

RESCUE the Equine A MENTOR the Child A HOPE for the Family A EMPOWER the Ministry

Because of Gods Love

It was July first. Lost in thought, I gazed down through the airplane window. A world graced with a million shades of green silently passed below. I was returning from Seattle after a visit with Janis, my precious older sister. She loved Jesus. She had been a pastor's wife and missionary most of her adult life. Now, she faced her greatest challenge, her final days of battling cancer. This was my third trip to say goodbye.

Although I thought I was going to be with her until her last breath, Jesus urged me to return home. It didn't make sense in the moment, but I have learned to trust what HE wants for me—more—than what I want for me.

I hugged my sister for long moments and then kissed her cheek. Without words, our eyes locked, as if to capture a "picture of remembrance." Because we had walked out decades of trauma, tragedy, joy and sorrow, we shared a bond that was unbroken for 65 years. My final words to her were a promise that I would continue to deepen my walk with Jesus until the day I would join her in seeing Him face to face.

Now I rested, alone on a plane. I knew I would never see my sister this side of Heaven again—and because of our faith in Jesus—our hearts were completely at peace. Only the redeeming love of our Savior could make this rare calm possible.

Two days later, I was jolted awake from a dream . . . at 4:00am. I saw a beautiful green field. It was filled with tall grasses waving in an unseen breeze. They moved as if they were lifting themselves in adoration and worship. Bright yellow and white flowers danced within the grass. Dark green trees stood in the distance. Then, I saw a picture of myself. I was about 16. Even though I was a tomboy, my blonde hair cascaded down my back and I wore a flowing light blue dress. I held the front hem in my hands so I could run with determination up the gentle slope of a hill.

The whole scene was drenched in perfect peace.

Suddenly, still in my dream, I realized, "Hey, that's *not* me. I never wear frilly dresses and my hair has never been that blonde. Was it Janis? I opened my eyes and checked my phone for a text from family, but there were none, so I settled under my covers and fell back to sleep.

I awoke at 5:30am. There were messages that confirmed Janis released her grip on this life and was now with Jesus . . . at 4:00am—the SAME time as I woke up from my dream.

I revisited the dream I'd just had. In His immeasurable kindness, Jesus had allowed me a glimpse of assurance that my beloved sister was with Him. The image of her running hard toward her Heavenly destination—and not *once* looking back—filled the 'sister shaped' void in my heart with His hope.

I thought about the truth of 1 Thessalonians 4:13, "Brothers and sisters, we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest

Even though tears streaked down my cheeks, I didn't feel distraught. Instead, I sensed a mix of joy and release.

of mankind, who have no hope." (NIV)

After walking out a sweet morning of reading my Bible and making breakfast for my family, I felt unusually tired, so I gave myself an emotional reprieve and rested for a bit. Once I rose into an upright position, I started to experience pain in my chest. I had no heartburn medication and was now highly motivated to make the long drive into town to buy more. I shared with Mark, my husband, that I was going to dash to the pharmacy. In his kindness, he offered to go for me and encouraged me to lay down and rest instead.

His suggestion was reasonable and kind, but I still felt a nudge to go. So, I thanked him and headed out toward the truck. I opened the driver door—but—could not seem to muster the strength to pull myself up into the cab. I tried several times and felt as if I was being pushed backward. Then, intense pain suddenly tightened my chest and radiated up my neck and into my back.

I willed myself back into the house and told Mark what I was feeling. When I returned to the truck minutes later, I noticed that I was able to step right up into the passenger side of the cab. We drove less than a mile when my chest felt like it was being crushed. The main hospital in our area is nearly an hour away. Mark looked at me and said, "I just heard the word 'paramedics' . . . the Lord is telling me to stop at the local volunteer fire station." My normal "don't want to bother anyone" attitude gave way to the fact that I needed help . . . now.

By God's grace, when Mark entered the fire station, there were four individuals sitting around a table. When he explained what was happening, two ran out the back door to bring the ambulance around and the remaining two ran to assist me out of the vehicle. Once I was inside the ambulance, the paramedics placed leads on my chest to run an EKG.

