


MERRY CHRISTMAS

Winter 2025

# AROUND the FIRE

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

## DON'T HESITATE



When I first started working with Violet, I was an intern. I remember the familiar hesitation of sharing my faith with her. I often faced the swirl of doubts in my mind: "I don't want to offend or pressure her." Or, "She's too young to understand." And, "What if she doesn't like me anymore?" I believed those lies for far too long, which allowed fear to silence Jesus' testimony within me and the nudging of the Holy Spirit.

I remember the day when what I offered in my own strength simply wasn't enough. During one of our sessions, Violet faced anxiety far deeper than any human comfort could reach. I felt helpless before the weight of her fear. Then, in the stillness of that moment, His voice came softly like a refreshing breeze: "*Sarah, you don't know the root of her fear, but I do. Invite her to come to Me.*"

Conviction and grief filled my heart as I realized I had spent *two years* holding her hand instead of placing it within the hand of her Heavenly Father. He is the One who loved her and knew her far better than I ever could. When she'd finished sharing her heart, I told her honestly, "This isn't something I can fix. I don't even have the words to make it better. But can we go to the One who can?"

Together, we prayed.

Immediately, I saw a shift. Her eyes softened. Her heart opened. There was a spark of joy and freedom that hadn't been there before. I shared with her 1 John 4:18, "*There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear.*" I told her that whenever fear returned, she could speak this truth over herself and trust that Jesus would meet her there.

Later that day, her mom texted me: "I don't know what you did differently today, but Violet said it was the best session yet. She is peaceful in a new way." My heart overflowed with both joy and humility. I whispered to Jesus, "Thank You for Your grace and for the second chance—to point her to You—not me."

Four years later, I still have the honor of walking with Violet. Our times together, especially this year, have become sacred. We dive into Scripture, pray through hard questions and I watch in wonder as her faith takes root and grows. The anxiety that once held her captive no longer defines her; she's learning to live free in the perfect love of Christ.

This journey has taught me something profound: when we let fear keep us silent—we rob others of encountering the only Hope that truly saves.

Today, many around us are desperate for His true and everlasting hope. Yet too often, we offer only our own finite imitation. My prayer is that this encounter will stir your heart as it did mine — that you would step past hesitation in all its forms—and speak the hope of Jesus with boldness and love.

Then, watch as the gift of His perfect love drives out fear in you—and—in those He's placed in your path.

- *By Sarah Wilson*

Continued on page 2





# Solid ROCK

By  
Dana  
Wegner

I breathed a silent prayer over my next mission. I was about to spend the following ninety minutes with a sweet little girl named Ruby. Our last few sessions had been challenging and never seemed to go deeper than surface-level. She had built high walls of self-protection. In response, I leaned into my own desire to “please Ruby” by making our times together comfortable and fun.

Today, the Lord was leading me in a different direction . . . He wanted me to take Ruby to the cross.

Situated at the highest point of the Ranch, the cross overlooked the entire property. Although my flesh thought that such a young girl would be bored by this approach, the Holy Spirit made it clear that Ruby needed to *know* how the Ranch came to be.

Once we arrived under the cross and sat down, I shared how the land itself was redeemed by the Lord, using soil, trees, horses *and people* that had all been discarded.

I watched her look over the property with interest as I told her about the first kids who walked up the familiar driveway. These kids didn’t come for a chance to ride for free, they only wanted to help horses who couldn’t promise them much in return. By coming to simply serve broken animals, they received instead the love of their heavenly Father.

It was never a horse or session leader that brought healing to the hearts of the kids—it was always their encounters with the love of Jesus Christ. I finished my thought by adding, “This is still the heart of Crystal Peaks.” Ruby looked down in thought. With a voice that matched her solemn expression, she said, “I *kind of* know about Him.”

Led by the Holy Spirit, I had a real conversation with Ruby about her desire to learn more about Jesus. When I shared that I wanted to gift her with a Children’s Bible, her face lit up. As we walked back down, I watched Ruby run to her mom in excitement and tell her about the new Bible.

