

MERRY CHRISTMAS

# AROUND the FIRE

Winter 2022

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

## *The Tissue Paper Prison*

BY KIM MEEDER

Recently, a distraught young woman walked up the Ranch driveway. Her story poured out within a tide of tears. Days earlier, she went to work and found out her employer was downsizing and she was given papers documenting her termination. She went home to share with her husband what had happened . . . only to receive more papers from him . . . documenting that he wanted an immediate divorce.

Awash in complete hopelessness and despair, she saw a flyer on a coffee house wall about a “Youth Ranch” that rescues horses and offers hope to families. It was the single word “hope” that compelled her to make the drive to this seemingly random “Youth Ranch.”

While recounting her ordeal to the Crystal Peaks staff, the woman also mentioned that she would no longer be able to afford her home. This was the house in which she was raising her four small children, all of whom were under the age of five. There was more—three years earlier she was made aware of an abused and terrified horse. She shared that she didn’t know anything about horses, but she knew that no animal deserves to be mistreated. Compelled by compassion, she carefully approached the neighbor and bought his battered horse.

Everyone who heard her terrible story was deeply moved. Despite the complete shattering of her life, she still displayed tender kindness and responsibility toward the troubled horse in her care. In a single week, she had lost her job, her marriage, her home and the ability to keep a horse in need. With heavy streaks pouring down her cheeks, she looked at the Ranch staff and simply asked, “I need a safe home for an untouchable horse . . . *can you help me?*”

Arm over arm, the staff gathered around the breaking woman and prayed.

# FREEDOM

*Continued on page 2*



While channels of help were immediately positioned, one questioned remained, *Lord, by helping this horse . . . will we imperil people?* By rescuing this untouchable twelve-year-old Arabian gelding, would we be endangering those on the Ranch? The gears of, “Rescue the Equine,” seemed to collide with, “Mentor the Child.” To move one thousand pounds of terrified power to a kids ranch could be life-threatening to both human and horse.

Our prayer was unified and simple, “Lord Jesus, You’re the only One who knows the way. Please show us how to be Your hands and feet and how to best help this precious young mama, her hurting children and her broken horse, Amen.”

By following the Lord’s lead, three staff members met the woman at her parent’s house to evaluate her bay gelding. She shared how it took her three weeks to be able to touch his muzzle. Occasionally, she could get a halter on him, but he was extremely wary and barely allowed her to touch him anywhere else. Being a young mother of four small children, that was about the extent of her training with him.

While Stephanie and Deirdre engaged the brokenhearted woman, Sarah engaged the fearful horse. After about 90 minutes of prayerful movements, Sarah was able to gain the trust of the gelding enough for him to smell her hand. In her evaluation, she witnessed a submissive horse who didn’t want trouble with anyone. Although he had the opportunity to be defensive and aggressive, he chose instead to move away. He consistently demonstrated kindness, caution and even curiosity. He wasn’t mean, he was simply afraid. His trust had been broken and he had learned to survive by moving away from any perceived threat.

After a designated time of prayer, we all agreed independently and as a team that God was releasing this fearful horse to come to the Ranch.

The saying is true, “Fear is a liar.” Fear often drives its owner to do irrational and sometimes dangerous things. Trying to load a terrified horse into a steal box is not only dangerous . . . it can occasionally be fatal. With that sober truth in place, our team of five women left the Ranch with a horse trailer in tow.

During the drive, we prayed over the horse, the young woman and the safety of our team. As is our tradition at Crystal Peaks, we greatly value the name of those coming into our care. A name is a banner under which the animal will live and it should have eternal value. I shared how earlier that morning during my time in the Word with Jesus, I was led to read through a portion of Mark. I was especially moved by Mark 10:46-52, the encounter of a blind man who pursued Jesus for healing. Because he was persistent and didn’t give up even when he was told to, Jesus healed him completely. This event took place in Jericho.

What? I’ve been to Jericho and it is so completely destroyed that nothing remains but great heaps of dirt. Why would Jesus go to a place of such destruction? As I pondered this location, it occurred to me that what makes Jericho notable is how its once impenetrable walls—the very thing that those within trusted most to protect them—were completely demolished by God through those who believed that He could.

As powerful as Jericho’s walls were . . . they gave way beneath the Almighty Presence of God.