I tried to discern the paramedic's expression as he read the strips. With each strip I could see his concern deepening. I heard myself ask, "Am I having a heart attack?" His solemn reply was, "I will be honest: yes you are."

Suddenly, everything shifted into an urgent gear. The nearest hospital with a Cath Lab was an hour away. I had to get there FAST. A flurry of discussion and decisions flew between the paramedics and Mark. He was going to follow the ambulance to the hospital. Just as the doors were closing, I told my husband, "Call the Ranch now—tell them to PRAY." Then, I watched the doors close between me and the love of my life.

I heard the ambulance director command the driver, "Use the lights and siren. Get us to St. Charles in Bend ASAP. Judy, we're taking you to Bend and we are 50 minutes out."

The paramedics were so kind, encouraging and effective. Even as they braced themselves around the twists and turns that lead away from our home, they continued going down the list of how to best help me. One man would ask a question, and the second would respond, "CHECK!" I heard myself tease them by sharing I felt as if I was getting my oil changed. They laughed and the tension eased as they told me we were now 25 minutes out.

"I want you to know that I've been a paramedic for 17 years and Judy, in my experience, you're the

first person to go though what you did and leave the hospital alive."

Ryan, Paramedic

Minutes later, a calm, almost electrical feeling came over me. I assumed they were giving me pain medication. I felt myself slip away into unconsciousness.

Waves. I felt waves. When I opened my eyes, I was standing in the same beautiful green field, the same sloping hill that I had just seen my sister Janis running through earlier. I saw the same lovely yellow and white flowers and the same gently blowing grass. The only difference was a tall figure standing in a thick haze to my left and a brilliant light to my right side.

In this place . . . I felt absolute peace. There was no fear. I was not alone. I could sense that my Lord was very near. After taking in the scene I asked, "Okay Jesus, what do I do next?"

Suddenly, the moment was interrupted by a rock hitting my chest, then another and another.

I tried to block them but they just kept coming. Someone was throwing rocks at me! I couldn't understand why they were doing that—or why they were being so rude! I wanted them to STOP!



Then, a large boulder crushed into my chest with so much force that it knocked me flat on my back. I opened my eyes to see the kind paramedic looking down at me. His eyes were filled with deep compassion. Then he gently said, "Judy, I'm so sorry I had to do that. You went into cardiac arrest and we had to use a defibrillator, but it wasn't strong enough, so I had to administer *hard* chest compressions."

A voice commanded from the other paramedic, "Judy, HOLD ON! We're five minutes away from the help you need. We're almost there!"

I only have vague memories of being wheeled into the emergency room, lights passing overhead, voices and people drifting in and out.

It was determined that I had blockages in three of my cardiac arteries . . . and the most permanent fix this side of Heaven . . . was an open-heart, triple bypass surgery.

This emergency surgery was scheduled at dawn the following day—on the fourth of July.

Early that morning, family and friends gathered around my bed. Each laid their hands on me and prayed.

Later, I was aware that I was out of the operating room. It was dark, the first night after the surgery. An awful presence came into the room and started to taunt me. It kept repeating "just die already!" I rebuked the lies in Jesus' name. The blackness retreated and I could see something coming toward me through the vanishing haze: it looked like an amphitheater. This structure was not made of construction materials. It was completely made of people. They were all those I loved and they had gathered shoulder to shoulder around my bed. Each one of them was praying over me. I could feel wave-onwave of God's immeasurable love pouring out from them and covering me in His comfort.

My initial recovery was so rapid that I was sent home days ahead of schedule. Although there were some health setbacks, my full recovery is underway.

Jesus has taught me so much during this time. I am still in awe of all He did to assure that I would live a bit longer. Looking back over that event, I can clearly see His hand in every detail. Had I overruled ONE of His decisions that morning—I would have died the same day.

