

HOPE FOR THE FAMILY

AROUND the FIRE

Spring 2022

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

FOLLOW ME

By Ben Donald

Continued on page 2

The morning air is cool as I make my way to the city. Treading along the road, I am drawn into a commotion. Crowds are lining the way to the city gate; what is going on? There is a man carrying a cross. He is battered and bleeding. People are mocking and shouting; some are crying. Whoa! Why is that Roman soldier yelling at me? “*You there! Get over here and carry this!*” Rough hands shove me toward the cross.

I stoop down and shoulder the heavy beam. The ridicule, the shouting, the spitting, the blows, they hit us both as I closely follow the man up the hill.

Do you ever feel like Simon of Cyrene? If that name is not familiar to you, he is the man that was chosen seemingly at random, to carry Jesus’ cross to the hill where he was crucified. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all mention him by name in their Gospels.

Simon's day was interrupted, his plans were upset. He found himself following Jesus on a road, in a direction, in a way that he never planned. We are told in God's Word that Simon followed behind Jesus on the road. He was immersed in an unreal scene. Unreal, because of the passionate hatred directed toward this man. Also unreal because of the way the man responded. It was as if every harsh word, every expression of hatred, every evil action was absorbed into Him. The vicious behaviors were not only absorbed . . . but silently nullified.

He did not respond to them. He just kept walking. Often in life we find our feet on paths we do not expect or plan. Before we even see hardship coming, our eyes are blurred with tears that we never expected to cry, pain we never imagined we would feel, disappointment we never saw coming. *What now, we ask?*

The second-guessing often begins immediately: *maybe I am not in God's will? It wasn't supposed to be this way? Where did I go wrong?* Perhaps, like Simon, you have been chosen from the crowd to walk the difficult road WITH Jesus. Of course, there are times in life when the burden we bear is of our own making. The promise God made to "not leave you or forsake you" (Deut. 31:8b, NLT) is still true, even when we cause our own pain.

How should we respond when we find ourselves in these painful, unforeseen situations? Look up. What is Jesus doing? Simon was blessed to have a visual aid in his situation. He could see his Savior placing one agonizing footstep ahead of the previous. Jesus was *still* on the move. Simon found that all he had to do was follow.

The reality of following Jesus often does not align with our "Christian" daydreams. The blood, sweat, dirt and pain are much more common than the goose bumps. There are hard jobs that need to be done. There are low points in life that just don't feel good no matter how we process the situation. Jesus summed it up this way, "Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows." (John 16:33b, NLT). To shoulder this load, He said, "Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls." (Matt. 11:29, NLT). How can He simultaneously promise trials and rest?

Scientists tell us that there are approximately 23,760 pounds of atmospheric pressure surrounding our bodies at any given time. Why aren't we crushed? Because there is an equal force of air pressure acting from within us in an outward direction. Do you see the connection? Jesus does not offer an exemption from trouble. He does not take away the external pressures. Instead, He fills us with His abundant, exceptional, more-than-enough companionship.

By choosing to fill our hearts with an indwelling of His presence, the great pressures and troubles of life are not overwhelming. Jesus is lovingly warning His disciples—and us—that many unpleasant things are headed our way. Even when we are living out our faith the best we can, the situations around us often get worse. He is letting us know that this is not a bad thing, this is a certain thing.

"But take heart," He said. "I have overcome the world." (John 16:33b, NLT). Jesus does not offer us "coping mechanisms." He does not offer an escape route. He does not even advertise a pleasant life. Instead, He offers us Himself. He offers a living, vital relationship. In this relationship with a perfect, holy, completely loving Person, we find life, hope and help in all things.

Scripture offers no further insight as to what happened to Simon of Cyrene once they reached Golgotha. Presumably the weight of the cross would have been lifted from Simon's back as Jesus was lifted up to crucifixion. Released from his trial, what would he do? Would he shrug his now bruised shoulders and head back to the city, relieved that his struggle and humiliation had passed? Or would he stand and look up, awed, amazed and changed by the sight of the man dying before him?

