

AROUND the FIRE

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

In The Waiting
By Sarah Wilson

*"...but they who
wait for the Lord
shall renew their
strength;
they shall mount
up with wings like
eagles;
they shall run and
not be weary;
they shall walk
and not faint."
(Isaiah 40:31, ESV)*



When I was sixteen years old, I received a diagnosis that felt like it would define the rest of my life. I was diagnosed with Polycystic Ovarian Syndrome, Type A (PCOS). Along with that diagnosis came the declaration, "There's a 99% chance you will never conceive a baby naturally."

The weight of those words felt like a massive boulder had been placed on my shoulders. What began as a medical diagnosis soon became an identity I embraced—one that quietly placed limits on what I believed God could do. Instead of surrendering my pain to Him, I surrendered to the enemy's lies. Gradually, fear overshadowed faith . . . and I believed this condition was my future.

The whispers came slowly at first: *worthless, barren, cursed, you'll never make a good wife, you'll never be a mother.*

As I believed those lies, bitterness began to grow. What started as grief steadily reshaped my heart in ways I never intended. To protect my heart from more disappointment, I distanced myself from children and from the Lord. Avoiding them felt easier than facing the painful longing that surfaced every time I was reminded of what the doctor had said.

Yet, even in that season that I chose to "leave" God . . . He never left me.

One evening in 2013, I stopped by a church I had once attended simply to use the restroom. As I walked down the hallway to the bathroom, I ran into my good friend, Joe.

For months, Joe had been inviting me back to church and encouraging me to join his small group, which was starting soon. Every time he asked, I quickly shut him down. Joe and I were like siblings and true to form, he made a sarcastic comment that prompted me to throw my car keys at him. Instead of the keys hitting him . . . He caught them.

A mischievous glint flashed from his eyes as he triumphantly declared, "You can have these back after the Bible study!" I rolled my eyes and grudgingly followed him into the room.

What happened next was something I could never have arranged for myself, nor could any human have manufactured. No one in that room knew about the diagnosis I had received years earlier—not even Joe.

After the study, there was a time of prayer. Each person would stand in the center while the group would share encouragement and Scripture. Afterward, they would pray over them.

When it was my turn, I stood awkwardly, wishing I was anywhere else.

Then an older man cleared his throat, looked directly at me, and said:

"I have a word for you. The Holy Spirit is making very clear what I need to share. Everything in me is resistant to speak because of what it's about, but here goes: Sarah is not a cursed name—Sarai was. With the name Sarah, you have inherited the legacy and covenant of God's faithfulness. He hears your prayers and He will answer them. He will open your womb."

In that instant, something broke.



Sarah

Continued on page 2

I sensed warmth rush through my body and what felt like a knot untwisted deep within my stomach. Uncontrollable tears poured out as years of pain, shame and self-condemnation were washed away. The burdens I had carried for so long fell away. The lies that had defined my identity lost their grip.

It felt as though the walls of Jericho had come thundering down in my heart.

My circumstances had not changed, but everything else had. In an instant, despair gave way to hope, surging through me like water breaking through a crumbling dam. The fear that had gripped my heart dissolved, replaced by a profound peace—the kind that can come only when God speaks directly into the deepest wound of your soul.

In that moment, the Holy Spirit showed me that I had a choice.

I could continue down the path of bitterness, letting disappointment shrink my world and harden my heart. Or I could embrace the opportunity God had placed before me. Rather than simply waiting for an answered prayer, I could become the support that young and new parents needed. Instead of withdrawing from children, I could invest in their lives. God was inviting me to join Him in His work while I waited for my own miracle.



Sarah and Sean, 2016

A few years later I met my future husband, Sean. Early in our relationship, I shared my diagnosis with him and the possibility that biological children might never be part of our story. His response was a picture of steadfast love and grace. Knowing the uncertainty that lay ahead, he chose me anyway. Looking back, I can see that his willingness to embrace an unknown future reflected a love far beyond himself.

In 2019, God led us from Virginia to Oregon so I could serve as an intern at Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch. At the time, we had no idea how profoundly that step of faith would shape our future.

What seemed like a temporary season of obedience became the beginning of a much greater story. Today, I can clearly see God's faithful hand guiding each step, and in June of that same year, I was honored to join the Crystal Peaks staff team.

