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There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life has set you [b] free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. **Romans 8:1,2**



*Inspiration for Her*

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THE OFFICIAL INSPIRATION MINISTRIES WOMEN'S NEWSLETTER



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*Inspiration Ministries is unifying the body of Christ in order to most glorify God and inspire others to accept the saving and satisfying love of Jesus Christ.*

# Letter from the Editor

*She is energetic and strong, a hard worker. She is clothed with strength and dignity, and she laughs without fear of the future. When she speaks, her words are wise, and she gives instructions with kindness. Proverbs 31:17, 25-26*



I just re-read the first-ever *Inspiration for Her* Letter from the Editor. And I am baffled. I remember Andy reading it over before printing and being amazed at the hope he saw between the lines, and asking where that came from, because it's not something I exude on a daily basis. Unfortunately, the only answer I can give is that for whatever reason, God has

chosen me to be this person – the editor – and has given me the ability to share the hope of Christ with women who need it just as desperately as I do. Seriously, these letters are as much (if not more) for me as they are for anyone else who reads them. I'm not always the most hopeful person (still trying to figure that one out...), but I do know where my hope comes from, and that is from Jesus Christ.

I was listening to an album by JJ Heller one morning about a week ago while I was getting ready for the day, and a song came on that hit me pretty hard. The chorus goes like this: "Sometimes it feels like forever / When it's dark outside / Baby, the sun will rise / Baby, the sun will rise / However long the night." And I remember a time a couple years ago that I heard that song (I believe I was pregnant with Lilly, because it's on JJ's "I Dream of You" album, which is like her lullaby album), feeling like the night was never going to end. That I was just stuck in this darkness, in this pit, in this state of hopelessness. And I don't really remember feeling like that night had come to an end at any point over the next couple of years. In fact, we faced some pretty trying times over those next couple years, and it was hard to just trust God and His goodness. It was hard to see what He was trying to do in those circumstances and situations and with those relationships. Not to say that it's been all dark for two years, because God has certainly done some miraculous things and blessed me beyond measure with my husband, daughter, soon to be son, and wonderful friends and family. But I was so stuck in my darkness that light was hard to see.

But that morning when I heard that song again, I cried as I realized that the sun has risen. That I don't always feel hopeless or lost or like I'm just floating through my life. I see that I have a purpose in this life. I see that I am loved by, accepted by, and complete in the One who created me; the One who continues to mold and shape me on a daily basis. I look around this new, warm, cozy house we are living in, watch my daughter play in her bouncy house, and feel my unborn child kicking in my belly, and thank God for the rising sun. And then I thank God for the rising Son; His rising Son.

I don't always have daily encounters that make me think about and acknowledge the amazingness of Jesus. But something I've been experiencing a lot lately is that realization through worship on Sundays. I can't tell you the last time I was not brought to tears for the majority of the worship service, because the lyrics speak to the wonder, power, forgiveness, and love of Jesus Christ. Because I'm "forced" to remember my dark days of sin and hurt and rejection towards God, and the fact that He sent His only Son to the world to be crucified for MY sake, knowing the exact wrongs I would commit, the sin and hate I would harbor in my heart, and doing it anyways. Hallelujah!

I used the same opening verse in this article as I did a year ago, because I wanted to use that as a goal for 2016, and, well, I don't necessarily feel like I've accomplished that goal as well as I could. So, here's to trying again in 2017. To being strong, wise, and kind. To being fearless in Christ. I pray you will step out in that journey with me. That together, we can continue to find Hope and strength and dignity in the midst of all our circumstances. Ladies, life is not easy. And Satan will do anything and everything he can to kill, steal, and destroy everything God wants to do in and through us. But God... God wants to restore, uplift, encourage, grow, strengthen, and transform us! And HE is the ultimate power. Satan is not the antagonist – he is not God's counterpart. He is not the evil version of the "all-powerful, all-knowing, ever-present" God of our lives. He only knows our past; God knows our future! And I really can't tell you how excited that makes me. Because my past sucks, and I want my future to be better. And I don't think I'm the only one feeling that way.