Since our moment at the cross, I’ve enjoyed a new depth and trust with Ruby. I’ve seen how she longs for more of Jesus. Clearly, a piece of her heart was unlocked when I chose to stop leading her with my own understanding and, instead, lead her to Jesus.

Matthew 7:24-27 contrasts a house built on sand with a house founded upon rock. When our lives are built upon the rock—Jesus, these words can be truthfully spoken:

*“The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”* (Matthew 7:25, ESV).

I’ve tangibly seen the shift that happens when Jesus is the absolute foundation and focus of my life, especially in my interactions with people. Clearly, it’s not about what *I* can do to bring a person to healing and freedom. Rather, it’s about humbling myself enough to get out of the Lord’s way and let Him do what only He can.

What might it look like for you to step out of centerstage and allow Jesus to become the basis of your life? How might it affect those around you when your relationships are no longer built upon the “sand” of people-pleasing, comfort and control? I encourage you to join me on this life-changing adventure that is only possible when Jesus becomes our true foundation—our *solid rock*.







By Hollee  
Sperry

## LIKE A LITTLE CHILD

*"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.*" (Mark 10:14-16, NIV)

Lately, Jesus has been constantly drawing my attention toward children—in a Ranch session, in a crowd, in my family, in a ballpark in Seattle. Everywhere I've been, children are what He highlights the brightest for me to see.

In a gathering of people, I noticed the brilliant blue eyes of a little boy, blonde braids framing the smiling face of a little girl, a sleeping baby held by a mom, the excited giggle of a child trotting on her pony and the rowdiness of young boys wrestling in the grass.

Recently, at a ballgame with my family, I sat behind two young boys. They had their baseball gloves on one hand, waiting for a foul ball to come their way. Within the other hand, they held plastic Mariners tridents to wave in celebration when their team hit a home run. Their joy was so evident; for a few hours, being at the ballpark with their family and believing in a home team win was all that mattered.

In a session this week, an eight-year-old girl quoted scripture from Job about how God made horses and how she really loves the white ones. Before I could finish saying what the Bible says about horses, she proudly told me that God's Word says Jesus comes back on a white horse. She already knew something that I learned as an adult. With her whole being, while on the back of a horse, she shared what she knew about God's love and creation with me.

During a Ranch tour last month, a young girl exclaimed that eating a fresh fig from the greenhouse "changed her whole life" and that it was simply the best day ever to pet so many horses! I shared the testimonies of many within our herd with the young girl, her grandma and her grandma's friend who'd spontaneously brought them to the Ranch that day. Her grandma returned a week later with a tack donation. She asked for books with Little Bear and Hero's stories because of how those horses had deeply touched her granddaughter with the love and hope of Jesus Christ.

I asked Jesus to show me, through these kids, what He wanted me to see . . .

He's showing me joy. He's showing me child-like faith. He's showing me His love. He's showing me the honor of being trusted to share who He is with them. And, to learn the same thing in return, from the kids around me. He's showing me what a special gift children are and how much He loves them.

He's showing me what it means to "*receive the kingdom of God like a little child*" by helping me see the world as they do. Through this process, I'm noticing their innocent joy and wonder and this—makes me want to pursue Jesus—*like a little child*.







While greeting our Ranch families as they came up the hill, I saw Teddy being carried in his mother's arms. I knew from previous visits that he was four-years-old and had cerebral palsy. Remembering that he loved horses, I offered to give his Mom relief and carry him into the horse paddock while his siblings were in their own sessions.

Once inside the paddock, I was surprised to see Jericho, our most shy horse, walked up to greet the small guest that I carried. Jericho had been badly mistreated as a young horse and still struggled to trust people—especially strangers. I watched in wonder as our wary gelding gently pressed his face into Teddy's tiny chest. Our timid horse not only stayed close to the nearly limp little boy in my arms, he even moved other horses away and seemed to protect his new friend. I had never seen Jericho love any human with so much passion.