Two years later, God expanded my opportunity to serve by leading me into the role of overseeing the CPYR Similar Ministry Department. Today, I have the privilege of building relationships with ministries around the world who share the vision of using horses to communicate the hope of the Gospel. I also have the joy of walking alongside prospective Similar Ministries through the application process as they seek to become recognized partners in this shared mission.

In February of 2026, I conducted an interview with Emmanuel Equine Ministry in Illinois as part of their Similar Ministry application process. During the interview, I met one of their session leaders, Jessica. I felt the Holy Spirit's prompting to invite their founder, Nicole, to attend IGNITION and I encouraged Jessica to join as well.

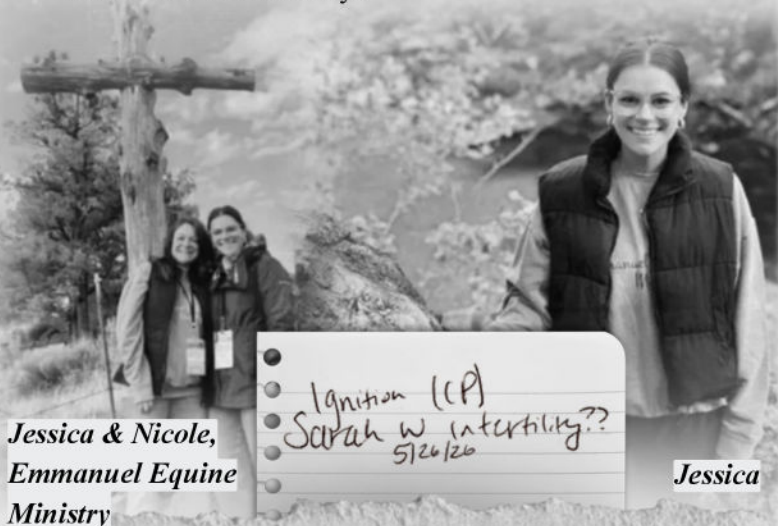
Together, they could learn and continue growing in ministry leadership.

What I didn't know was that God was already preparing something far greater than a ministry connection.

By May of 2026, Jessica arrived at IGNITION. During a conversation, I shared a little about the journey Sean and I were on and our prayers for a baby born from my womb. What she said next struck my heart like an electric current.

Jessica explained that before coming to IGNITION, she asked the Lord who He wanted her to pray for while she was there. She felt God place a name and situation on her heart:

"Sarah W . . . infertility."



*Jessica & Nicole,
Emmanuel Equine
Ministry*

Jessica

Here is Jessica's perspective:

On May 26, 2026, I wrote James 3:17-18 in my prayer journal, "Wisdom is pure. It is also peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial, and sincere. And those who are peacemakers will plant seeds of peace and reap a harvest of righteousness." Later that day, I was packing up to head to Crystal Peaks Youth Ranch for their Ignition event as a board member and plus-one to my aunt, Nicole Hutchison, who runs Emmanuel Equine Ministry. We had recently interviewed and had a wonderful Spirit-filled conversation with Sarah Wilson and Stephanie Voth to become a Similar Ministry.

The Lord told me a few days prior that I wasn't going there to just receive, but that He had a mission for me. As I studied the book of James that day, struggling with doubt and questioning the Lord if I lean too much on my own understanding, I casually asked, "Okay, God, I question if I hear you or if I'm just crazy, so what do you want me to know about this trip?" Immediately, I sensed in my Spirit and apprehensively wrote down, "Sarah Wilson . . . infertility?" I thought, "Really, God, you're going to give me a word for a Crystal Peaks staff person?! No pressure!"

On the second day of the Ignition event, Nicole and I walked back to say hello to Sarah. She asked Nicole how she is feeling in her pregnancy, and the conversation turned into Sarah sharing that she has been struggling with infertility. My ears felt hot, and my body was covered in goose bumps as the Lord confirmed what He had told me. I immediately knew God wanted me to pray for her. I shared with Sarah what I had written in my journal and asked if I could lay hands and pray for her before the week was over. With a surprised look on her face, she agreed.