We are entering a new year, Sisters. A new season. A new life. And that should be something worth sharing and celebrating! So I want to encourage you to share with the other ladies around you what God is doing in your life. How is He shaping you? What is He taking you through, besides "just being in prison" (which I don't take lightly!)? Your life doesn't end on the inside of those walls – it begins! Take this time to explore God and His Word. It is full of truths to encourage you and to give you strength.

Also, should you feel so called, put your changes on paper and send them to us so we can share it with the other ladies going through similar situations! I've heard it said "you can't keep it unless you give it away." I know that sounds silly, but here is the reasoning. Joy is contagious. So when you share the joy of the Lord with someone else, not only does it bring THEM joy, but it also brings YOU more joy. It's the most fantastic domino effect ever! It's like "pay it forward" – you do something kind for someone, then they do something kind for someone else, etc. But in this case, you are sharing the love of Jesus and the transforming power of the cross. And that's better than kindness. So get to writing! We love and care for you ladies. Nothing you've done will change that. Same goes for Jesus.

Excited and Inspired to get this new ball rolling,

*Kirsten Foster*

Inspiration Ministries

# Celebrating Recovery

by Arlene Samuelson

**“Hi.** My name is Arlene. I am a grateful believer in Jesus Christ, and I struggle with food addiction and the need for approval.”

In 2007, I walked into my first Celebrate Recovery meeting and said words similar to those above. For much of my life, I have struggled with my relationship with food and the weight that I have added to my 5’2” frame over the years. Driving back and forth to work, I’d originally heard about Celebrate Recovery via Christian radio. As I learned more, I yearned to not just deal with my eating habits (emotional, comforting, tension-relieving) and struggles with exercise (nonexistent for the most part). I had lost (and regained) a lot of weight over the years. It wasn’t as if I didn’t understand what is involved in weight loss. I had lost weight in several programs and via a great medical bariatric doctor.

In 2007, my weight was down from its highest, but God was speaking to my heart. “Don’t you see that you need to deal with the reasons you eat... the reasons you get discouraged when the going gets tough?” I could lose weight, but my desire was to be able to be healed from whatever “sickness” was making this part of my life such a struggle. The fact that Celebrate Recovery was a Christ-based path to healing from my hurts, habits and hang-ups intrigued me. I was ready to acknowledge that God needed to be a part of working towards being healthy, both in body and spirit. Going it alone without God had brought me only temporary success followed by heartbreaking failure when I would regain the weight I’d lost. I was tired of losing the weight and then losing the battle over and over again. It was time to step out of my denial.

I had heard that my small town now had a Celebrate Recovery so eventually I went to my first meeting not knowing what to expect. What I found was friendly people who also struggled with a large variety of issues: alcohol, drugs, anger, pride, pornography, codependency, shame, low self-esteem, and many more. I also found Christian praise music, a place to learn God’s plan for my heart, steps to keep me on His path, and a safe place to openly share my struggles, hurts, discoveries, and victories in the small open share groups.

Let me take a moment out of my journey and share with you WHY I think it is so important to share Celebrate Recovery with all of you. I spent 14 years working in our county jail with women as a volunteer jail chaplain – hearing their stories, encouraging them, and sharing their struggles as well as mine. Some returned again and again; some only once; some moved on to other jails or prisons. In so many of their stories, there was a major trauma somewhere in their lives: childhood abuse, rape, divorce, family dysfunction, violence, death of loved ones, losses of all kinds. Of course, drugs and alcohol played major roles as to why many of the women were incarcerated, but my thoughts that these traumas were significant factors were confirmed by the leader of a seminar I attended. Our leader was a PhD and in social work in one of the worst neighborhoods in LA. I asked her about the connection between these life traumas and addictions. She stated that

99.99% of all addicts have had a previous damaging trauma in their lives. As I understood it, this had been the subject of her doctoral thesis. As human beings, we, sadly, often do not deal with hurts in a healthy way. Pushing those hurts down a dark hole with alcohol, drugs, food, shopping, and many other methods becomes a way of life, instead of dealing with the tough stuff, the junk we carry with us like a bag of rocks on our backs.

