NONPROFIT ORG. U.S. POSTAGE PAID PERMIT NO. 55



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he Ephesians 2:4 loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive grace you have been savedtogether with Christ-

IJ



Inspiration for Her

WWW.INSPIRATION-MINISTRIES.ORG
August 2016 VOLUME 1, ISSUE 4 (55)

THE OFFICIAL INSPIRATION MINISTRIES WOMEN'S NEWSLETTER



NEWSLETTER FEATURES

- 1) Letter from the Editor by Kirsten Foster
- **2) Belonging** by CJ Eaton
- 3) Humility, Love, & Clean Feet By Elisabeth Harvey
- **4) My Life Before Christ** by Tammy
- 5) Fearfully & Wonderfully Made by Lauren Liberto

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



To say this has been a long week month is potentially the understatement of the century. With a 9-day outdoor festival, worked mainly by Andy and I (with the help of a few AMAZING volunteers), then, with very short notice, four days with 10 volunteer missionaries from Bellevue Baptist Church in Tennessee, some disappointing personal moments, and now being 12 weeks pregnant with my second child, it's been a bit overwhelming. I don't mean this as a complaint,

just insight. Insight into the sometimes difficult, but always blessed life I've been given. The opportunity to be taught by God that I need to depend more fully on Him if I ever plan on making it through. I often find myself in "survival" mode, instead of "thriving" mode. And I can't imagine I'm the only one.

I originally chose the verse on the cover because of the "strength" part. I was sensing the Holy Spirit was going to connect it to many of the articles I would receive this month. After this past week and rereading the verse, I think the "shield" and "trust" parts are more my focus. Ephesians 6 focuses on the armor of God, one piece being the shield of faith used to extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one. These darts are specific to us, based on our past. So Satan, in his finite wisdom, started shooting – discouragement, disappointment, uncertainty, doubt. Then I was reminded by my dear friend, Michelle, to pick up my shield of faith! And that I had the ability to block these attacks and speak the truth of God's Word over my situation. Our God is greater! Our God is stronger! Take that, Devil!

As it turns out, mine is the only article written by someone I know. Something came up for every other regular contributor – broken computers, not having the time, having nothing to say, etc. To say there is a war waging in the heavenly places is putting it lightly. For a moment, I honestly thought there wouldn't be an August edition of *Inspiration for Her*. But I was reminded that especially in uncertain times, God is faithful and provides. So, my husband, the resourceful man that he is, helped me find some testimonies online that I believe can and will serve as an inspiration this month, and even in the months to come.

I was recently not-so-gently reminded, while working on a Step Study for Celebrate Recover, that I don't do a very good job (or any job, for the most part) of turning my will (life) over to God's care on a daily basis. There is something in me that just can't give it up. I don't want to trust Him. I don't want to believe that the things He allows me and my family to go through are for my good, for my betterment. I just don't want to. But then I am a little more gently reminded by wonderful friends and my husband, that it is for my good, and a necessary part to living a life that glorifies and honors God, and shares with others the saving and satisfying love of Jesus Christ. I have to accept that, even though I've been let

down by and have lost trust in man, God is NOT man; He is all-knowing, all-powerful, and ever-present. And I can and should trust Him when I can trust no one else. Because He is faithful, and loving, and wonderful, and gracious, and merciful, and forgiving, and, well, everything!

Another question in that same Step Study was one about my experience after giving my life to Christ. I was pretty young the first time I raised my hand to accept Jesus into my heart, so I don't remember it super specifically. But I do remember not wanting to go to Hell. So my decision was based on fear. Then, in 2012, I read about the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15 (that's a whole other article!) and I came to a fuller realization of the love God has for me; the love that was manifested in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the resulting salvation through His sacrifice. Suddenly my life in Christ became less about fear and more about love. See, God is not a god of fear, but of love; perfect love. "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love" (1 John 4:18). To make a decision out of fear will only get you so far because fear fades, gates are opened, and your shackles are taken off. Then you find yourself in the same place you were in before — living life for yourself, ignoring everything God is telling you, back behind bars or even dead.

But it's the love of and for the Father that surpasses your desire to do what you want, when you want. It's this love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never fails..." (1 Corinthians 13:7-8a). This is no ordinary love, but the extraordinary love that only comes from knowing the Living God and having Jesus Christ dwelling in your heart!