During worship the next night, the Lord nudged me to go pray for Sarah. I was wrestling with questions like, "What if I'm out of line or I make her feel weird, Lord?" I told Him I would do it, but that I would love insight on how to pray . . . As I shared the word the Lord had given me, it was clear that He had healing for her that day. As we prayed, I sensed a prompt for forgiveness and to break any legal rights the enemy has over her womb generationally and from rejection in the name of Jesus. I am continuing to believe and intercede for full physical healing and a baby to be born. I know the Lord was present that day and did a healing in her heart as well as mine. James 3:17-18 came alive as God put His pure wisdom on display!"

What Jessica couldn't have known was that I had grown weary in the waiting. My faith had not failed, nor had I stopped believing God's promises—I was simply tired. After years of praying, hoping and entrusting this longing to the Lord, my heart needed fresh encouragement.

In His kindness, Jesus chose the same season to send it through a woman from the Midwest.

Once again, He used someone who knew almost nothing about me—to remind me—He knew *everything* about me. He heard every prayer, saw every quiet disappointment and every weary moment. Most importantly, He was with me.

That encounter became a beautiful picture of the Gospel. Often, Jesus chooses to give His love, encouragement and faithfulness to His people through His people. In this way, He meets us in our weariness, strengthens our hearts and reminds us that we are never forgotten.

Jesus could have encouraged me in countless ways, yet He chose to work through a willing servant who simply listened and obeyed His voice. This is how the Church was designed to function. We are called to encourage one another, carry one another's burdens, strengthen one another's faith, and remind each other of God's promises when the journey feels long.

"Therefore encourage one another and build one another up." (1 Thessalonians 5:1, NIV)

"Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it." (1 Corinthians 12:27, ESV)

The Gospel advances not only through sermons, ministries, or programs, but through ordinary Believers who make themselves available to the Holy Spirit. Through simple acts of obedience, God brings encouragement, hope, healing and truth exactly when His children need it the most. I realize that God's faithfulness

has never been measured solely by the answers I have longed to receive. His faithfulness has been evident in His constant presence—shown in part—through His people.

Today, Sean and I continue to pray and believe for a miracle. We do not know how God will ultimately write this chapter of our story—but we *know* the Author. We know the One who holds every unanswered prayer, every longing, every tear and every hope. That confidence gives us peace—not because we know the outcome, but because we *know* His character.

Waiting has a way of testing what we believe about God. It can tempt us to wonder if He has forgotten us or if our story has somehow been overlooked. Yet Scripture tells a different story. Waiting is not evidence of God's absence. More often, waiting is the place where His presence becomes the most tangible. Waiting is where He teaches us dependence, deepens our faith and reveals His character in ways we might never experience if every prayer were answered immediately.

If you are carrying a prayer that feels unanswered, I want to encourage you to keep bringing it before the Lord. Keep trusting Him. Keep seeking Him. Jesus taught His followers to pray persistently and not lose heart (Luke 18:1), not because persistence earns God's favor, but because persistent prayer keeps our hearts near our Father.

My story is still being written. Our prayer has not yet been fully answered. But through every chapter, one truth has remained unchanged: God has been with me . . . and He is with you. This is the greatest lesson that waiting has taught me.

Isaiah 40:31 promises that, *"those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength."* It does not simply tell us that strength will come; it reminds us where that strength is found. We wait **for the Lord**.

Not merely an answer.

Not merely for a breakthrough.

Not merely for the fulfillment of a dream.