Glancing in the rearview mirror, I shared with my team how fear resembles the walls of Jericho. Those who cling to it feel an impenetrable wall around them that cannot be breached. Unfortunately, that belief which can feel like a fortress, is really a prison for those who choose to live cowering under its boundaries. The blind man proved this truth. Fear is always a liar (1 John 4:18). The reality is that our fear is tissue-paper thin and one, single courageous step of faith will carry us right on through into the absolute freedom that Jesus offers all (Gal. 5:1, 2 Cor. 3:17).

I clarified, “We’ve been praying that this horse’s fear would diminish and trust would rise in it’s place. What do you think about symbolizing this process and renaming him ‘Jericho?’” The team was thoughtful. Finally, Emily, who was sitting directly behind me spoke, “I think that would be cool not only because of what it stands for . . . but also because it sounds nearly identical to the name of the courageous woman who rescued him. This name would honor her brave heart as well.”

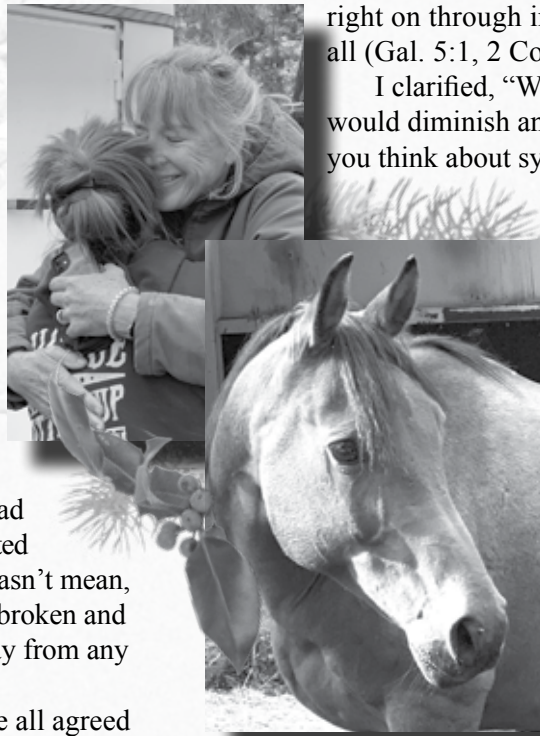
And just like that, it was agreed upon. With unified recognition that *all* fear can be destroyed by faith—we named the terrified gelding Jericho.

Once we arrived, our little team went to work. I threaded the truck and trailer through a dense stand of ponderosa trees into an incredibly tight but safe position. We opened the trailer door and constructed a small round pen of metal panels behind it.

Each woman had a stick with a plastic bag tied on the end. Everyone was strategically placed and had a specific job. Once Jericho was moved into the small pen, Sarah—and only Sarah—would be allowed to carefully and gently engage him. The rest of us stood back and waited for what this gelding would tell us. We were told that Jericho had only been trailered twice in his life . . . and neither time was without pain and fear.

It was imperative that from this day forward NO fear would be employed in any interaction with Jericho . . . only opportunities for trust.

Already knowing his abject fear of strangers and what they might do, we agreed to not even LOOK at him. Instead, we would simply convey with our movements that we were kind and gentle and here to help.



*Photo credit: Kim Meeder*



After group prayer, everyone took their pre-arranged positions and Jericho quietly entered the pen. Because we were not close, he was calm. He smelled the trailer with interest and picked up a few random straws of hay from within it. This metal box smelled like his own kind, an instant comfort to a herd animal who was completely alone.

One at a time, with quiet intention, each of our team moved a bit toward him. Still, by not looking at him, none of us were perceived as a threat. He accepted our inch-by-nonchalant-inch advance as we casually mirrored his movements and scratched, rubbed our faces on our arms and searched the ground for something fun to eat. Without word or threat, we were becoming his herd.

In a surprisingly short amount of time, we had each advanced toward him until we were only feet away on the outside of the small metal pen. He continued to stand quietly and passively explored the trailer.

Without further approach, touch or fear, our team proceeded to help him understand that the trailer was the best place for him to be. We did this by softly rustling the bags tied to our sticks every time he looked away from the trailer. The moment he looked back into the trailer, the gentle rustling stopped.

This “herd communication” continued until he knew exactly what was being asked of him. Because we were not “attacking” him—but supporting him—he felt brave enough to turn his back to us and study this boxy space that had previously embodied terror. By lowering his head, he studied it earnestly.

A choice lay before him . . . one that only he could make. He could stay in his fortress of fear, alone—or—he could trust his new herd and leap into a family.

As if to say goodbye, he looked back one last time. The bags rustled in unison, cheering him on. In one, single courageous act—terror was trampled by TRUST—the horse leaped through the tissue paper wall of his fearful prison and into the trailer.

