



EMPOWER THE MINISTRY

AROUND *the* FIRE

Fall 2022

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



*Step In or
Step Aside*

By Sarah Perez

Step In: act as a substitute for someone.
Step Aside: withdraw or resign from an important position.

The Ranch Ignition event was drawing closer by the minute and I felt my humanistic fears growing. There was a gap in our Ranch staff that God had chosen not to fill. This empty position made Ignition—a large annual event in which we freely teach others how to start a similar ranch ministry—feel nearly impossible to host. I sensed a familiar and suffocating feeling of inadequacy creep into my mind and try to fill my heart. I had even desperately whispered to God “This is too big, I just can’t do this, *I can’t.*”

Every untruthful word I spoke over myself only yanked my focus off of God and firmly placed it on the mountain of impossibility looming in front of me. Yet faithfully, God spoke *His* truth over me, “No, Sarah, NO! You were made for such a time as THIS.”

I struggled to hear Him through all the doubts I had allowed to flood my mind and drown out His words. With my insecurities and fears firmly in tow, I ignorantly stepped in the way of the Great Provider. In that moment, God could have easily moved me back into the proper position. Instead, He chose to graciously teach me about His faithfulness and provision.

Currently, I am learning how to live life with open palms and to daily lay all the gifts and talents He has entrusted to me at His feet. God created my heart to have great admiration for His perfect order and organization. I find pure beauty in His every detail because of how I see and value them. I am a planner to the core of my being. So, living in spontaneity and “going where the wind takes me,” has never, EVER been my life motto. When the gap at the Ranch continued to be unfilled as Ignition drew closer—and there was no one to oversee the void but me—I realized God was moving me toward an opportunity for growth . . . one that was out of my comfort zone.



Photo credit: Emily Green Photography



I decided to meet with the founders of the Ranch and my fellow director, and I literally thought, “Surely they will agree that this event is just impossible for this year.”

Ha! NOPE! Not even close! From these leaders, I received only words of support for the mission and strong empowerment to move forward in faith.

But fickle me was still not convinced. Holding tightly to my fears and doubts, I decided to ask the entire staff if we should host Ignition, knowing that each individual would be needed to help fill specific roles to make the event work.

Attempting to host and plan Ignition was a BIG challenge for me because of all the prayer, heart, soul and detail that it entails. It’s so much more than just an “event,” it’s an opportunity for participants to deeply pursue God’s presence and individually encounter the transforming love of Jesus.

Although I have had prior years of experience with project management, most of it was devoid of God and solely focused on human control. Since my focus was out of alignment, the tools of project managing became burdensome. This led me to grind even more on my inadequacy.



With my uncertainties pounding in my head, I thought “Surely the staff would agree with me! This was too much! We’re too busy! The event was too impossible.”

Once again, NOPE! I sheepishly admit I was surprised when our staff echoed the same words of the founders and directors, “We support you, Sarah. We are with you in this. We choose not to miss this BIG opportunity to share God’s love.”

Shoot! How could this be?! I was the *only one* hesitating.

As I listened to the support and excitement of our team, God whispered “You have stepped *in front* of Me when I have been asking you to *step aside*.”

Conviction made my heart ache for what I had done to my faithful Father. I had moved *Him* aside.

Tears flooded my eyes and my heart bowed in immediate repentance. In that moment, I chose to step aside and I invited God to step in. Instantly, all the fears and lies I allowed myself to focus on *shattered*.

Through my team’s words, God’s MIGHTY power came rushing in and filled my heart with His promises, “*I will go before you . . . and level the mountains.*” (Isaiah 45:2a, NLT), “. . . *my power is made perfect in*

weakness.” (2 Corinthians 12:9a, NIV), “*I will strengthen you, I will help you . . .*” (Isaiah 41:10b, ESV), and “*For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.*” (Matthew 11:30, ESV)

I saw Jesus cheering me on through the entire staff. An excited melody filled the room as our team willingly stepped into the role God had planned for each one of them. The Holy Spirit had freedom to lead and all of our hearts came into His alignment. The decision was clear—we would host Ignition—and WE were *all* made for such a time as this.

As the event drew closer, my peace in God grew stronger. By choosing to rest in Him, it was easy to allow God to move through the giftings of our team. My role was simply to guide them with the tools of organization and planning He had already given me.

Ignition came with a mighty roar. God moved in powerful, breathtaking ways. As I watched God’s truth crush the lies that once gripped me, every fear and doubt I had held onto became powerless.