Let me share the story of a young man in his late 20s. At age 11, his sister was hit by a car and killed. Two weeks later, his mother disappeared and at that time many years later neither she nor her body had been found. He was the oldest of his siblings who were eventually brought up by various members of his extended family because his father was not able to deal with the situation and the children. The family really didn’t have much discussion of this overwhelming tragedy. They just moved on. I find it very unsurprising that later in his teen years, drugs and alcohol became a part of his life. The amount of pain and confusion combined with his age and no place for him to voice what he was experiencing, wondering, feeling. Fortunately, he had been able to turn away from the numbing influences of drugs through some of his prison programs and the help of staff and meetings in his transitional housing. His healing was obviously in process as he was able to share his story with me. Sometimes the real prison is a silence that covers over a festering, hurtful experience rather than the walls and cells of a jail or prison.

I recognize that facing those hurts and stating them in front of others is very difficult, but it is also very freeing. I will compare it to an injury recently experienced by a farmer I know. His shirt sleeve became caught in the equipment running an auger. It pulled his underarm into the equipment, grinding into the skin until his brother could turn it off. At the hospital, the first step was surgery to clean the debris and dirt out of the wound. If the wound was not completely clean, infection would set in. Once the wound was clean and drained, he underwent treatments in a high oxygen environment to encourage healing. His wounds are definitely healing, and his arm will one day be whole again.

I liken the small open share groups to being a place to open the old wound and clean out the debris I’ve carried around. I was very aware of some of that “junk” I’d toted; some came to me as I heard the testimony of others or listened to the steps or the Serenity Prayer. I see God as my high oxygen treatment portion. He speaks to me in truth and shows me what He knows I can handle and need at any given time. To me, it’s a matter of knowing that I do not have to live a wounded life, but that my Lord wants to bless me with healing. I have not done anything to deserve that healing. Instead, my Creator loves me and wants His child to live a healed life. By myself, that was simply not happening; in fact, the failures I experienced were making things worse. With God and my support friends at Celebrate Recovery, I can handle the ups and downs of my journey. I can see my failures for what they are and know that they are balanced by victories and growth in my life. It’s not been a fast process, but I thank God every day that He drew me to Celebrate Recovery.

## *My Variegated Hair – A Makeover Story* by CJ Eaton

I found my first gray hair when I was 23 years old. It was appalling! How could my follicles have betrayed me! At least, I thought, it's only ONE gray hair, so I ruthlessly plucked it from my head, thinking that would solve that problem. It didn't. Within a few weeks there were more. And more. And so on. Needless to say, plucking them all out was not practical; I really didn't want to be bald.

Before they became too numerous and overwhelmed my head I took a closer look at one of them. I could see how the natural brown faded gradually into a dull, boring gray. Great, I had thought then. It's not just going gray – it's *variegated!* You know those bundles of yarn that have multiple colors that look so pretty all wound up, and even more beautiful once they've been stitched into something recognizable? They're called variegated because of the many variations of color that create the incredible beauty. Only it didn't look so pretty when it was my hair.

My hair. It was the one feature that could generate positive comments. My looks were a sore subject, believing as I did that I was unattractive and knowing my weight was not anywhere close to what I wished for. At least, I thought, I had thick, wavy, fairly pretty hair. Well, I used to have that anyway.

It didn't occur to me at that time that maybe I was putting just a little too much significance on my appearance. It had pretty much become the norm in our society for women to style and fluff and paint and polish before leaving the house. From a very young age, girls are often complimented on how adorable they are, how cute their outfit is, what a sweet smile they have. So much focus and attention is placed on what we look like to other people that sometimes all our other qualities get overlooked. In fact, beauty has become the ultimate achievement for some. Talent, skill, education and character may be put aside or ignored for the sake of looking better than the other women we know. We all probably know those competitive types who can slyly deliver a cutting insult thinly disguised as a faint compliment. It's as though someone is keeping an invisible score card as we try to rack up points for how physically attractive we can be.

This also opens the option of using beauty as a commodity. How often has a woman drawn someone in with her looks for the sole purpose of obtaining a tangible result? Do we believe the only worthwhile thing we can offer is our appearance? Do we think that is the most valuable asset we have to "trade"?