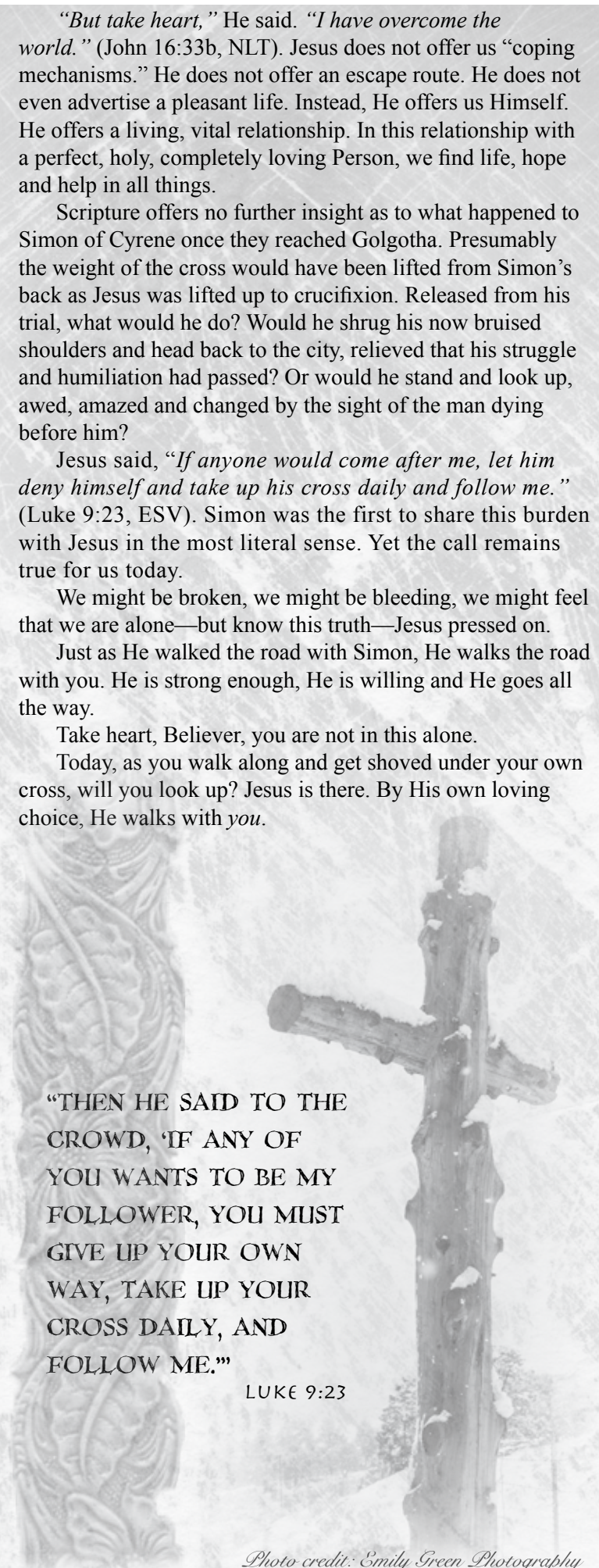
Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23, ESV). Simon was the first to share this burden with Jesus in the most literal sense. Yet the call remains true for us today.

We might be broken, we might be bleeding, we might feel that we are alone—but know this truth—Jesus pressed on.

Just as He walked the road with Simon, He walks the road with you. He is strong enough, He is willing and He goes all the way.

Take heart, Believer, you are not in this alone.

Today, as you walk along and get shoved under your own cross, will you look up? Jesus is there. By His own loving choice, He walks with you.



"THEN HE SAID TO THE CROWD, 'IF ANY OF YOU WANTS TO BE MY FOLLOWER, YOU MUST GIVE UP YOUR OWN WAY, TAKE UP YOUR CROSS DAILY, AND FOLLOW ME.'"

LUKE 9:23

Photo credit: Emily Green Photography



Regal Redemption

BY SARAH ROBINETT

Photo credit : Skye

Recently, for one family living in Indiana—in a single pivotal moment—tragedy struck. A beloved daughter, full of life, optimism and dreams . . . never came home. As if instantly frozen within a terrible storm, time stopped.

Left to reel from the loss of their child, her parents were caught up within the violent, blinding blizzard of swirling grief. All that remained was to pick up the shattered pieces of their hearts and continue on. But how?

Twenty-two hundred miles away, in the cold winter air, I listened as one of my precious session girls shared her heart. Over the last several years, “Skye” and I had walked many painful roads together. More precisely, when she came to the Ranch for sessions, Skye did the “walking” and I did the listening. On this day, her most recent hopes and heartbreaks emerged throughout our conversation like ominous bodies of ice in a glacial bay. Similar to icebergs, I knew her minimal, superficial words were connected to great blocks of pain hidden beneath her thin facade.