I learned that if Jesus saved me once, He can save me again, if it's *His* plan. And if He chooses not to, He allowed me to experience that death is not scary. When we know HIM as our Lord and Savior, being with HIM is better! He does not abandon us in our darkest times—He walks *with us—through them*.

His Word is true: "The Lord is my shepherd; I have all that I need. He lets me rest in green meadows; he leads me beside peaceful streams. He renews my strength. He guides me along right paths, bringing honor to his name. Even when I walk through the darkest valley, I will not be afraid, for you are close beside me. Your rod and your staff protect and comfort me." (Ps. 23:1-4, NLT, emphasis added)

No matter what we face in this life—if you've asked Jesus to be your Shepherd—you don't need to fear *anything* because you already have *everything you need* for *all* that's to come.



He is the One who leads us into the green pastures of His presence. He is the One who takes the fear of death away and replaces it with His absolute peace.

Moments before I was taken into a surgery with an unknown outcome, Kim held my hand as she read from Psalm 16: "I will bless the Lord who guides me; even at night my heart instructs me. I know the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is glad, and I rejoice. My body rests in safety. For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your holy one to rot in the grave. You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever." (Ps. 16:7-11, NLT)

For the Believer—the fear of dying is nothing more than wasting precious time focusing on the wrong thing. To leave our body is to be *present with JESUS*—the Author of a peace beyond what we can understand. (2 Cor. 5:8, Phil. 1:20-22, Phil. 4:6-7)

For those who do not know Jesus as Savior—death IS fear producing—because it's the very real threshold into the everlasting torment of being eternally separated from God.

Being "eternally separated from God" is not our Heavenly Father's choice—where we spend eternity—is OUR choice.

God the Father has already proven His love for mankind; "For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him." (John 3:16-17, NLT)

And: "... There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus. **He gave his life to purchase freedom for everyone**." (1 Tim. 2:5-6a, NLT, emphasis added)

Because of God's love—Jesus gave His life to purchase freedom for *everyone*.

Because of God's love—you can wholeheartedly receive the eternal gift of Jesus as your Savior.

Because of God's love—you too, can share this Good News with everyone in your midst.

And—because of God's love—I have one more day to encourage YOU with these truths.

Returning to Childlike Faith

"If you reach out to me, you will find me when you search for me with all your heart" (Jeremiah 29:13, TPT)

I was two years into a journey of allowing Jesus to remove "callouses" from my heart. During this time, I recurrently found myself in a state of longing for Heaven. Within any given moment, my heart would clench with a deep ache and my eyes would flood with tears. Not being someone who cries often, I would think "What is happening to me? This is such an illogical pain. How could I miss a place I had never been? Or, be homesick for a heavenly home I'd never seen?"

I started to pray and fast over this feeling and desired God to reveal what I could not logically understand. After a week of specific prayers, the Holy Spirit showed me a picture of my heart. The image I saw was raw and freshly stripped of thick, protective callouses. Without them, I now experienced everything I had once protected myself from feeling.

Like a sick and starved body craving nutrients, I longed to be near my Heavenly Father's heart. I yearned for the time when I was a child and felt completely encompassed by His heart, safe and secure. It was within those days that I offered Him the sacrifices of purest simplicity of all my childhood babbling, wonder and praise. During that season, all my words were a prayer and an invitation for the living God to be in my every moment.

Each March, the Ranch staff begins our session season with a day set aside to fast, pray and worship. It has become one of my FAVORITE days of the year because our entire team gathers to spend a WHOLE day with Jesus.

We typically start our time together in worship, then spread out across the Ranch to seek individual prayer with our Heavenly Father. I found my special spot on the Ranch and settled in.

BY SARAH WILSON

I was just outside the Crystal Peaks orchard at the top of our hayfield. From this location I could take in the other fields and the Refuge building. Above, rose the top outline of the original Ranch property. My prayer started with simply thanking God for all that laid before me and how much He has provided through the years.

I closed my eyes and purposed to slow my thoughts down and quiet the constant "to-do" list in my brain. With my eyes closed and thoughts finally settled, a familiar vision appeared. It is a vivid picture Jesus has shown me throughout my life and continues to show me to this day.