There is a downward spiral that can start when we get caught up in this lie. If we believe we don't measure up to the world's "beauty standard," perhaps we then start to believe that we don't deserve the benefits of living in a world of beautiful people. When we live in a place that insists we can only be loved if we are beautiful, our belief in our intrinsic value bottoms out. I have serious concerns that a person's character no longer holds much value in our culture – and this is what our children are hearing, learning, believing. Who decided that this standard, this expectation, and these specific qualities define "beauty" and dictate our value based on where we fall on the scale? Who does this glorify?

Don't misunderstand – I don't think God considers make up a sin or hair stylists an abomination. It's far more about the intent of our actions and beliefs, not the fact that we want to look our best. It's at the point where we place more importance on gaining approval and validation from other people than on what God thinks, says, or instructs. If we are honest about this issue, we can see, Biblically speaking, how God views this attitude as an idol – something that gets in the way of our relationship with Him.

How often did God tell us to forsake all idols? Can anyone count how many references there are in Scripture? Starting in Exodus with the Ten Commandments, He reminds us repeatedly that He is to be our only God and anything that takes priority over that relationship is an idol. You'll find His admonishing words in Leviticus, Deuteronomy, Judges, Samuel, Kings, and Chronicles. In Proverbs, men are strongly cautioned against letting a woman's beauty impair their judgment. The whole of Scripture is loaded with warnings about the dangers of allowing any barrier between us and Him.

In fact, God invoked some severe consequences for the nation of Israel because of their idol worship. He explained clearly that there are no benefits to bowing down to an inanimate object that can do nothing when they, *His chosen people*, have access to a *Living God*, who can do anything. And still, they refused to listen and wound up in exile.

Why have so many women made attractiveness an idol? What do we hope to gain from putting our efforts and energy into beauty? Why do I sometimes consider staying home from church because I don't like what my hair is doing that day? Individual answers may vary but the core cause is the same now as it was three thousand years ago – self. Self-focus, self-indulgence, self-centeredness, selfishness, self-satisfaction... We want to feel good about ourselves and use our appearance as a vehicle to invite compliments designed to stroke our egos.

God tells us throughout His Word that true beauty comes from living in a close, obedient relationship with Him. This relationship is the result of removing the focus from ourselves, valuing His perspective and teaching above all others and worshipping Him with everything we have. Our worth to God is never contingent on anyone else's opinion.

### *To the Sisters in Christ*

Being a woman of God means daily needing to be reminded of the value we have in Jesus. We all have the desire to know our weight in worth and purpose, to fully understand the living and loving beauty we are called to be and display. I've found the subject of edification is most inspiring when it's found in the wisdom of another Sister in Christ. We want to make it clear that you ladies of the Lord are important to us, and we are committed to inspiring and encouraging you. We are in this together. Our hope is to reach the hearts of women everywhere, whether in literal confinement or spiritual, to come along-side you in prayer and friendship.

# *My Search for Love Part 1*

by Anonymous

**I** was born and raised in Illinois. I'm from a middle class family. My upbringing was less than perfect. There was a lot of fighting and strife in my home. I love my family, and my parents did the best they could, so that's all I'm going to say about that. As a young girl and into womanhood, I was always looking for love. I wanted that fairy tale white knight that would come rescue me from all that was wrong with the world and save me from myself. This mind-set directly led to the addictions I developed: alcohol, pot, cocaine/crack, prescription drugs, and eventually heroin. My search for love and my need to fill a void led to very unhealthy relationships. When I was 15, I lost my virginity to a 25 year old married man. I was this family's babysitter from the time I was 13. I guess by the time I turned 15, this man thought I was woman enough to do as he pleased. I thought I was mature. I was for my age, but not mature enough for that, emotionally or in any other way. I thought I was in love with him, and he told me he was in love with me. To make a long story short, his wife found out.

My whole world was turned upside down. I lost him, her (who was at one time my best friend), and their kids that I had grown to love like they were my own. I was more than just the babysitter. I was their friend. I hung out there every weekend, they were kind of... my life. So it was a pretty devastating time.

That whole situation pretty much set the tone for my future relationships with men. From here on, it was a life of bad relationships, drugs, and alcohol. It seemed that with every new man came a new drug and a new demon for me to inherit.