Teddy beamed with a wordless smile as he watched Jericho surround and defend him. I could feel my heart flood with awe as I observed unconditional love pour through a fearful horse over a precious little boy.

Suddenly, it occurred to me, this is a small reflection of how much Jesus loves us. He moves through hard things to surround and defend us. Then, He takes us into His loving arms and whispers, "I love you and I will never leave you."

*"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."* (John 3:16, NLT)

Thank You, God, for giving Your Son so we can believe in Him. And by doing so, we can be with You—and surrounded by Your love—forever.



## Comfort IN GRIEF

One of my favorite moments this year was with an eight-year-old girl named Emma. She was coming for her first time. These "first" sessions are my favorite because the kids are not sure what to expect and are always so excited and filled with wonder. Emma was no exception. She carried great joy that was expressed through delightful giggles. Although she hadn't been around horses much, I could see her kind heart turn toward Truah, our small blue-eyed Icelandic horse, who we'd just tied off.

Truah stood quietly as we brushed her. I shared the story of the Ranch and what Jesus has done here. During this time, Emma communicated she was still learning about who Jesus is. I was humbled and delighted to share the Gospel and just how much Jesus loves *her*.

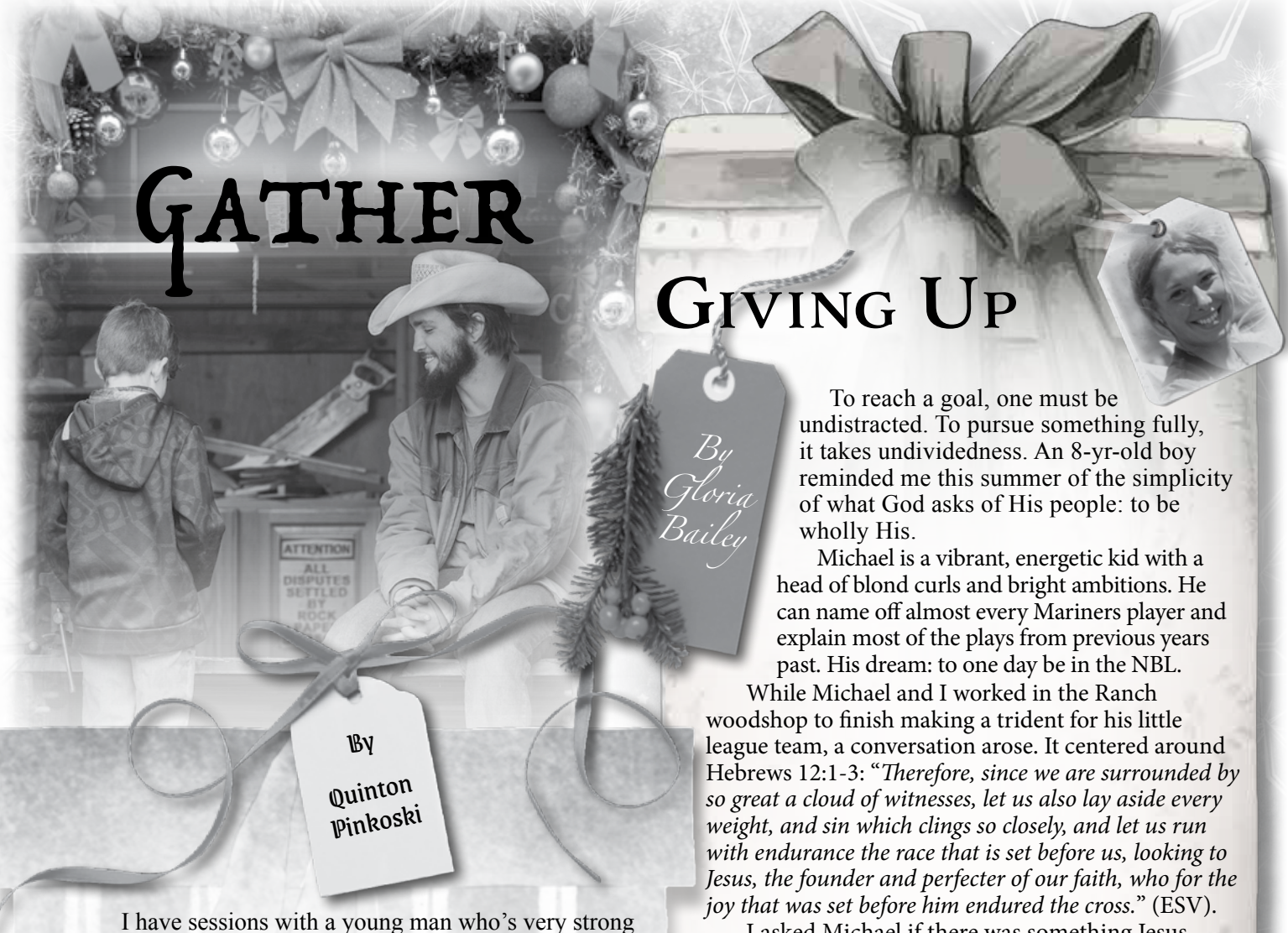
Then, Emma opened up about how a friend—who was like a brother to her—recently died in an accident. She was trying to keep an open heart while processing the grief.