After the death of her mother, Skye was pinballed through the foster system. She knew only broken promises. Earlier, she was reunited with biological siblings within a temporary home. Shortly thereafter, a kind woman nearby invited Skye to come and ride her horses. The girl had been praying for a miracle and suddenly she was encircled by family

AND horses to ride? Now she was certain God had answered. However, what she saw as a miracle . . . faded into a nightmare.

Siblings within the household consistently chose trouble. With incredible compassion, the foster parents offered every opportunity for the broken teens to reverse their disastrous course. Tension built until the day came when an anonymous source called the police. The offending parties were sent to juvenile prison.

From there, Skye was immediately placed—once again—within a new family. She was devastated. To her, the only saving grace of another transition was the fact they had a special treasure in their backyard: an old Appaloosa mare. As if adding woe-upon-woe, only two months after her move-in date, the beloved horse died from a violent colic episode.

In silence, Skye and I sat together. Surrounded by a frigid fog, it felt like a gray mirror of Skye’s gray circumstances. Her past was clouded with deep disappointment. And her future seemed shrouded with emptiness.

Jude—her favorite Crystal Peaks horse—let out an impatient sigh from beneath her. His warm breath poured out in visible frozen streams. Shamis, my mount, bobbed her head, telling us both it was time to get moving.

We released our horses to trace patterns in a fresh blanket of snow covering the arena. Coming together again, we prayed for Jesus’ radiating promises to shine through her sadness.

A few months later, Troy was in the midst of a renovation project on the Ranch. He needed more supplies and Kim accompanied him on a quick dash to a local flooring store.

They decided to divide and conquer. Kim stayed outside to look at stone slabs and Troy went inside. Suddenly, a customer noticed the logo on his hat and asked excitedly, “Do you work at Crystal Peaks?” Troy chuckled, “Actually, I do. My wife and I founded it.”

The woman burst into an enthusiastic flurry of words. Troy smiled and encouraged her to speak with Kim outside. Instantly, she rushed out the door.

While admiring stone slabs, Kim looked up just in time to see a woman half run-half hobble toward her. The lady called out in rushed animation, flailing her arms to capture Kim’s attention.

Quickly, the woman introduced herself as “Eileen,” and opened the verbal floodgates. A terrible story of heartache poured out. Eileen’s situation at home was dire. She was caring for her

mother-in-law on hospice—with intense pain from her need for a double knee replacement—while tending her horses.

Eileen's body was spent and broken. She functioned under excruciating pain and no longer possessed the health necessary to care for her cherished equines. She had been asking God for a miracle.

Kim listened intently, then prayed with the woman for God's direction and healing.

Troy returned and it was time to go. Kim gathered Eileen's contact information and promised the Ranch would soon be in touch.

Upon her arrival home, Kim relayed to me her unique encounter at the flooring store. She shared how Eileen was in need of finding a new home for two of her horses. Her desire was that they remain together . . . and be used in a ministry program to help children in need. Eileen wondered if it were possible to gift her horses to Crystal Peaks.

It was a generous offer. Yet, my mind shifted to our current herd and the fact that our program was full. I wasn't sure if adding two additional horses was possible . . . Kim's next words jolted me back to the present.

"Sarah, she asked if I knew Skye."

"Skye?" I questioned, "My Skye? My session girl?"

"Yes!" Kim responded with emphasis. "Eileen said she and Skye were very close. She told me how Skye used to come and ride her two horses. Wait until you see these pictures . . ."

My friend handed me her phone. Every picture captured Skye with two enormous black and white draft horses. While scrolling through the pictures, I could feel my eyes nearly pop out of my face! Recognition accompanied each one. I had already seen every photo . . . because Skye had shown them to me.

"I-I know these horses," I stammered. "Skye told me all about them. For months those horses and the special friend who owned them were all she talked about. But Skye had to move and hasn't seen them since. She is not going to believe this! Wouldn't it be awesome if they were reunited here at the Ranch?"

Kim's expression silently filled with caution. Confused, I paused my excited rambling.

"Apparently, there was an incident in Skye's foster situation," Kim explained. "Eileen called the police . . . Skye was devastated and furious. Eileen recounted that every time she tried to reach Skye, her bitter response was, 'I hate you!'"

The weight of this knowledge fell heavily on my rise of enthusiasm. I remembered my recent conversation with Skye. She never told me she knew who made the call to the authorities. I had no idea it was the horse friend she once adored. The pain over her broken family and the repeated loss of her siblings overshadowed her heart. If there was to be a reunion now with the woman Skye blamed as the source of her grief, it would not be a happy one.