The vision always starts in a vast, rolling field. It is filled with wildflowers of all shapes, sizes and vibrant colors. At the center of the field is a GIANT oak tree with branches so great the leaves brush the ground. There is always a bright blue sky filled with beautiful white fluffy clouds. Within this place, the sun shines down with a warmth that you feel in your bones.

Every time I'm in this field, I'm a little girl about six years old. Jesus and I are always dancing and laughing together, unhindered by the world.

As the scene progresses, He kneels down so our eyes are level and asks, "Would you like to run to the tree with Me?" I let out a joyous squeal and say, "Yes!" Then we take off bounding through the flowers towards the great oak tree. Jesus always keeps perfect

pace with my child-length stride so that I am tucked right by His side as we run. My little hand tightly clenches His and my eyes are locked on Him as we move together. The warm golden sun shines through His hair and beams on His face. I am covered with an overwhelming feeling of the purest contentment, freedom and love.

My heart is completely satisfied and longs to be nowhere else . . . but with Him.

As the vision fades, I open my eyes and realize I'm still earth-side. I gaze over our hayfield and immediately feel the familiar ache of longing for this field to be the one in my vision and for me to be in the warmth of Jesus' presence. Disheartened, I pray for clarity. I know with certainty that it's not my time to be in Heaven—yet. I feel a bit confused and a little frustrated by this yearning that keeps flooding my heart. While

sitting there seeking answers, I heard the still small voice of the Holy Spirit whisper, "Your heart aches because you do not walk with Me like you used to. I want you to return to a childlike faith in who I Am. Once again, I want to hear your babbling words that are prayers of invitation for Me to be a part of your every day."

Photo credit: imemilygreen

1 Chronicles 16:11 says, "Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always." (NIV)

I realized that the longing of my heart was because I stopped inviting Jesus into every detail of my day—like I had when I was a child. I now categorized what I deemed was important for Him to hear and what was not. My adult-self went a step further and started treating communion and prayer with Him in nearly the same way I used medication. I only sought

closeness with Him when my life was not going well—then I put prayer back on the "medicine shelf" when life was better.

This realization deeply grieved my heart. I could only imagine how it saddened Jesus' heart as I left behind the simplicity of a friend and "out grew" the desire to invite Him into my every day life.

In the hayfield, I knelt before my Heavenly Father and dear Friend in repentance. I asked Him to forgive me for how I stopped pursuing Him like a child and instead, started to blame Him for growing distant from me. Over time, I became frustrated with God. I stopped receiving dreams, visions and clear words from Him. This unique closeness stopped when I stopped singing back to Him the simple melodies He gave me. It stopped when I stopped dancing in worship for Him. It stopped when I started to care more about what people thought of me than what He thought of me. It stopped when I stopped spending time in His Word with a childlike wonder. It all stopped . . . because I stopped . . . period.

The silence was never because He stopped wanting to communicate with me.

I LOVE the quote by Pastor Louie Giglio that says: "God is always seeking you. Every sunset. Every clear blue sky. Each ocean wave. The starry hosts of night. He blankets each new day with the invitation, 'I am here."

God has always been faithful in seeking me—but I have not always been faithful in seeking Him.

As I grew up, I allowed my hurt, the world's pain, empty religion, the logic of man and many other things to divert me from seeking my Heavenly Father with childlike wonder. I realized the true depth of how I wanted to know Him—and the way I wanted to experience Him—would start with going back to the simplicity of a child.

The deep longing I felt could only be filled by His deep love.

Psalm 42:7-8 says: "My deep need calls out to the deep kindness of your love. Your waterfall of weeping sent waves of sorrow over my soul, carrying me away, cascading over me like a thundering cataract. All through the day Yahweh has commanded his endless love to pour over me. Through the night I sing his songs and my praises to the living God." (TPT)

Friends, I needed to honestly ask God this question (and perhaps you might as well), "Have I lost my childlike faith and wonder for Jesus?" And, "What if the depth of relationship in HIM which I've been seeking, the revival in my home I need, the hunger for His Word I've been praying for and the momentum in ministry I desire—all hinge on my heart returning to Jesus like a humble child?"