From Heaven’s view, every heart that leaps through fear . . . lands in FREEDOM.

This is the journey of trust . . . where every step takes us deeper into the freedom of Jesus Christ.

It is for this reason that Jesus chose to leave Heaven’s glory and come to earth. Sent by the love of the Father, Jesus came to purchase our freedom from sin and eternal death. And He offers this everlasting gift to everyone who will choose it.

So, the real question is . . . will we?

Will we choose to remain imprisoned by our own fear, pride, guilt, shame, anger, apathy or unforgiveness? Or, will we mirror a blind man named Bartimaeus—or an Arabian gelding named Jericho—and leap into the complete healing of Jesus’ redeeming love?

Within this season hallmarked by gifts, will you choose to take His greatest gift? Will you choose, like Bartimaeus to no longer be bound by your circumstances and what others determine for you? Will you choose, like Jericho to no longer allow fear to become your idol, your tissue-paper prison that keeps you from knowing Jesus’ freedom?

Today—Jericho is no longer blinded by fear. Instead, he is transforming within his new life of loving freedom on the Ranch. He continues to trust and is allowing many to touch, rub, scratch and feed him. He now chooses to be haltered, led, allows his feet to be trimmed and FOLLOWS his human herd. Similarly, Bartimaeus is no longer blind. Mark 10:52 continues, “And Jesus said to him, “Go, for your faith has healed you.” Instantly he could see, and he FOLLOWED JESUS down the road.” (NLT, emphasis added).

Beloved, it’s time to choose to FOLLOW JESUS.

Today, will you take *action*—to leave your place of pain—and move into the open arms of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior? His loving freedom awaits.

“It is for FREEDOM that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by the yoke of slavery.” (Gal. 5:1, NIV)



*Photo credit: Kim Meeder*



I'm sure many of you are familiar, especially parents, with the old phrase, "The days are long, but the years are short." Parents who deal with constant fatigue despite overwhelming love for their children is something we all grow accustomed to. As a working mama with two young children at home, I know I do.

The days are long, but the years are short is a statement I've clung to often as a mother. It wasn't until recently that I began applying the same premise to our family's life in ministry. When you're working on a mission with the Gospel as the center of all you do, there are many mountaintop moments, as well as valley sojourning-on experiences. God has certainly moved my life through many peaks and valleys over the last five years here at Crystal Peaks. Some of these seasons have increased my faith in tremendous ways. Others have challenged my faith with lies of doubt, insecurity or fear. As each deception tried to creep into my heart, I had to acknowledge them and work through every one with Jesus.

By reflecting with the Lord on the word "seasons," I am first reminded of the beauty and uniqueness of annual weather changes—winter, spring, summer and fall. We're so blessed to live in the Pacific Northwest where we truly experience each of the four seasons in all their splendor. Spring brings rain showers that pour much-needed moisture into fertile soil. Soon, all creation starts to blossom with vibrant colors. Each plant displays green evidence of the life-giving water it needs to survive. Summer brings the heat we need to ripen and dry our crops and prepare them for harvest. The arrival of Fall is announced by bundling up to go outside. We welcome every hue of orange, red and yellow that encircle us in radiant glory. Gradually, the winds grow stronger and leaves begin to fall.

Winter comes and drapes the high desert with a beautiful banner of snow. The pure white mantel covers the lush pines of the forest with a dusting of what often looks like powdered sugar across the mountains.

Seasons in our life ebb and flow much like the seasons of the year. I love each of the four seasons for their own unique splendor. While looking for the same radiance regarding seasons in my own life, I've felt the Lord question, "Do you appreciate the seasons of your life of faith as much as you appreciate the seasons of nature?"

Moved by the question, I decided to begin by looking up the dictionary source of the word *seasons*. I read through a few definitions without life applications, then I came to "season" as it relates to timber. The Oxford Dictionary defines the verb "season" as "to make suitable for use as timber by adjusting its contents to that of the environment in which it will be used." Simply stated, it means to season the wood for it to be suitable to use. *Okay, Lord, I understand.*

Timber must go through a process of adjusting its moisture content before it can be burned. Why? Because if it doesn't, no one can set it aflame. It will only smoke and pop, twist and warp and create a terrible odor. Why? Because *it isn't ready yet.*

As I've let this truth seep deep into my heart, I've realized that ministry is no different. If we haven't had time to *season*—time to go through a refining process with Jesus—we won't be ready to accomplish the goal. In fact, we will often ruin the environment we were meant to set aflame with God's fire.