Ladies, I know that it's easy to doubt or be discouraged in these circumstances you are in. But know that God loves you with this very perfect love, and is calling you to Himself at this very moment. He loves you and wants you to be able to know and to feel that. I struggle with doubt... a lot of doubt. But that doesn't lessen His love, care, and concern for me. So know that no matter how you feel – discouraged, let down, unforgiveable, doubtful – it doesn't lessen the way God feels about you. It doesn't lessen the work of the cross. It doesn't lessen your forgiveness. It lessens nothing. If anything, it only makes His heart ache for you even more. He wants what is best for you, and wants you to trust Him. I know that's much easier said than done. No one said it would be easy. But I know that it's worth it. And I would encourage you to open your heart to Him if you haven't, and if you have, to open it wider. Let Him fill every nook and cranny, every crack, every hole. Let Him fill the void you feel deep inside, because nothing will fill it like the love of Christ. And nothing will give you more peace and joy than that filling and that feeling. Just wait and see!

Letting go and letting God,

Kirsten Foster

Inspiration Ministries

Belonging by CJ Eaton

Rejection without cause is one of the most ridiculously painful and confusing situations. There have been times I have wanted to say to someone, "what is it about me that rubs you the wrong way?" Why does it seem like there are just some folks that dislike me on sight? It doesn't matter how friendly I am, how likeable others may perceive me to be or how genuinely I try to engage the person. There is just something that puts them off, that gives me that sinking feeling that I just don't fit in. Why does this happen? Is it deliberate or instinctual? Is it an automatic response to some sort of sense we have about each other or a snap judgment based on external factors?

Consider the women around you. Maybe one or two of them don't seem to be able to address you without sneering or smirking. It seems to me if everyone is in one place to serve the same consequence, you would find some common ground. It can be really difficult to feel like a part of a team when one of the members doesn't value your presence or your input.

What about those we should be able to assume we belong to? What about fitting in with and being accepted by your family? This is a place we should be able to presume we do belong. Are the expectations they have for you out of line with your own? Does this get in the way of creating or keeping strong bonds of love and acceptance?

Here's a tough one – what about church? Is there something, some kind of barrier that gets in the way of truly being immersed and engaged with the other ladies? Maybe there are parts of your life that could be judged in a rather poor light. Perhaps your current circumstances haunt you and keep you aware and concerned that anyone who truly knows about it will think unkindly of you or decide you couldn't possibly be worthy of their company.

Is it your thought or their action? Is it perception or reality?

Divorcees and single parents can feel like a target, as can former/current convicts, drug users, individuals with disabilities and the disadvantaged. But the list is not exclusive. All of us have something we want to hide so it won't be available to ridicule or gossip. Even those who have been victimized want to keep their secrets. It's a risk to allow other people to see the past, the scars, the sins that maybe you haven't been fully able to heal.

So many times, so many opportunities to ask ourselves if we belong, to wonder if we're genuinely accepted. We may wonder if the other person is only acting, just saying all the right things and smiling like they really want you around but you sense the undertone, the missing light-in-the-eyes, or the hesitancy that you know just doesn't quite hit the right note.

And if we presume that someone else is only faking their joy to see us, does that make us judgmental? Are we taking too much on ourselves by reading into what may simply be someone's natural shyness or reserve, maybe who has difficulty making friends, feels awkward in social situations, or feels pressured to behave in a welcoming manner that just doesn't work well for them?

Personally, I have always struggled with feeling unwelcome almost everywhere, as though people were just tolerating me and really couldn't stand having me around. What's the root of this? Is it just some part of my character I was born with or the result of some childhood trauma? I find myself wondering if I am just too different or not adequate or possibly born to be an outcast.

God teaches us acceptance – not tolerance. A man I have great respect for once stated "...tolerance is nothing more than the enemy's shallow substitute for love..." (not an exact quote but pretty close to that). Our culture puts a lot of emphasis on tolerance – for others who look, act, believe, worship, live differently than we do. What does it mean to tolerate? Is it to smile and act friendly and give lip service agreement with a "sure, that's okay" attitude while mentally rolling your eyes in disgust and disdain? Do we just ignore what we know to be sinful so no one has to feel bad?

How is that serving our Savior? Tolerance doesn't uplift anyone, doesn't bless anyone and certainly never led anyone to the saving grace of Jesus. Love takes risk, it steps out into danger, allows the opportunity for truth – in fact, demands it. Love offers eternity, shows mercy, looks for the lost, mends the broken and brings outcasts into membership with the body of Christ. It makes the past a memory and puts it in its place.

Love translates in genuine, transparent, full-out acceptance of each other and creates an atmosphere of welcome and belonging that overwhelms all resistance. Instead of being the one feeling rejected, bring the belonging with you everywhere. Be the invitation, be the welcome, and overcome the doubt about your value with the pure joy of living in Christ. Others will want to join you.

Jesus, A True Friend

by Kei Burks

Do you ever feel like you're losing your mind? Stop! It's just Satan trying to distract your time.

Don't give in to the torture and pain, Just pray to the Lord and you'll have great gain.