As you ponder these questions, consider what Jesus said in Mark 10:13-16: "People were bringing little children to Jesus for him to place his hands on them, but the disciples rebuked them. When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, 'Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it.' And he took the children in his arms, placed his hands on them and blessed them." (NIV)

Jesus loves the little children. When we return to Him in childlike wonder, simplicity and honesty, He welcomes us with open arms. If we choose to run to Him with innocent trust—like the encounter in my vision—Jesus is eagerly waiting to hold our hands and run with us.

It is when we humble ourselves like a child—that we allow the thick callouses to be removed from our hearts—so that we can experience the fullness of HIS heart.

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SEARCHING FOR HOME

Photo credit: imemilygreen

BY ANN HAWLEY

It was a particularly chilly spring day. Although we had enjoyed a week of sunshine and mild temperatures, the snow that had fallen overnight covered the Ranch in a blanket of white. "Fake Spring," I thought to myself, knowing that this particular season in Central Oregon arrives in many ever-changing weather patterns.

I waited at the top of the hill near the Greeter's station, blowing into my hands and stomping my feet to keep warm. At the bottom of the hill, I saw

two small forms making their way up the driveway: a petite woman and a joyful child who was exuberantly skipping up the gravel road.

My mind wandered back to the first time that I met this pair. Grace had been a shy 8-year-old whose gaze rarely left her own feet. Although she loved the horses who welcomed her when she entered the paddock, she was slow to warm up to her human mentors. Like many of the children we serve, Grace had seen a lot in her eight years. Her parents were no longer a part of her life and she was at the center of a contentious custody battle among extended family members.

On this day, four years after our initial meeting, her excitement was palpable. As we met at the top of the driveway and exchanged hugs, Grace happily followed Lorissa, the staff member she had grown extremely close to over the years. As they entered the upper horse paddock, Beth, Grace's guardian, and I made our way into the barn where a fire was burning within the massive woodstove.

As we huddled in front of the radiating warmth, Beth shared their recent struggles and the legal challenges they were still facing in the pursuit of attaining full custody of Grace. Although this precious child was distraught at the Judge's ruling that she must visit her other family members who were also fighting for her custody, she was begrudgingly (albeit tearfully) obedient every time she was forced to leave Beth's presence.

Even though we had prayed together countless times, I could sense a measure of peace in Beth that I hadn't witnessed before. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she shared their recent challenges, victories, and the pure joy of experiencing life with Grace. The Lord was bringing His 'little lamb' out of her shell. This transformation was obvious to all of us—as she learned to trust Him—and ultimately to trust Beth.

Our conversation was winding down when Beth and I looked up to see Grace and Lorissa entering the barn. Grace beamed when she saw Beth and she animatedly regaled her

with horse stories. I knew that Grace had recently returned from a court-ordered visit and she was relieved to be back.

Beth had mentioned how much Grace enjoyed helping care for their farm animals, so I said, "I bet you're enjoying your time with Beth!" Without skipping a beat, Grace responded, "Yes! She is home."

Grace didn't say that Beth's house felt like home—or that caring for farm animals felt like home—or that Beth's home-cooked meals felt like home . . . she said, "She is home."

As we said our goodbyes until the next time, I couldn't get this phrase out of my head. Grace is only one of hundreds of children who walk up our driveway each season—many of whom have been bounced between a revolving door of foster homes.

I was left to ponder—what exactly is home? And why does the concept of home remain so elusive to so many of us?

Home. For most of us, this word elicits so many emotions, memories and desires. My family and I recently moved. And while I cherish the place we moved from, it no longer feels like home to me. Oddly enough—while I love the place we moved to—it doesn't entirely feel like home to me either. This push/pull balancing act between the now and the not yet forces my eyes to look toward Jesus.