The Holy Spirit reminded me of Jesus' friend Lazarus who was raised from the dead (John 11). We talked about how Jesus understands our grief in losing loved ones because He experienced loss Himself. Jesus grieved Lazarus even though He knew He would raise him back to life.

I shared how we can go to Him in the midst of heartache and He will always be present with us in the journey. Reading further in the same passage, Jesus says, *"I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying."* (John 11:25, NLT).

Toward the end of our conversation, Emma shared how her friend knew Jesus. She was comforted to learn she would see him again one day.

I reminded her that every heart who invites Jesus inside—can experience deep comfort within grief—because we *know* we will see those who love Him again. And THIS is Jesus' greatest gift to anyone who chooses to receive it.



## GATHER

## GIVING UP

I have sessions with a young man who's very strong in his faith. He's noticeably mature for his age and his sessions are rarely the typical boy type of playing games or building something in the woodshop. Often, we find a place to sit somewhere on the Ranch . . . and just talk to each other.

We've spoken about big things like the difference between Catholic and Protestant denominations, apologetics and evangelizing. We've also talked about personal things like his new church, what he's reading in God's Word or the fun he had camping with friends. No matter what our topic of conversation is, I always find him uplifting and engaging. It's not the subjects that fill my heart, but the fact that our conversations always center on Christ and how He moves in our lives.

Recently, we were up in the Lookout above the Ranch and were so caught up in our conversation that we went way over our 90 minute session time! Our time together reminded me of Matthew 18:20, where Jesus says, *"For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them."* (ESV)

This verse rings loud to me because when I meet with this young man—I sense a unique joy and peace—the kind that only comes when we gather in the Presence of our Lord, Jesus Christ.

To reach a goal, one must be undistracted. To pursue something fully, it takes undividedness. An 8-yr-old boy reminded me this summer of the simplicity of what God asks of His people: to be wholly His.

Michael is a vibrant, energetic kid with a head of blond curls and bright ambitions. He can name off almost every Mariners player and explain most of the plays from previous years past. His dream: to one day be in the NBL.

While Michael and I worked in the Ranch woodshop to finish making a trident for his little league team, a conversation arose. It centered around Hebrews 12:1-3: *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross."* (ESV).

I asked Michael if there was something Jesus might be asking him to give up in order to follow Him more closely. Without missing a beat, he responded, "Sports."

Honestly, that was the last thing I expected him to say. Michael went on to tell me that he and his brother—without apparent adult persuasion—have been praying about whether or not sports are becoming too important in their lives and ultimately taking the place of God!