You can get angry, but don't sin. Don't let wrath place you in the devil's den.
Only God deserves all the glory! He truly knows the moral of your story.
Don't give up and don't give in. What you need to know is with Jesus, you'll definitely win!

It may seem as though this is a head-game of life, Nah, it's just reality that causes too much strife.

Just remember, you have a True Friend. His name is Jesus, all He wants is to come in. So what do you say? Don't give up, just give in...

To the One True Winner; Who is not a sinner Because in the long run, while in this race,

No matter what, come judgement day, we're all going to see Jesus face to face!

Humility, Love, and Clean Feet by Elisabeth Harvey

A couple summers ago, I had been watching my three little cousins - Jenna, Emmy, and Sammy - for a couple days. Knowing their parents were coming in an hour, I wanted to clean them up a little (oh the simple joy of young age not having to shower every day!). So one by one I took them to the bathroom, sat them on the counter, and began washing the filthiest part of them; their feet. I thought nothing of it. I wanted them to feel clean and be able to greet their parents with cleanliness; shiny faces, brushed hair, clean clothes, and yes, scrubbed feet.

When I was in the middle of cleaning the youngest, Sammy, I was overcome by the love I felt for my little cousin, for all of my cousins. And then out of nowhere, I was hit with the sense that a similar thing had happened some two thousand years ago. Suddenly, I was feeling humbled.

Jesus, in John 13, began to also wash feet. Bending low, water and towel in hand, He began to wash His own disciples' feet (in my opinion, ten times more gross, harrier, and smellier than a four-year-old girl's feet). But He did it. He washed their feet and "...having loved His own who were in the world, now showed them the full extent of His love." Woah!

I mean, I love my cousins, and to be honest, I had no hesitation or bother in washing their little toes and heels. It was a joy to wash the grime away and send them off to greet their parents, sparkling and clean. But to be doing the very act that Christ had done, knowing that my love for my cousins was incomparable to the love Christ has for us, I was stunned. For a moment, I got a unique glance of what Jesus felt as He washed their (relatively disgusting) feet. Adoration, love, "you are mine forever and ever" kind of love, care, compassion, the Love that NEVER fails (1 Corinthians 13:8), radiated off of Him. The grime didn't matter, it was the time spent with the feet, the act of washing, the love that glowed.

Wow. I have to say, if you ever want to feel humbled, I'd suggest washing someone's feet. Put yourself in the position Christ did that night after supper, and try to grasp the fact that the Creator of the universe – the One who was slapped, spit on, ripped to shreds, put on pieces of wood by rusty nails, THAT Christ – got down on His knees and began to wash feet.

And He's willing to go beyond that. More than anything He wants us, He wants even ME, to go to Him so that He may clean my heart. A cleansing that is eternal, a cleansing that means we don't have to shower every day, or even every other day! A cleansing that is one and done. And then, once cleansed by the perfect hands of Christ, He can pick you up off that counter, give you a hug, kiss your forehead, whisper again and again how much He loves YOU, and then can send you on your new and refreshed way to greet none other than His Father. All we have to do is reach up and let Him take us to that counter of forgiveness, redemption, and love.

${f M}$ y name is: regret, shame, pain, dirty, angry, failure, hated, forgotten. My life is full of valleys, with no mountain in sight. I haven't seen good in so long I'm

My Life Before Christ

not sure it still exists. My story starts out like anybody else. For six years of my life I was the typical kid. Then life got in the way and things started changing.

When I was six I watched my great grandmother take her last breath. Four short months later, at age seven, my dad died. He died from complications from attempted suicide. I was never a "normal" kid after that. I sat alone on the floor during P.E. at school watching the other kids play begging God to just tell them I loved them. That in itself is way too much for a seven-year-old to handle all by herself. I started getting depressed. I even went as far as attempting suicide. My heart was broken and nobody could help me. As time went on I came out of my depression and could see hope again. Then in 2009 my world crashed. My great aunt died. I was lost and empty. Eleven short months later tragedy struck again. My papaw died. I felt an anger start in my heart that would not soon be quenched.

On June 16, 2012 my faith was put to the test harder than before. My other papaw lost his battle with cancer. I started spiraling. I was depressed, angry, and confused. I wondered why God who is supposed to love me so much kept ruining my life. I started drinking and smoking pot daily. Curling up to a bottle was the only thing getting me through the day. I started giving myself away in pieces and slowly at first, then all at once, until I had nothing left. I looked in the mirror and saw a stranger — a tired, broken stranger. I was a mess. I was only 14 but I felt like I had lived a thousand years.