Photo Credit: Eileen Mennis



Slowly, my swirl of emotion settled firmly over one single resonating resolve. I quietly voiced to Kim, "If nothing else—even if Eileen's horses don't come to the Ranch—I believe God wants to heal their broken friendship. Let's pray He does . . . and trust Him for the rest." She agreed. Together we bowed our heads and pleaded for His redemption and healing over these two broken hearts.

Through continued prayer over Eileen and Skye, God began to reveal His step-by-step, mind-blowing, sea-parting, plan for redemption. After

we completed a formal evaluation of Eileen's horses and she toured the Ranch, we all felt His strong peace about moving forward into the adoption process.

We said "yes" to Eileen and agreed to receive her tremendous gift. I trusted Jesus to provide for the super-sized mouths to feed and to create extra room among our already overflowing herd. I also knew that before they arrived, I would need to tell Skye.

Photo Credit: Sarah Robinett and Skye



Often, when horses are adopted from loving homes, their owners become part of our extended Ranch family.

Eileen hoped to frequently visit the Ranch and remain close to her cherished four-legged friends. If Skye were to arrive at the Ranch and see Eileen unexpectedly, I could only imagine the potential horror and betrayal she might feel . . . *again*. It was vital that I tell Skye immediately. This would give her time to prepare her heart for an inevitable encounter with the woman she currently despised.

It is often the nature of our God to show us His miraculous plan *after* we take steps of faith toward Him. Once we committed to receive the new horses, God revealed His amazing way of creating room within our herd.

On a warm spring day, a few staff members and I prepared a very precious gift for Skye. With her new foster mom's blessing, we arrived unannounced into their driveway . . . horse trailer in tow.

"Renee's parents."



"Skye reunited with dear friends."

Skye met us with wide-eyed confusion and exclaimed, "What are you doing here?" Our special surprise hidden inside the trailer gave himself away with a familiar whinny. "Jude? JUDE? Why are you here?" Skye stammered in disbelief.

I smiled and opened the trailer door. Jude—a small chestnut horse—was Skye's favorite four-footed

companion from the Ranch. He turned toward the girl he loved and stepped boldly out of the trailer. I firmly placed his lead rope into Skye's hands.

Skye stood nearly motionless as she tried to comprehend what was happening. I clarified the scene, "Remember how you've been praying for a horse of your own? Well, we've been praying too and Jesus revealed that you would make a perfect home for Jude."

Without words, my young friend's jaw dropped and her face turned bright red. This was the first time I had ever seen her speechless. In a way not fully understood, Jesus was healing her

"Renee's parents with Eileen."



heart and repairing her trust. After long minutes of stroking her new horse, she was finally able to whisper, "Thank you."

Even though the arrival date was soon, I knew this was not the time to mention Eileen and the two horses. "Father," I silently prayed, "Please open her heart. Make a time for me to tell her."

Two days later, I waited for Skye to join me at the Ranch for our weekly session. I could feel my heart welling with angst. I knew this was the day for me to speak to her about Eileen. I didn't know what to say or how she would respond. Would this conversation draw her toward healing—or—push

her back into the painful prison of mistrust and betrayal.

In moments, Skye crested the top of the steep Ranch driveway and lunged into my arms. "I still cannot believe you surprised me with Jude!" she beamed with wonder.

I smiled in return, "Skye the whole idea was totally from Jesus. You have been praying for a horse—and God heard you. He told us to give you Jude. The gift was straight from Him to you."

I took a deep breath, and prayed for God's words to flow from my mouth. "And Skye, remember how we've been praying for more big horses to join the Ranch herd? Now that you have Jude, God has made room for us to adopt two more horses."

Skye's eyes grew wide with excitement. "Ooooh! Are they Little Bear's siblings? Did you rescue them? Did they come from . . .?"

"Slow down sister. Take a look for yourself," I handed her my phone to show her the pictures of Eileen's horses.

My young friend's face turned from delight to disbelief. I watched all the color drain from her face and wondered if she might throw up.

Cupping her hand over her mouth, Skye blurted out, "Eileen . . . those are Eileen's horses."

Absently, she backed away from me, her voice faltered, "I hate her. She called the police on my family. I told her I hated her and never wanted to see her again . . ."