Looking back at Ignition, God gently reminded me of pivotal moments in His Word where His people stepped aside so *He* could lead the way. Esther could have easily taken control and stepped into God’s position—then realized the impossibility of the situation

she faced—and chosen to back down. But instead she *stepped aside* and trusted that *God would step in*. Esther knew God had prepared her for “*such a time as this.*” (Esther 4:14, ESV)

Before He was crucified, Jesus prayed, “*Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but yours, be done.*” (Luke 22:42, ESV)

Jesus chose to step aside to become the perfect sacrifice—so that I could live in freedom. He knew the cost and still He chose what was best—for *me*.

Now, I hold Ignition as a precious covenant, a reminder of the lives that would not have been impacted by God’s love if I had not chosen to step aside. I also hold it as a covenant of His unconditional faithfulness and provision for me. Even in my weakest moments—He is still Jehovah-Jireh—the *LORD will provide*.

Friend, right now, is there a situation in your life that makes you feel inadequate? Is there a mountain in front of you that feels impossible to overcome? If so, consider this: have you let fear and doubt place you in a position that only God should be in? Have you *stepped in the way*, when He is gently asking you to *step aside*?

If so, I want to encourage you to release those areas of your heart to the Father—right now. Take a moment to pray, ask for His forgiveness and invite Him into the center of what you are facing.

“*. . . you whom I took from the ends of the earth, and called from its farthest corners, saying to you, ‘You are my servant, I have chosen you and not cast you off’; 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 41:9-10, ESV)



Photo credit: Emily Green Photography

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Ignition Participants Respond:

“The Ignition event has been the most incredible thing I have ever participated in. I am blown away by the messages, the lessons, the very place that is Crystal Peaks, the fellow participants and of course, Kim and Troy Meeder and their staff. Standing on hallowed ground, hearing how God brought this incredible place into existence out of a cinder pit, hearing how people who were called by God helped it grow, and grow, and grow . . . and how attacks from the enemy had unsuccessfully tried to destroy the ranch, was inspirational to say the least.”— C

“This has been one of the most Spirit filled experiences I’ve had in my life. The power of His presence has moved me to tears repeatedly. I do not deserve this blessing but I am thankful for God’s grace. I am amazed at the obedience in the Lord trickling down to everyone at the ranch from the biggest role to the smallest and the desire to honor God by putting Him before every single move or decision that is made. It is a pure demonstration of faith and what being a strong faith based ministry looks like. I am excited!”— S

“Want to thank you for Ignition. It is absolutely amazing what God has done in your lives and your ministry! We both needed a spiritual uplifting!”— L & M

“God has blown us away through Ignition! We are feeling so hopeful and encouraged as we seek what His plans are for our little farm.”— B

“It was truly an honor and a blessing to be a part of Ignition. I can honestly say my life will never be the same.”— M

Photo credit: Emily Green Photography

A Hallelujah Life



BY ANN HAWLEY

It was an early Spring day and although the sun was shining brightly, it was very chilly outside. I zipped my jacket up to my chin as I walked to the orchard with one of our volunteers. While we walked past the sheep pasture, we spontaneously decided to take a detour to check on our very pregnant sheep. Lambing season had arrived and the entire staff was on the lookout for any signs of new life. As we reached the ewes with their bulging sides, my friend said, “What an incredible day! Blue skies, crisp air, new life coming and God’s faithfulness!” As soon as she said this, two things immediately came to mind: a verse I had just read that morning in Psalms and a worship song I had recently heard which I could not get out of my head.

“But we your people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.” (Psalm 79:13, ESV)

As the two of us leaned over the fence together and watched our large and woolly Icelandic sheep try to navigate with their pregnant bellies, I agreed with her and said, “You have to listen to this song! I’m making it my mission to dig deeper into this! I pulled my cell phone out of my pocket and music began to fill the pasture:

*Every hour, every second
Every heartbreak, every blessing
You can have it all
Every dark night, every morning
I lay my life down here before you
You can have it all*

MY LIFE SINGS HALLELUJAH

*I won’t let the rocks cry out
I’ll shout it from the mountaintops
Let everything I am reveal
The glory of how great you are
I won’t let a breath go by
And miss a chance to lift you high
Let everything I am declare
The story of how great you are . . .*

(Great You Are, by Jordan Smith)

‘A Hallelujah Life’ . . . what in the world does that even look like? I’ve been thinking about this ever since. I can’t help but reflect back to that night long ago when our Savior, the Lamb of God, was born in Bethlehem. Although our traditional stories of that Holy night include the presence of shepherds guarding their flocks, some scholars believe they were almost certainly not traditional shepherds, but Levitical priests who were in charge of caring for the lambs who would be used for sacrifice in the Temple. What an incredible foreshadowing of Christ Himself—who was born that night to become the perfect sacrifice for our sins. Although we all fall short in our humanity, Jesus Christ became the perfect sacrificial lamb so we could all be redeemed. That humble beginning in Bethlehem is a powerful reminder that Jesus came so we could have eternal life.