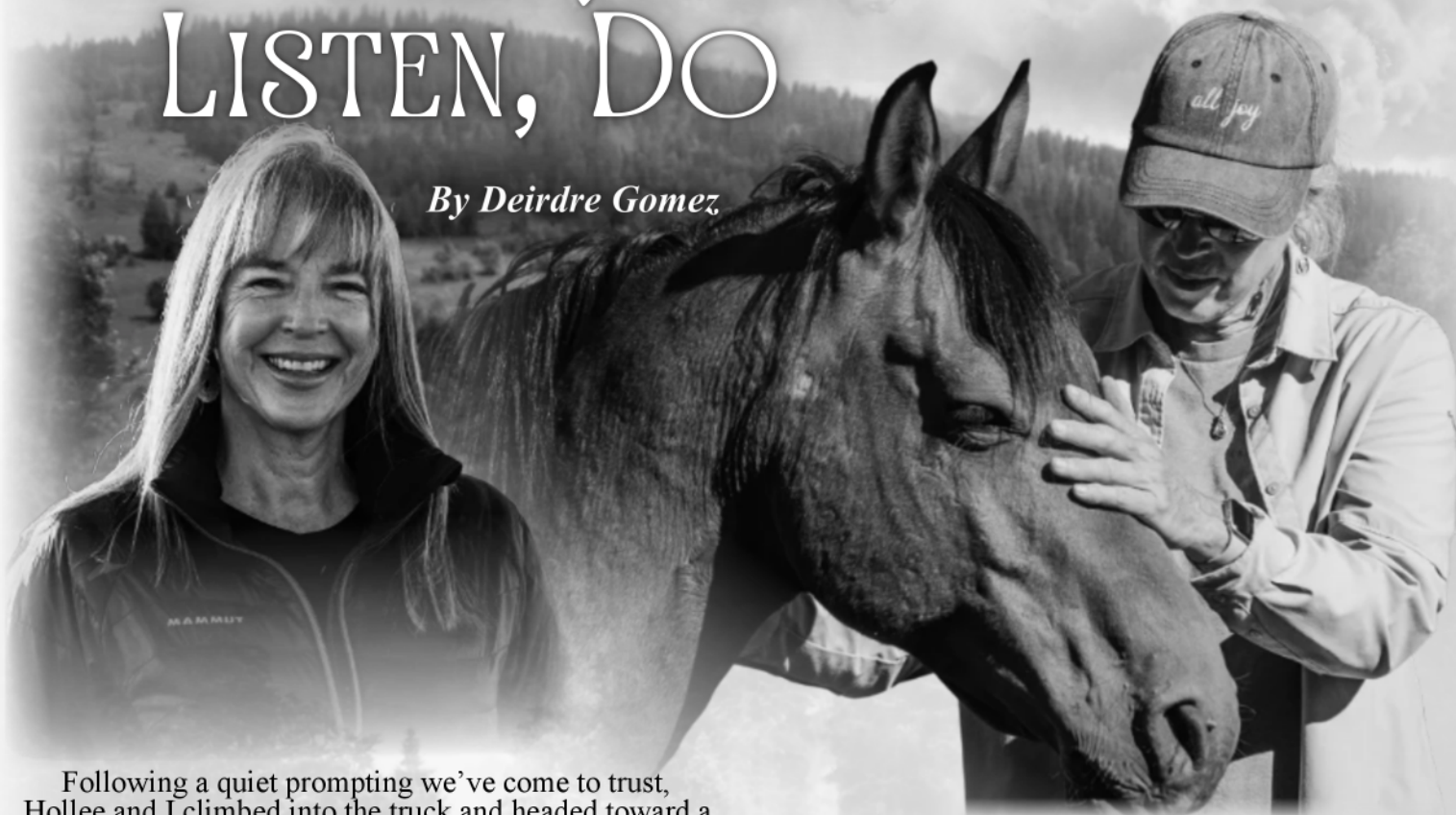
We wait for *Him*. And in the waiting we discover that the greatest gift is not ultimately what God places in our hands . . . but the nearness of the One who has held us all along.



Sarah and Sean, 2026

PRAY, LISTEN, DO

By Deirdre Gomez



Following a quiet prompting we've come to trust, Hollee and I climbed into the truck and headed toward a small town east of Bend. A woman had reached out, hoping to donate her horse to the Ranch. Whenever an equine donation form crosses our path, we've learned to not rush in with answers. Instead, we begin with prayer.

Each encounter is unique—sometimes a phone call becomes a prayer, sometimes a visit, sometimes we meet both horse and human and sometimes—much more. No matter the outcome, we always ask God, *"What is best for the horse? What is best for the owner?"* Then, we listen to the Lord's voice.

Together, our team has learned from the Ranch's Founders the simplicity found in, "Pray, Listen, Do."

