and former neighbor, sent me regarding her diagnosis. "I truly have found God to be in my heart. I went through a rough period. My cancer diagnosis was not good and the surgeries overwhelming. This has been a long journey and story but every single bit of it has been such an amazing blessing.



I have many miracles and so much to be grateful for. I do not know how I got by without knowing this great love from God. I now know where I am going and continue with his purpose for me to be here. I pray and study his word each day. You said in one of your letters that **you can't go back and start over, but you can start now and have a different ending.** Amen! Thanks Sara. Cathy is a life that has truly been changed by Jesus! What a joy to witness her getting baptized at her church. Cathy continued to inspire me with her trust in the Lord. When she received word that her cancer had returned, she wrote:



Hi Sara, I so appreciate your love and prayers. While I am surprised by my new diagnosis, I can tell you already the Lord is providing me the strength and Grace I need to face this setback with everyone I need. God's Love is greater than my fear. I may have to remind myself of that every day, every hour, or sometimes every minute, but I will face my chemo with a smile on Monday and gratitude for such an amazing support system and caring doctors too. I believe that many times God must bring us to the end of ourselves so we can have a new beginning, a second chance. I am a person of second chances. I am getting a second chance right now to fight my cancer again and feel very certain God will show me my purpose in this by putting people in my path that I can encourage!

The question I have asked myself is, does my faith change according to my circumstance? I certainly hope not. I believe God has my plan already known to him. I trust in that for the present. It is turning around and trusting him with the mystery of my unknown future that I pray for each day. Faith can become stronger in a storm. I truly pray every day for strength and wisdom and the ability to love strongly those who may seem like they don't deserve it. Believe me, it is only by God's hand I can do this.

I pray I can be an inspiration to the other ladies in my chemo group, that even if you have to come back again it is still the gift of another chance. Prayer is so powerful, and I appreciate all the prayers. I have been praying and looking to Jesus about this whole thing. It's like this, I truly believe God is good and there is something good in his plan for me always. I know it sounds crazy but now that my cancer is back and I'm over the shock of it, I am excited to think of the position this may put me in to show hope to others. I have read somewhere that Hope is as essential to the health of our soul as water is to our bodies. Hope leads us to the presence of God. Hope is not wishful thinking or avoiding reality, **IT IS ABSOLUTE CONFIDENCE IN GOD WHO MAKES ALL THINGS NEW!** - Cathy

Published in the Arizona Republic:



It is with a heavy heart that we come together to honor and celebrate the life of Catherine Lodwick. After a long battle with ovarian cancer, she passed away at home on 09/07/2023 surrounded by family. Born in Iowa and having spent her later years in Arizona, she leaves behind a legacy that will forever be remembered.

What truly defined Cathy was her unwavering faith in Jesus Christ. She believed deeply in spreading His word and sharing His love with everyone she encountered.

Cathy had an incredible passion for animals, particularly her beloved dogs, which brought her immense joy throughout her life. We remember Cathy for her kind heart, infectious smile, and compassionate spirit. May we find comfort knowing that she is now reunited with our Lord, continuing her mission from above.

What a powerful testimony Cathy had! The LORD always takes the route that brings Him the greatest glory. I can only imagine the joy she is now experiencing in Heaven being in the presence of Jesus. Even though I deeply miss her, I'm grateful that we will spend all of eternity together!

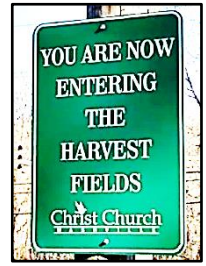
She was an inspiration to me as we spent many hours together. During one of our times together, she asked if I would help plan and speak at her memorial service. I told her I would be honored to do that. Her memorial service will be November 18. She has four grandsons whom she adored, and one is studying on the east coast and won't be home until Thanksgiving break and wants to be at the memorial service.

Please pray that the Lord will give me wisdom as I prepare the message He wants me to share celebrating Cathy's life. I know it will be an emotional time.



## The Joy of Becoming a Contagious Christian!

I had the privilege of speaking at two breakout sessions on this topic at the Arise AZ Conference. Intro to my session: *"God News is contagious. We should be faith spreaders, love givers and hope dealers! – Groeschel. You will leave inspired, encouraged, and challenged to step out in faith to share Jesus with those around you who desperately need Him. It will be fun and practical!"*



What a blessing these women were to me. It was so much fun to be with them! I gave each of them handouts, two evangelistic booklets by Cru and a Stop to Pray medallion. My props included a hat with a blinged out cross in the center -- when people say *I love your hat*, I say, *it has a cross on it*. The normal response: *I know*, then I ask, **do you know Jesus?** I call it my evangelistic hat! 😊 My sweatshirt says, **I may start talking about Jesus at any time!** A poster which says: **You are now entering the Harvest Field**. I encouraged them to post a copy on their door as a reminder for when they leave home.

Someone said: *The harvest is plentiful, and the observers are many!* May we move from just observing to participating in HIS harvest field and may our hearts be deeply burdened for those who don't know Jesus. There is great JOY when we step out in faith to share Jesus with others who desperately need HOPE!



*I had the opportunity to attend the Arise AZ Conference with my mom this year and hear her speak to 60+ women between two breakout sessions. Hearing my mom speak for the first or 20<sup>th</sup> time, my heart is always ministered to. She effortlessly connects with women through her humor, transparency, relatability, and unmistakable radiance of Jesus! It is quite astounding, yet not surprising, the imprint she leaves on literally everyone she encounters. I consider myself incredibly blessed for the mother and best friend God has given me!*

What a joy to have Jennifer join me at the Arise AZ Conference this year. I love her heart for the Lord! Each day on her drive home from work (she lives in San Diego) she calls, and we pray together. I thank the Lord for Jennifer and all the time we've been able to spend together!

I met Don and Nancy at last year's Arise Conference, and they volunteered again this year with a team of 15 from Central Baptist Church in North Little Rock, AR. What a blessing all these men and women were to us at the conference! When Jen and I arrived, Nancy was at the door confirming our reservations and when she recognized me, she said, "I have got to tell you something!" Here's her story . . .



*Your March newsletter on grief was so timely for us and a huge blessing. My husband's twin brother was killed in a car accident on February 3rd. They were extremely close as you can imagine twins are. Then before we could recover from that my "special" younger brother who lived with us for past seven years after passing of our mother, passed away suddenly on March 6th. God answered my prayer immediately when I asked for guidance on whether to ask doctors to continue trying to save him or was it time for him to go home to heaven. The Lord took him immediately !!! I will be forever thankful and blessed for that answered prayer!*

*Your newsletter and the sharing of others who had experienced great loss helped both of us to see we are not alone in our grief and further instilled that even though at times what happens in our lives is very painful we need to trust in God's perfect plan! They were both saved and we know we will see them again someday in God's beautiful heaven!!! Thank you again for your dear friendship and your ministry. You are definitely doing God's work. We love ❤️ you!!!*

I love sharing what the Lord is doing in this ministry through my monthly newsletters. I'm grateful for how He graciously gives me wisdom month after month. Hearing how Don and Nancy were encouraged blessed my heart!

**Captured by His Holy Calling,**

**Sara**