I've been in ministry here at Crystal Peaks for five consecutive seasons now, and I can tell you that not one season has been similar. The refinement process with Jesus—sanctification—is continual. It is rarely easy, yet it is incredible to reflect back on.

Through reflection, we see the work of Christ in our lives in magnificent ways, even when we didn't understand it in the moment. We see times of growth. We see times of endurance. We see how God was preparing us for the next season through lessons learned in the previous one.

Sometimes it doesn't feel good—but like the timber that's laid out to season for its intended use—sanctification is

# SEASONS

By Stephanie Voth

necessary for those who seek to follow Jesus and be laid out for *His* intended use.

The past two seasons have been intensely refining for me personally. The Lord has been softening my rough edges by asking me to let go of deep emotional wounds from my past. While I continually learn to fully depend on Him, I'm also leading a large team of people on a mission for Christ.

Refinement is an understatement. I'm finally able to look back and see God's faithful provision for me as He cleanses me of all the junk I still had stored within my heart. His love has removed things so ingrained within—that I didn't even know they were there.

I wasn't raised in a Christian home, and though my parents did their best, our home was often centered around personal success, lofty career paths and educational achievements. Very few of my family members understand why my husband and I work in ministry. Honestly, it's made the calling that much clearer for us. It's beyond our own logic.

When God calls me to do something outside of my wheelhouse, I wish my first response was to act immediately. Yet, I often hesitate. I have questions. I want to know the full story first, THEN decide if it's a good plan.

The beauty of this scripture in Matthew 4 is that Simon and Andrew didn't know the fullness of what they were going to do with Jesus. They didn't even know a small portion of it! Yet, they trusted Jesus to lead them. They trusted that He was their Savior and He had good plans for them.

He will be faithful to grow the seeds. All He asks of us is to partner with Him to *plant them*.

We don't have to understand *why* in order to follow God's prompting. We just have to be obedient. Like the wood being laid out to become seasoned and ready for the fire, only then can we be fully used for HIS intended purpose. He will remain faithful and continue preparing us for the next steps.

It has been an honor and a joy to walk with five different groups of interns as they enter the Ranch ministry for our session program. Every year is unique and I see the work of the Holy Spirit reveal powerful things to each of them. They learn what it looks like to fully submit their hearts to the Lord and allow the hard work of refinement and sanctification to enter all areas of their daily lives.

I see our interns come not knowing what to expect, yet filled with hopeful anticipation. Then I watch them blossom and grow as they choose to send their roots more deeply into Jesus. In reflecting back, I'm constantly in awe of God for giving me the beautiful opportunity to walk with these incredible people. He has allowed me to celebrate with them, cry with them, ask them hard questions, support them in times of doubt, love them fiercely in times of struggle—and through it all—see firsthand how Jesus reveals Himself. I've witnessed the radically transforming grace of Jesus overwhelm these young warriors for Christ and launch them forward into the next chapter of their lives.

*So, the days are long, but the years are short.*

Just like the wonderful, incredible, hard and messy journey of parenting, being on mission for Jesus Christ in daily life isn't easy. Sometimes it isn't fun. However, it is our life's greatest calling.

I can always say that through the difficult experiences I've endured—it is *always* worth it—to see the Light of Christ ignite into flame within the heart of another. Jesus doesn't *need* us to spread the Gospel. Yet, like a nurturing father, he *chooses* to engage us . . . to teach us . . . to develop us into His ambassadors.

I look back on times in my life and I now understand how I was timber that wasn't ready for the fire. I needed time to be seasoned. I had life lessons to learn with Jesus to become a more experienced, functioning part of His body.

Friend, as you continue in this current season, search for how God is ever-present and refining you for your good and His glory.

No matter what lies ahead, remember His faithful promises . . . "Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever . . . The people who walk in darkness will see a great light.

*For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine . . . For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end.*" (Isaiah 9:1-2, 6-7, NLT) ". . . fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand." (Isaiah 41:10, ESV)





# GRATITUDE

By Troy Meeder

**I**t was the summer of 1995. I had just turned 35 and Kim would be 34. Our residence was a double-wide manufactured home on 8.92 acres of a rock quarry with a view. We had little more than a box on rocks.

Yet, it was this small, ugly, insignificant pile of rocks that Jesus chose to become the very place He would use for *His* glory. He is so good like that.