Because we can't say yes to every horse, we trust Jesus to always shows us what's needed most. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."* (Proverbs 3:5-6, NLT)

Our journey led us to a serene valley of beautiful farmland. The home lay tucked within, nestled in quiet grace. Lea greeted us warmly. We learned that she and her husband were facing financial hardship and were in the process of moving into a motorhome so they could rent out their house. They loved their horse deeply but knew they could no longer keep her. Their hope was to find a safe and loving home for their gentle mare.

Our new friend led us out to her beloved horse, Mia. It didn't take long to see that Mia was in pain. She'd foundered a couple years earlier. Now each step was labored. Her every movement spoke louder than words: she was suffering.

Seeing the encounter unfold—we did what we've learned to do—pray.

The first answer came when God opened the door for our vet to make the long drive out and evaluate Mia. The second answer came through the Humane Society. We learned that Lea could apply for a grant to cover the vet farm call. *"You can ask for anything in my name, and I will do it, so that the Son can bring glory to the Father."* (John 14:13, NLT).

Soon, under a bright Central Oregon sky, we returned with our vet. The diagnosis was devastating: Mia had severe laminitis. Her pain was extreme. With this advanced and crippling condition, the vet confirmed the most loving and merciful choice . . . was euthanasia.

Lea was not ready for this outcome. How could she be?

We asked the vet for a moment. Hollee and I silently pleaded with Jesus for the right words, wisdom, clarity and peace. We prayed with Lea before she stepped away to talk with her husband.

Lea returned with tears in her eyes. Her decision was full of courage and love. She and her husband chose to gently let Mia go.

Then, something remarkable happened.

As the vet prepared to end the mare's suffering, two horses from a nearby pasture galloped over to the fence. They stood fast with their ears forward and their eyes fixed on Mia. It appeared that they came to say goodbye—and—we are with you.

Mia passed peacefully. Surrounded by love. Ushered into eternity with dignity and honor.

We prayed before stepping out of the truck—inviting the Holy Spirit to lead—and He did.

What began as a horse evaluation, transformed into a moment of holy mercy and a gift of peace amid pain. Lea and her husband experienced more than support that day; they encountered the fruits of the Holy Spirit. *"But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things."* (Galatians 5:22, NLT).

"For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so my ways are higher than your ways and my thoughts higher than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:9, NLT). When I seek His ways over my own, He leads me to places of ministry I would not otherwise go. Our encounter with Lea was a tangible example of this truth.

I'm learning that I don't need all the answers before following His leadership. The Bible says, *"If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you."* (James 1:5, NLT). When He calls me forward—He—will provide everything I need.

One of the powerful ways God equips me is through His Word.

His mercy is new every morning (Lamentations 3:22-23). For this reason, I begin each day in Scripture. His Word steadies me and it has changed how I communicate with my family and friends.

His Truth sets me free. *"For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom."* (2 Cor 3:17, NLT). All of us encounter situations daily where we don't have the answer. And *this* is the best time to understand that we ALL have the freedom to stop—and Pray, Listen, Do. It is from this place of surrender that the Lord will show us the path to take.

Daily, I am learning to trust Him in all areas of my life.

This is my prayer for you as well—that you fall in love with Jesus—that you truly know how deeply you are loved by Jesus. *"How wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love is."* (Ephesians 3:18, NLT). By choosing to trust in His love for you and surrendering to His leadership, He will take you to places you could never imagine. And it all starts with three simple words:

Pray, Listen, Do.

*"The Lord is
close to ALL
who call on
him, yes, to
ALL who call
on him in
truth."*

*Psalms 145:18, NLT,
emphasis added*





Rivers of Living Water

By Ann Hawley

Summer has arrived at the Ranch—and with it, all the signs of the warming season: vibrant flowers in hues of red, blue, pink and orange—early morning dew on the hay fields and retreating snow on the Cascade mountain range. The Ranch horses are sleek and glossy as they graze in lush pastures. Nearby rivers seem to delight in carrying families and friends into new memories together as they float down their cool waterways.

As I walked up the Ranch driveway to meet a group of volunteers, I soaked in each aspect of this summer beauty. For me, this season is the perfect time to remember God's faithfulness. Strolling between the flowers that line the top of the driveway, I reflected on all the Lord has been doing in this place during the past year.