Within a single moment that felt like an eternity, I silently pleaded, "Please Jesus, help us now." Feeling led to pursue her, I pressed in, "Skye, do you know how much Eileen loves you?" Giving silent witness, tears filled Skye's eyes and streamed down her cheeks. It was clear her mental and emotional gears were colliding. In all the years I'd known Skye, from losing her mom to cancer, through each foster home and heartbreak, I had never seen her cry.

God was softening her heart.

Skye fought to control the flood of her emotions. Finally, in a soft and earnest voice, she said, "I . . . I was so mean to her. If Eileen comes to the Ranch . . . can I . . . could I apologize to her?"

BOOM. The CHOICE to forgive caused redemption to rain down like holy fire. The icy walls surrounding her heart melted before the unstoppable healing heat of genuine repentance.

With my own eyes filling with tears, I drew her into an embrace. “Of course you can. And you don’t have to wait until you see her at the Ranch. I have her phone number.”

Nodding, Skye worked to dry her face. I continued, “Can you see how much God loves you? He gave you Jude. Before that, He placed these other beloved horses into your life—and He wants to give them back to you. He also knows how much you loved Eileen—and He wants to heal your friendship and give her back to you.”

Later that night I received a message from Eileen. She was elated. After Skye’s session at the Ranch, she made the bravest phone call of her life. She—a child—apologized to Eileen and reaffirmed how much she truly loved her. Eileen shared how she was going to Skye’s house that Saturday. She wanted to meet Jude and reach across the former hurt to affirm their loving friendship.

Only Jesus could do this—and He wasn’t done yet—the horses hadn’t even arrived.

In the days that followed, awe, wonder, gratitude and worship danced around the staff and all who had joined us in praying through these events. In the midst, we continued to prepare for the horses’ arrival . . . and to trust God to provide for them once they came.

That is when Crystal Peaks was contacted by a couple from Indiana.

They reached out to the Ranch after losing their 28 year-old daughter, Renee. Karyl, her mom, shared how Renee had a love for rehabilitating animals. Crystal Peaks was suggested to them by a friend who knew their daughter. By choosing to move forward through their grief, God was healing the impossible, gaping hole in their hearts.

In honor of their daughter, Gene and Karyl created a fund they titled the “Renee Legacy Fund.” They felt God calling them to help Crystal Peaks rescue a horse. When they heard

of the two horses that were slated to arrive, they immediately sent funds to cover the initial costs of not one—but both of the horses.

What seemed like the final puzzle piece was dropped into place. Everything—everything—was prepared for their arrival.

Finally the day came. Enormous feathered feet stepped down out of the trailer. The towering gelding followed me with his head held low in gentle, humble contentment. His sister appeared next bearing a two-foot-long mane braided with celebratory red roses for the occasion. I couldn’t help but notice an iridescent shine shimmering across their black and white patterned coats.

The new horses were a rare breed known as the “Drum Horse.” Originally, they were bred for the Queen of England as part of the British Royal Calvary. These astounding mounts were developed by crossing draft horses—Shire or Clydesdale—with the Gypsy Vanner. This resulted in an enormous breed noted for their stunning paint markings, feathered feet and a ridiculously long, flowing mane and tail. I was amazed at the presence of such regal warriors . . . and the realization

of how Jesus had already used them to fight for strong ties of redemption. Truly, they were created to carry God’s war-cry of hope and freedom for all He desires to restore with “Regal Redemption.”

Only God’s indescribable miracle of redeeming love could braid three separate lives devastated by pain and grief into a glorious masterpiece of redemption.

In their unique times of frozen desperation, each heart chose to turn toward Him in faith. Through the cold darkness, the prayers and pleas of His people reached Heaven. The resulting answer from the heart of the Father rained down like fiery columns of pure hope, melting the cold grip of suffocating hopelessness.

The loss of a child . . . the loss of family . . . the loss of health . . . the loss of relationship . . . perhaps you are the one frozen within this icy pain. When faced with a blizzard of suffering, it is God’s love that calls you—to choose—to step forward into a deliberate action of faith . . . toward Him.

“I have told you all this so that you may have peace in me. Here on earth



Photo Credit: Eileen Mennis

you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world.” (John 16:33, NLT).

“The smoke of the incense, mixed with the prayers of God’s holy people, ascended up to God from the altar where the angel had poured them out. Then the angel filled the incense burner with fire from the altar and threw it down upon the earth; and thunder crashed, lightning flashed, and there was a terrible earthquake.” (Revelation 8:4-5, NLT).