As I frequently have to remind myself, Jesus tells us to take up our crosses and follow Him. I have yet to find a verse in the Bible that calls us to a life of comfort.

When we think of home, we usually conjure up a longing for a place where family exists—a sense of being loved, protected and cared for. It doesn't matter whether we've actually experienced this definition of home—we still all share this universal longing. We're not usually visualizing a building so much as a feeling of being contented and whole.

But the truth is, regardless of our circumstances, this world will never be able to fully satisfy us. Throughout our lives, we are repeatedly disappointed and disillusioned. By relying on earthly sustenance to bring us joy and fulfillment, we're constantly reminded that we are *not* home. When we're hungry for a better life, we ultimately realize that we'll always be uncomfortable here. We live in a place that can never satisfy the deepest longings of our heart. We're homesick for a land that we have been promised.

"... he has put eternity into man's heart..." (Ecclesiastes 3:11, ESV)

This lack of contentment with the things of this world ultimately drives many of us toward the only One who can satisfy: Jesus.

Because of what Jesus Christ has done for us—dying on the cross and living a perfect life as a homeless exile—we have this hope of eternity. Home. The more grounded we are in the only One who can truly satisfy, the more we reflect Him.

We were created to live in relationship with Jesus and to be His imagebearers . . . to make Jesus known and seen through our very lives. Our individual existence is telling a unique story . . . what's the legacy that we're leaving behind? People who know Jesus feel like home.

In his book, Mere Christianity, C.S. Lewis spoke about home from a unique perspective: "Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on; you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make any sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were being made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself."

"Jesus replied, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them . . '"(John 14:23-31, NIV)

As I was reflecting on all of this, I realized . . . this was the newfound peace I experienced in Beth when we prayed together. This is what Yahweh—the God of the universe—wants for each one of us. This is what the Lord is doing when He is forever wooing His children back to Him. When we invite Jesus into our lives, this very Spirit of Christ comes to dwell within us . . . and *He makes His home within us*.

This is what Grace meant when she powerfully stated that Beth was home. Grace was experiencing Christ in Beth. She may not have been able to articulate it, but as she experienced Jesus in Beth . . . that felt like home.

As the theologian, Henri Nouwen said, "Jesus came to wipe away the burden of the past and the worries of the future so that we can discover God right where we are here and now."

That's exactly what Grace was doing: experiencing the presence of God in the love of Beth. This young girl who experienced so much grief and turmoil in her early life, was finding her true home.

What is the thing that people experience when they're experiencing us? We may never understand the impact we have on others' lives when our own life is fully surrendered to Him. Until we allow Him to make His home in us, we will forever be wandering.

"Instead, they were longing for a better country, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them." (Hebrews 11:16, NIV)

Jesus is the only door to our true home. Lord Jesus, make your home within me. And like Beth, who opened her arms wide to Jesus—and was a welcome conduit of love to Grace—may we each be an authentic reflection of our Savior.

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.

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BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES

Join us for an all staff/volunteer work day!

Our next large-scale volunteering opportunity will be held on Saturday, November 2nd from 9:30am – 4:00pm. We would love to invite you to our annual "Batten Down the Hatches" work day. Please note: you do *not* need to be a current volunteer to take part in this special event.

The focus of the day will be to work together on several significant projects to prepare for the winter season. There will be plenty to do for everyone including: winterizing garden beds, raking leaves, re-building fences, weeding, cutting firewood and the like. By focusing these tasks into a single day, we will be embracing the "many hands make light work" theory.

Kids and families are welcome! This is a great opportunity to meet the staff and other volunteers. Lunch will be provided as a thank you for your hard work.

If you can join us for Batten Down the Hatches (or a portion of the day) please RSVP to: ahawley@cpyr.org. We'd like to get an accurate count for project team planning and for catering.

Schedule:

9:30am–12pm: Project teams

12pm-1pm: Lunch (provided by Crystal Peaks)

1pm-4pm: Project teams



Thank you to all who serve this ministry through hardwork . . . and praying harder!