Through this conversation, I realized that God brings clarity and confidence when He asks His children to give up sin. As His daughter, I know exactly what He wants me to surrender. But, sometimes I try to ignore God's Spirit. I often find myself wanting to push aside His nudges to lay down a weight. But, I know that, until I give up my idols, I'm not fully looking to Jesus. But when I give up the sins that cling so close, that is when I see the joy before me.

I'm learning that when I bring my sin TO Him—then—I can run twice as fast FOR Him.

What "weight" might be dividing and distracting you from Jesus? Like young Michael, what might Christ be asking you to give up today?





## COMPASSIONATE FRIEND

"M-m-m . . . w-w-wh . . . uh-um, o-kay?"

Walking with a brush bucket in my hand, I turned to face the small child before me. She struggled to answer when asked if she wanted to spend time with a horse. Although she was the age of seventeen, developmental delays gave this precious girl the tender appearance of an 8-year-old. Whenever she opened her mouth to speak, her words were broken by a strong stutter. The communication challenge caused me hesitate before initiating further conversation. I didn't want to embarrass her by not being able to understand her choppy syllables.

Truthfully . . . I didn't want to embarrass *me*.

Crashing through my own uncertainty, I chose to ask a simple question.

"Do you know Jesus?"

Through broken cadence, she answered, "Yes," she knew Jesus and she had been baptized.

As we approached our horse with the grooming tools, I ventured further into unknown territory. I wasn't sure she'd be able to answer—or perhaps even comprehend—my next question.

"Why did you get baptized?"

Without hesitation, she answered, "B-b-be—because I-I-I n-needed help with myself."

"What do you mean?" I pressed.

"W-w-well, my past was pretty rough, but . . . Jesus helped me."

Our conversation paused as we started to brush our horse. After explaining how to use each brush, I rotated our discussion back toward God.

When I asked *how* she came to know Jesus, her answer amazed me.

"Uh-uh-well my-my parents didn't know what to do. I-I-I-I wa-wa-wa-was shrieking. But I stopped when Jesus came into my room."

I asked her to repeat herself, unsure if I heard correctly. She answered again that she was shrieking—but stopped—*when Jesus came into her room*.

I was astounded.

"You saw Jesus?"

"Yes," she responded with certainty.

"What did He look like?"

The petite girl stopped brushing her horse and lifted both hands with emphasis. Her stutter straightened into clear, passionate truth.

"He looked like a Compassionate Friend to me."

Her words impacted my heart with power. This child, whom I considered "special needs," WAS special—with a testimony of literally seeing Jesus, her "Compassionate Friend."

Now it was my turn to stutter. "Wow . . . Uh, how . . . I mean, did . . . did you see Him just once? Or more than once?"

"A lot," she answered directly. "He comes into my room. He's always the same, but He helps me with different things."

My mind was swirling. "What has He helped you with?"

"Oh," she answered without pausing, "Like Jesus told me it was only water. And not to be afraid. So I got baptized."

"Wow," I responded, "So before you saw Jesus you were afraid to get baptized?"

"Yes, but He told me it was only water and not to be afraid."

The more she spoke of Jesus, the more her stutter faded. And the more questions I had. When our session came to an end, I was deeply moved by all the heavenly words that flowed from her beautiful heart. As she and her mom walked away, I remembered my reluctance to speak with her at the beginning of our time together. If I had not taken a baby step of faith to ask a simple question, I would have missed out on this precious and powerful gift.

Then the irony struck me.

My most profound conversation of the year—was with a child who could barely talk.

Jesus, who is this little girl's "Compassionate Friend," spoke of how God loves to reveal Himself to children. He said, "*I thank you Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will.*" (Luke 10:21b, ESV)

Our God is the same today—revealing Himself to a "little child" who was willing to welcome Him into her room.





By  
**LEAH MEIER**

## COURAGE

Monday rolled around, bringing with it another week of session, horses, children and laughter. I was excited to see that Lily, one of my favorite session kids, was scheduled for the afternoon. (BTW, I have about 36 favorites!) When Lily arrived, we headed into the paddock to meet our resident gentle giant, Benaiah. He is one of our largest and most reliable session horses. As Lily and I were saddling Benaiah, she pointed to the cinder cliff at the back of the ranch and said, "I want to ride up to the cross today."