We were ridiculed and maligned. Often, we were questioned, “Are you serious? You want to build a place for kids and horses . . . *in a rock pit?*”

During those early days, our hearts aligned with that of Noah. He too, was ridiculed and maligned, “You want to build a boat . . . *in a desert?*” (Gen. 6:9-22)

By following the only One who knows the way, we chose to say, “Yes.”

Squarely facing all the human logic that stood against us, we said yes to our Savior—simply because He asked. Although we did not know the way, we did know that it was HE who created everything beautiful . . . even an abandoned rock quarry.

*“There is one God, the Father, by whom all things were created, and for whom we live. And there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were created, and through whom we live.”* (1 Cor. 8:6, NLT)

I’m now 62. Nearly 30 years later, what was once an 8.92 acre rock quarry, a handful of tack and two hurting horses, has grown through the hand of God, into a 105 acre miracle of His redeeming love.

“STEP-FOR-STEP, WE MOVE FORWARD  
IN CONTINUAL AWE AT HOW  
THE WORK OF THIS MINISTRY  
HAS BEEN CARRIED OUT  
BY THE POWERFUL LOVE OF JESUS  
. . . AND YOU.”

Out of the barren rocks, HE has grown abundant gardens that provide food for families. Out of the brokenness, HE is pouring out hope for horses and children. Out of walking by faith through uncertainty, HE gives courage for others to follow Jesus and begin their own treks of ministry.

Only JESUS can do this. Through His compassionate heart, we’ve been allowed to be a part of His redemptive plan. And the pure beauty of this journey has exceeded our highest hopes and dreams.

Step-for-step, we move forward in continual awe at how the work of this ministry has been carried out by the powerful love of Jesus . . . *and you.*

God’s Word details how the benevolent generosity of many became the strong foundation of the first church. This humble beginning formed the cornerstone of the world-changing ministry of Jesus Christ.



“All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. The apostles testified powerfully to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and God’s great blessing was upon them all.” (Acts 4:32-33, NLT)

The Believers who founded the first church came together to support a call that only Jesus Christ could herald—a call to reach the lost—a call to change the world—a call to share His redeeming love.

Like those first Believers, YOU have done something similar. Through your encouragement, volunteering, love, financial support and prayer—Jesus’ healing love continues to ring out from a small rock quarry in Central Oregon.

It is with unspeakable gratitude that we *thank you* for your unwavering kindness shared with us throughout this past year—and the 27 years prior. Because of your faithful support, this ministry continues to offer all services free of charge to everyone.

We are wordlessly awed by how our Savior works and are humbled by your strong shouldering with us. Because of this truth, we look forward to our 28<sup>th</sup> season of ministry together.

The entire Crystal Peaks staff, along side Kim and I, wish to thank you for choosing to walk with us in this amazing journey of serving Him.

May the King of kings be the very center of your Christmas . . . because He *alone* is the reason we celebrate.

Merry Christmas Dear Friend.

Humbly and thankfully yours,

*Troy and Kim*



All stories written in “Around the Fire” newsletter are true. Some of the names have been changed to protect individual privacy. “Around the Fire” newsletter stands on the Word of God. Multiple translations of the Holy Bible are used to assure clarity for our readership. Each author is afforded the right to choose the translation that best suits their submission.

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

Please use my donation for:

- Where it is needed most
- Rescue the Equine
- Mentor the Child
- Hope for the Family
- Empower the Ministry

Payment Method:

A check payable to Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch or CPYR for \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Send donations to: Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch, 19344 Innes Market Road, Bend OR 97703.

You can also make your donation at [www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org](http://www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org) with your credit card or PayPal account.

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## 2023 CALENDARS OUR GIFT TO YOU!



Dear Extended Crystal Peaks Family,

It is our joy to share what Jesus is doing here at the Ranch. To keep you close to our heart, we have designed a beautiful calendar of compassionate and powerful moments captured within the lives of our kids, volunteers, staff and horses.

As our gift to you, we would like to offer each household one free calendar. We pray the Lord will use it to bless and encourage all who see it.

To order a calendar, please go to our website at: [www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org](http://www.crystalpeaksyouthranch.org) and click «Ranch Life,» on our home page. Or, mail your request to: Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch, 19344 Innes Market Road, Bend, Oregon 97703.

If you wish, additional calendars can also be ordered, these will be \$12.00 apiece. All international orders outside the US/Canada will need to pay an \$8.00 shipping fee.

Whether you live near or abroad, we sincerely **THANK YOU** for shouldering with us in this ministry of hope. May Jesus' abundant grace and peace be with you all.