I was immediately reminded of the new group of volunteers I was about to meet and take on a Ranch Tour. They had all come from distant states with no particular agenda other than to serve this ministry. Because of the generosity of their time and talents—and the gifts of others like them—we are able to share the hope of Christ with the children and families we serve.

We continue to rescue horses, serve at-risk children, and provide support to our similar ministries. What a gift! These volunteers are truly our boots-on-the ground *rivers of living water*.

"For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants." (Isaiah 44:3, NIV)

During the Feast of Tabernacles in the Old Testament, the priest pours water on the altar as a symbol of God's faithfulness to His people. For 40 years as they wandered in the desert, the Lord provided food, water and shelter.

Jesus later uses this same image of water being poured out as an opportunity to introduce us to the Holy Spirit. I love that Jesus used physical elements—things we can see and understand—to introduce us to spiritual truths—things that aren't necessarily visible, but are just as real. Jesus speaks to the crowd in Jerusalem and declares Himself to be the fulfillment of Isaiah 44:3. And later, He offers this gift of living water to us:

"But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you." (John 14:26, NKJV)

In this verse, the word "helper" is derived from the Greek word, "paraclete." This word defines the Holy Spirit as one who comes alongside us—a helper, advocate, encourager and friend.

Rivers of living water . . . what a beautiful picture of our volunteers! Who represents the gifts of the Holy Spirit better than the folks who travel from near and far to shoulder alongside us in this work? The Holy Spirit empowers us to do His good work and to produce good fruit. God's Spirit gives us His fruit as evidence that we belong to Him. How blessed we are by the generous souls who are called to this place. Here are just a few examples of the "helpers" the Lord has sent to us this year:

"For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour my spirit upon your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants."

Isaiah 44:3 NIV

Rivers of Living Water...

A group of local women with a heart for getting their hands dirty and growing amazing things each faithfully volunteer here every week. We have affectionately named them our "Grow Team." They have been instrumental in helping us provide food for the hungry. (Not to mention the fact that they have a lot of fun doing it!)

Rivers of Living Water...

We are incredibly blessed with several volunteers who devotedly serve here in various capacities: helping us with events, greeting families, delivering food to nearby shelters, taking charge of special projects such as construction, painting, irrigation and mechanical tasks. They are the heart and soul of this place and they play an integral part in keeping everything humming.

Rivers of Living Water...

From individual students to large school groups, we've been blessed by young people who choose to serve here. What a selfless example of humble service these students provide to everyone—especially to the children we serve. And the kids who are helped are definitely watching. In fact, many of our session children later become some of our most faithful volunteers.

Rivers of Living Water...

This year alone, we've had volunteers join us from France, Germany, Canada, Panama and Israel. It's humbling to watch the Holy Spirit move in the hearts of volunteers from places all over the globe.