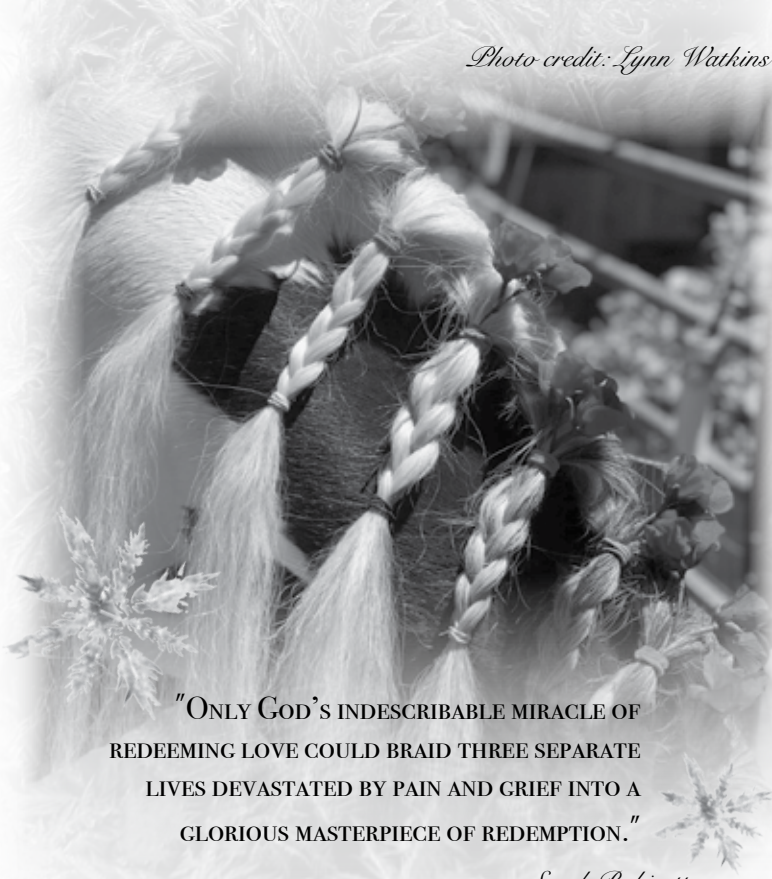
Within every heart, the altar is a place of fiery sacrifice. The Bible tells us how trials refine our faith like fire. (1 Peter 1:7). When we offer the sacrifice of praise and prayers on the altar of our painful circumstances, God hears. He receives our prayers, molds them and returns them as a force so powerful and beautiful that it shakes and transforms our very foundations. The supernatural answer of His “thunder, lightning and earthquake” just might be returned to this realm as a whispered prayer of repentance, the unstoppable light of His healing forgiveness and the complete destruction of what was once meant to destroy us.

Every stone-cold storm of the enemy must flee away from God’s presence. “For our God is a consuming fire.” (Hebrews 12:29). When we bring our presence into HIS presence—every frozen bond melts.

Like Renee’s parents—or my session girl—or the woman at a flooring store who ran toward the flame of hope . . . don’t give up. Allow your prayers to rise to heaven’s throne. Trust the consuming fire of Jesus’ love to burn away all your icy grief, pain and suffering. He loves you and wants to restore and redeem all that is lost in your life.

Friend, take courage. If you choose to accept it, King Jesus is offering a journey of “Regal Redemption” . . . for you.

Photo credit: Lynn Watkins



“ONLY GOD’S INDESCRIBABLE MIRACLE OF REDEEMING LOVE COULD BRAID THREE SEPARATE LIVES DEVASTATED BY PAIN AND GRIEF INTO A GLORIOUS MASTERPIECE OF REDEMPTION.”

~Sarah Robinett

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

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Calling All Prayer Warriors!

Please join us as we lift up those attending our 2022 IGNITION event on May 25-28. As the Lord calls each soul into ranch ministry, it is our desire to encourage all toward a deeper relationship with Jesus Christ. Through the last 26 years of challenges and victories, we have learned to follow and depend on the only One who knows the way.

This four-day event equips participants from across our nation—and beyond—with the tools needed to return home and establish their own ministry. During IGNITION, our greatest prayer for each individual is to encounter the living God in a transformative way.

Also, please pray for every person who will share and shoulder with these participants during their ministry journey.

Although our registry for this event is full, if you sense the Holy Spirit directing your heart toward this gathering, please email: similarministries@cpyr.org.

Again, thank you dear family for joining us in prayer over this event . . . we so appreciate you.

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.

Photo credit: Emily Green Photography