Later that year when I was still 15, I met my first real boyfriend. He was 20 years old. He turned out to be physically abusive and very controlling. During that relationship, I dropped out of high school and had my first child at the age of 18. I ended up leaving him when my son was 5 months old. I got a fake I.D. and started hitting the bars. It wasn't long before I had a serious drinking problem and started using cocaine due to meeting abuser #2. He was 10 years older than me and was going through a divorce. He supplied me with plenty of cocaine. He was nice and sympathetic to my situation, but he soon turned abusive too. The beatings were far worse than the first boyfriend. The drugs were out of control, and so was the abuse. With him I suffered physical, mental, and emotional abuse and rape.

I had two more children with him. In my mind, there was no way out. So I stayed and suffered for 10 years. During those years he and I both picked up a bad habit with hydrocodone. This was on top of the daily cocaine use. I was arrested for my first felony, picking up a fraudulent prescription in Illinois. While out on bond for that charge, I was arrested in Indiana for the same thing. I was 28.

I was so dependent on the drug that the physical withdrawals made me want to die. When you are in bondage to a drug that you are physically sick without, you'll do whatever you can to ease the pain. At the time I was taking forty 10mg pills a day. That is about 8 times the maximum amount prescribed to take in a day.

I lost 50 pounds because it made me so sick I usually threw up about 5 times a day. I am very fortunate to be alive.

I finally got away from him because he went to prison. However, I was lost without him. I know that sounds crazy, but when you are controlled by an abuser for so long you lose any existence of your own. I was with him from age 19 to age 29, so it was like he practically raised me. It's pretty sick thinking, I know.

I was left with three kids. I was evicted, had lost my job, and had no car. I was on probation for my two felonies. After about two weeks of a horrible detox, I had finally kicked the pills. However, as any addict does, I just traded one addiction for another. I was living from place to place, drinking heavily, and just continued to be lost. I had to eventually give my kids to their father's family. I wasn't fit to take care of them, and I didn't have a stable home for them to live in. I still saw my kids here and there, but eventually my selfishness led me far from them. I was too focused on my path of self-destruction to care about anything else. There were brief spaces of time where I really tried to get my act together and had a game plan to make things better. I even put myself in rehab several times. It never took. I always fell again and always worse than the time before.

Then entered Brad, who is now my husband. I know what you're thinking, "Oh, he must be that knight in shining armor she was looking for all her life." That's not even close! Brad and I met in a bar and started seeing each other. Very soon, we fell madly in love. He was different from the others. He never hit me or called me names. He was peaceful and mellow. We had big dreams. We talked about getting married and having a home and babies. Satan had other plans for us.

Bars were our thing for the most part. He had told me about his addiction to heroin, but he was clean from it at that point, as far as I knew. Before long, his demon became my demon, and we started using heroin together. Life quickly fell to pieces, not that they were ever really together. We were drenched in sin.

We stole from family and friends. We burned every bridge we had. My family completely let me go and would have nothing to do with me. I was shooting \$200 worth of heroin a day. My daily life was a vicious cycle of stealing, pawn shops, and getting to the west side of Chicago to get my drug. Every day was a race against the withdrawals, a panic to get my drug before I got sick. Nothing else mattered. We were homeless, hopeless, and soulless.

It was a sick existence. We slept in hallways of roach infested slums on the west side. We begged for money on the street and stole from anyone we could. Heroin is pure concentrated evil. You become a slave to it. Nothing else matters, and it is the closest I will ever come to being demon possessed. I think back to the end of these days and remember how I just wanted to die. I was utterly hopeless and without purpose. I remember shooting up and praying it would be the shot that killed me. I desperately wanted to end my suffering. I wanted to end the monster I was and end the pain I was inflicting on others. I was empty and broken down so deep I couldn't see any glimpse of light...

# *Will I Ever Overcome*

by Rebecca Congleton

“Do you think I’ll ever overcome my learning disability?” The words cut this tender mother’s heart like a rusty old knife. My 13-year-old daughter asked me that question while we were in the car, driving back from the grocery store. I don’t remember exactly what we were discussing when she asked it, but I will never forget the error of my response.