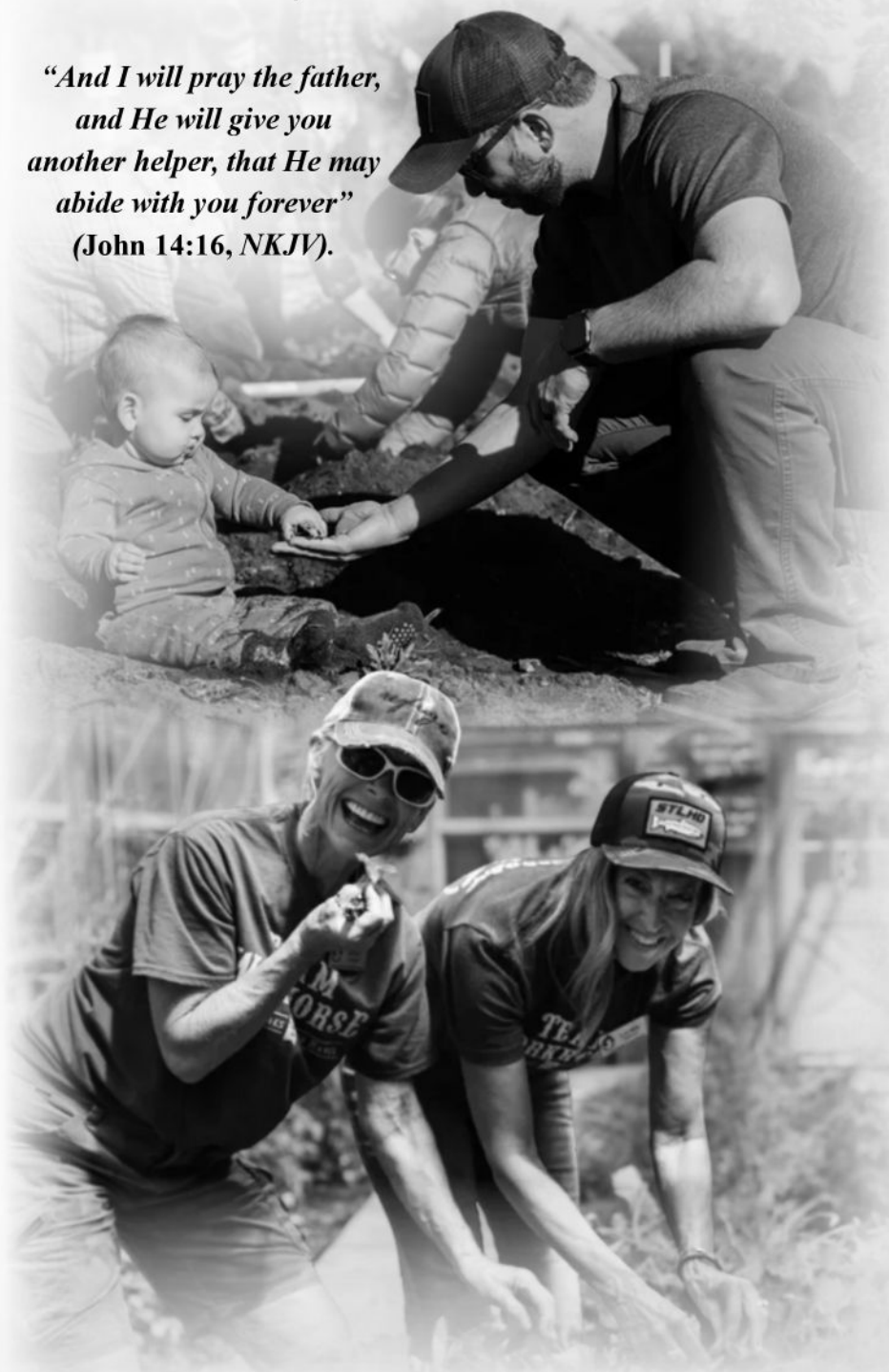


As I reached the top of the hill to meet this new group of enthusiastic volunteers, I began the Tour by sharing what the Lord had been revealing to me. I reminded them that they were EACH a river of living water—and I couldn't WAIT to see where the Lord was leading them!

"Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" (John 7:38, ESV).

Have you felt a "Holy Spirit nudge" to take action within your own community? Perhaps there's a local ministry who needs someone exactly like YOU to join . . . or a precious shut-in who just needs a friend . . . or a school that needs someone to help with their reading program . . . the possibilities are endless. Through what seems like the smallest gesture—we can make a big difference. Listen to your heart—and follow the River!

*"And I will pray the father,
and He will give you
another helper, that He may
abide with you forever"
(John 14:16, NKJV).*



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

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You are invited... **REFUGE 2026**

"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble." (Psalm 46:1, KJV)



In the midst of life's storms—when the days feel heavy and the way forward unclear—Jesus remains our constant. He is not just the light at the end of the tunnel . . . but the light *within* it. He is our stronghold, our safe place and our unwavering Refuge.

Refuge at Crystal Peaks is a space for the Beloved to gather—just as we are—to share a meal, connect through fellowship, worship Jesus together and receive a simple word of truth from Scripture.

Whether you're weary, hopeful, or somewhere in between, *you are welcome here.*

Gathering Details:

When: The second Tuesday of every month

Where: 19275 Innes Market Road, Bend, OR 97703

We always begin with a potluck-style dinner; please help us fill the table and make it overflow with welcome for all.

If your last name begins with:

- **A–K:** Please bring a side dish of any kind
- **L–Z:** Please bring a dessert of any kind

Come hungry—for food, for connection and for the hope only Jesus can give.