Standing on the highest point of the Ranch is a wooden cross. From beneath it spreads a beautiful view of the Ranch properties and the Cascade Mountains. For those who wish to go outside the arena, a safe trail winds up the steep incline where horses can be ridden to just below the cross.

Once Lily was mounted on Benaiah, we started up the trail. As we climbed, she seemed to grow more tense with every plodding hoof beat. Half way up, the pathway makes a sharp turn and becomes quite steep. We came to the turn and Lily suddenly asked Benaiah to stop. Looking at me with large fear-filled eyes, she said, "I can't do this, I'm scared."

Lily had never ridden a horse before she came to the Ranch. She had overcome many fears and gained enough confidence to finally start riding horses. Yet, amongst the 90-degree heat emanating from the cinder rocks . . . she was frozen. The confident steps she had gained since coming here—evaporated.

I stood beside Benaiah and tried to coach Lily through her fear. "Take a big breath. We can stand here as long as you need. Look up, don't look down. Trust Benaiah, look how calm he is." After peppering her with all my great kid-calming strategies, I asked her, "Okay, should we go now?" She just shook her head.

While looking up into Lily's tense face, I suddenly realized what I'd missed. "Hey, let's ask Jesus to give you a courageous heart and the ability to trust Him more than what you fear." She glanced down and quietly said, "That would be a good idea." I placed one hand on her and the other on Benaiah, and prayed a simple prayer, asking Jesus for courage and trust for my little frozen friend.

As soon as I finished, Lily reached for the reins. A little surprised, I asked, "Are you ready?"

Her reply was confident, "Let's go."

That encounter remains a clear reminder to invite Jesus into *every* moment of *every* day. I didn't have the wise words needed to help Lily get past her fear—but I know the One who does. All we had to do was ask HIM—who is wisdom itself—and He answered immediately.

Deuteronomy 31:6 says, "*Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will never leave you or forsake you*" (ESV).

This was a promise made by God to the Israelites 3500 years ago—but it rings just as true today—for you and me.

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

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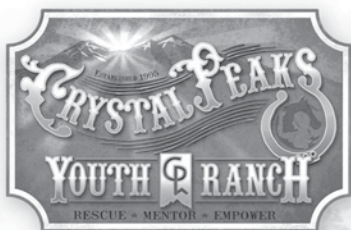
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DEAR EXTENDED CRYSTAL PEAKS FAMILY,

With grateful hearts, we rejoice in all that Jesus is doing—moment by moment—here at the Ranch. Each day, we witness His healing love transform young lives in ways only He can. Hope begins to bloom in hearts once burdened, courage replaces fear and laughter returns where silence once lingered.

One of our favorite ways to share these glimpses of God's grace is through our annual Crystal Peaks calendar. Each image captures a moment where the love of Jesus is at work—reflected through the eyes of a child, the gentle nudge of a horse or the beauty of His creation surrounding us.

As a small expression of our deep gratitude for your prayers, encouragement and steadfast support, we would be honored to send one complimentary calendar per household as our gift to you. It is our heartfelt prayer that every page will remind you of the hope and redemption found in Him alone.

To request your calendar, please visit our website at [WWW.CRYSTALPEAKSYOUTHRANCH.ORG](http://WWW.CRYSTALPEAKSYOUTHRANCH.ORG) and click on the "Donate" button on our home page, then "2026 Calendar."

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Please remember to note "2026 Calendar" with your mailed request. If you wish to bless others with these images of hope, additional calendars may be ordered for \$12.00 each. To help with costs, international orders (outside the U.S. and Canada) include an \$8.00 postage fee.

With love and gratitude, we wish you and yours—a christmas filled with the presence of Jesus—and a blessed New Year.

**CRYSTAL PEAKS YOUTH RANCH**