Let me back up just a little. We found out Liv had what is misleadingly called a “nonverbal learning disorder” right before fourth grade (it does not mean she is nonverbal, quite the opposite). We knew that she likely had some sort of learning difficulty, but the harsh gut-punch of what her tests showed took quite a while to subside. Olivia’s right brain hemisphere is drastically affected. This is the half of the brain that interprets visual spatial reasoning and sorts out all the new information. Her left brain hemisphere, where spoken language is processed, is actually dramatically strong.

What this all translates to for her is severe difficulty with spelling, math, working memory (the memory you use to retrieve information while completing a multi-step task or solving a math problem), balance, telling left from right and even remembering which way a lower case “d” faces. Many things that are easy for typical kids her age are like a foreign language to her.

So there we were, on our way back home, with a car full of groceries, having a fun time, and she asks me if I think she will ever “overcome” her learning disability. I should have said “Yes! You overcome it every day! I am amazed at everything you are able to do in spite of the extra work it takes you to get it done! You are amazing!” I should have looked her in the eye and made her feel like there is absolutely no question, no doubt in my mind about the successes she will have. I wish I had done that.

Instead, I looked at my bright, beautiful daughter, and I said, “You will always have it, but you can find ways to do the things you want to do. You just have to do them differently.” Her face didn’t light up. She wasn’t encouraged or invigorated with a newfound belief in herself. In fact, she looked pretty discouraged. It wasn’t the WORST answer I could have given her, but it certainly wasn’t the best. I tried to talk it out a little more, and help her understand what I was saying, but I don’t think I ever achieved my goal.

For the past couple days, I’ve been thinking about it, rolling it around in my mind, and figuring out how to redeem that moment. I do believe in her. I do believe she can overcome her learning disability. She is an amazing young lady.

Sometimes I wonder how God is always able to say the exact right thing to me, whether it’s through His Word, or in quiet moments, when I know He is speaking gently to my spirit. I too have “learning disabilities” when it comes to spiritual things. I tend to make the same mistakes over and over and over again. I get busy with life and forget to make time to just be still and pray. I get focused

on things that don’t matter, like whether people love the music my husband and I make, when it’s only God’s acceptance of my offering that should be important to me. I get cranky and rude and whiny and impatient. I get worried and weary and weak in faith. But no matter what I’m going through, or how I’m struggling or even completely failing, He always knows the perfect words to speak to me. He always lifts me up and makes me feel like I am more loved than I ever dreamed possible. He always speaks the truth, but in a way that grows my faith and strengthens my roots. He is the very best dad.

As you navigate this life that is often hard, and you come up against challenges that seem “easy” for everyone but you, know that you can cast all of those cares on your Heavenly Father, that you can go to Him at any time and say, “Daddy, will I ever overcome this?” and He will answer you with “Yes, daughter, you will overcome, if you abide in Me.”

## *Hearts*

by Sharon Brooks

Well, it’s here again. The day loved by many and dreaded by others, Valentine’s Day. While there are several stories and legends about how and when the original Valentine’s celebration began, it has evolved into a huge day of exchanging gifts and sentiments full of love. In preschools all over the world, little ones will cut out paper hearts and decorate them with crayon drawings of flowers. Perhaps they will be delivered to Mom or Dad or find themselves on the desk of a cute boy or girl in the classroom. “Will you be my Valentine?” This well-known phrase will be hand written or printed on thousands of cards, signs, and balloons, or even in the sky. What a fun day!

We all long to be loved and admired by that special someone. I believe God designed our hearts in this way. Even if we don’t have that “one” special person to share our hearts with, there can be many people who fill our lives with joy and happiness. That’s the beauty of love! However, when we find ourselves in dark or difficult situations, it’s easy to feel left out, unwanted, and unloved.

That is how a day meant to spread love can make us feel just the opposite. Where are my flowers, candy, and cards? Doesn’t anyone care about me? I’ve asked those questions and I’m sure you have as well.

There is one person who can fill our hearts with so much love and acceptance that we never question again if we are special to anyone. His name is Jesus and He holds your heart in His hands. He loved you before you were ever born. He loved you enough to die for you. Acts 15:8 tells us that God knows our heart. He understands the hurt of feeling unwanted. God also provided a way through Jesus, where our hearts can be full of love, joy, and peace.

I hope you will read Romans 10:9,10 and take it to heart. Every day can be Valentine’s Day!