So what is our response to that?

“Worthy is the lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!” (Revelation 5:12, ESV)

IT STARTS WITH WORSHIP

Is the beginning of a ‘Hallelujah Life’ praise and worship to our King?

In the Bible, the word ‘hallelujah’ first appears in the book of Psalms. It’s a combination of two Hebrew words: ‘halal’ meaning praise and ‘yah’ meaning God (Yahweh). Hallelujah is used in Scripture 28 times—it’s a call to praise, worship and glorify God. We see throughout Scripture that even the angels praise and worship the Lord.

“And one called to another and said: ‘Holy, Holy, Holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!’” (Isaiah 6:3, NASB)

In Hebrew, the word ‘Kadosh’ is the word we define as ‘Holy.’ But the Hebrew meaning goes even further—it means ‘set apart for sacred use.’ When we worship God, we reflect the light of Jesus Himself. Jesus has shown us the way to worship, and as His image-bearers, we reflect His light when we worship Him.

As my friend and I marveled at the miracle of upcoming new life and the obvious metaphor of Jesus as the sacrificial lamb, we burst into song together. “I know this song!” she

exclaimed when the first chords of “Great You Are” began playing. “It’s so powerful!” We literally sang at the top of our lungs, arms linked, all the way to the orchard—oblivious to the fact that singing was clearly neither of our spiritual gifts.

Later that day as I was reflecting on the beauty of the morning, the Lord reminded me that a ‘Hallelujah Life’ is first and foremost built on a foundational relationship with Jesus Christ.

“ . . . I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.” (John 10:10-11, NIV) *“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.”* (John 10:27, NIV)

A COMMAND TO LOVE OTHERS

Once we know, love and have a personal relationship with the One who gave His life for us, we are then called to love others. I believe that love is the second element of ‘A Hallelujah Life.’ How can our lives imitate Christ’s love for us? God calls us to be His image-bearers, to reflect His light. In the original Hebrew, God does not say in Genesis 1:3, “Let there be light” (as most of our western translations state). He says, “Be light.” What a powerful command! We can often preach a better sermon by living ‘A Hallelujah Life’ than by any persuasive argument we might offer. Jesus is the “light of the world” (John 8:12) and when we truly love others, we are physically representing His commandment.



Photo credit: Kim Meeder



“My dear children, let’s not just talk about love; let’s practice real love. This is the only way we’ll know we’re living truly, living in God’s reality.”
(1 John 3:18-19, MSG)

GRATITUDE IS KEY

‘A Hallelujah Life’—at its core—must also include thanksgiving. Our personal outlook is a natural reflection of our hearts. The world tells us that we need the things it provides to bring us happiness. Our realities are defined by the lens we choose to view the world: a glass that’s half empty and one that’s half full are both true. But the actual truth is, we only need what is in our hearts—Jesus Christ—to bring us *true* joy. Our perception becomes our reality: if our eyes are fixed on Him, we can *choose* to be thankful. And by choosing gratitude, we are right in the middle of God’s will.

“Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, NIV)

Many weeks have passed since I spent that holy morning with my volunteer friend in the sheep pasture. We now have seven lively lambs who arrived safely into this world. They are an absolute delight to watch as they joyfully scamper about. Also, they have become a favorite activity for many of our session children.

While none of us will ever find perfection this side of Heaven, what I know for sure is that if we practice the trio of *Worship, Love* and *Thanksgiving*, we will be on the path to living ‘A Hallelujah Life.’

May Jesus—who was love personified when He walked on this earth—teach each of us how to live authentically in Him. Through Christ, may we lead a radically transformed life—marked by absolute joy.

Lord, I pray that as we draw nearer to You, You will show each of us how to live out our one holy, hallelujah life.



Photo credit: Kim Meeder

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.

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BATTEN DOWN THE HATCHES

Join us for an all staff/volunteer work day!



Photo credit: Emily Green Photography

Our next large-scale volunteering opportunity will be held on Saturday October 22nd from 9:30am-4pm.

We would love for you to join the Ranch staff for 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, etc. By aligning these tasks together in a single day, we will be embracing the joy of “many hands make light work.”

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.

Schedule:

- 9:30am-12pm:** Project teams
- 12pm-1pm:** Lunch (provided by Crystal Peaks)
- 1pm-4pm:** Project teams

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 head count for project team planning and for catering. Again, thanks to everyone who serves this ministry—especially your prayer covering and support!