On October 20, 2013 I knew I couldn't continue down the road I was on, so I turned to Jesus. I became a new person that day. Jesus saved me from myself. He became my life. I could finally stop fighting. After 10 years of death and pain I was exhausted. I could smile and laugh. My brokenness healed. I had hope for the future. Tragedy still came. August 17, 2014 my world came to a stop once again. My uncle who was my best friend, died. Losing him was the hardest thing I've ever gone through. It didn't make sense; he was only 46. How could someone that I loved so much and had seen every single day really be gone? Five days later another uncle passed away. I couldn't take it. My heart was so broken and I was so emotionally exhausted. I felt like running away and never stopping.

This time was different though. I was done running. I asked Jesus to carry me through it and he did. He still is. Because of him I have a smile on my face and a song in my heart. I have valleys, but I also have mountains. I have hope; I see the good in the bad. I am transformed. My name is: joy, peace, over-comer, remembered, redeemed, restored, loved, forgiven.

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made - A Testimony

by Lauren Liberto

Twenty-eight years ago, God blessed my parent's with their only baby girlme. I was not raised in church entirely; only attending service on Easter, Christmas, Mother's Day, etc. So, I knew of God and Jesus Christ, however, I never fully understood how to build a relationship with Him. Up until I was in my late teens, I thought just believing in God was good enough; that's the way it was supposed to be I assumed. Everything in my life seemed perfect. My parents were great; family life was good; hardly any struggles; had a great childhood - I was truly blessed. I just did not realize just how blessed I was.

In 2002 my Dad was diagnosed with Stage 4 colon cancer, again something I did not know much about other than the word CANCER being directly linked to DEATH in my mind. I was scared, but he fought it off and on for years.

I graduated from high school in 2004, which was the first time I made myself proud. Many times I wanted to drop out and just get my GED, but my parents would have been far less than satisfied had I gone that route, so I finished strong obtaining my diploma. Keep in mind I was smart as I wanted to be. I made Honor Roll once just to prove to myself I could, and since I knew I could, I was merely okay just getting passing grades so I could graduate. I didn't care about my grades. My mind was elsewhere besides school. I also had no drive to go off to college. I was satisfied going to community college right up the street from my parent's house. Which, I did - along with my high school sweetheart, whom very quickly found out he was going to be a Dad, and I was the mother. I was eighteen years old when I found out I was pregnant, beginning the second semester in community college. It was the first time I felt I failed my parents.

I was blessed with my son's arrival on October 7, 2005, and was ready to raise this child, my son, by myself with the help of my parents. His Dad was involved for a little bit in the beginning (it was exciting and new), but he wasn't mentally and physically prepared to handle the demanding responsibilities of parenthood, and he soon steered off not too much longer later. I was okay though. I worked, provided for myself and my son, purchased my own vehicles, and even helped my mom out with housing expenses. I was good, or so I thought.

I met an older man I thought was everything for me. I ran off from home; moved to his hometown in East Texas, and got married in February 2009. No one approved of what I had done, so I lost all relationships with everyone in my family and pretty much everyone in my life, except for my mom who did her best to hold on. Another surprise came with the announcement of my second pregnancy with my daughter who would be born November 3, of 2009. I was married, had two children, struggling to make ends meet, and a husband who was anything but faithful. I moved backed to Houston to live in my parent's house at the end of 2009, because I needed the help and I wanted to be closer to my dad. He was so disappointed with the decisions I had made in my life, but he was still my Dad and

I loved him, and unfortunately the Cancer was taking a turn for the worse. Still, I was trying to find a relationship with someone I could talk to, who would listen, who would care, but I was turning to all the wrong places.

I turned to drugs: First marijuana, proceeding to cocaine, then methamphetamines, and narcotic pills, just whatever would do the trick at the time. I was spiraling down fast and couldn't help myself all the while watching my dad, who watched me kill myself with drugs as he himself was dying. My dad passed away on November 27, 2010. Still looking for something to ease the pain, make me numb or invisible, I turned back to drugs. I started working again the beginning of 2011, maintaining a household and barely making enough to live with the demands my situation was allowing at the time. My husband wasn't working, was no help, and our marriage dissipated before my eyes. I filed for divorce in 2011 and was granted my divorce and freedom in 2012.

I was doing great in my job, wasn't doing drugs, provided for my two children and my single parent household, and thought I had it all together. However in 2013, I left my job and moved back in with my widowed mother and grandmother. Shortly after, I started relationship after relationship with men, never resulting in anything good. The real story comes now...

In December of 2014 I was arrested in Harris County on four felony charges and I was granted a \$0 bond, which meant there was no way to get me out of jail. I had never been in trouble like this. I was so washed out from doing drugs and living a reckless life that I was wishing that I was dead rather than be in jail, because I was exhausted from the worthless life I was living.

But, on December 11, 2014, the day I started what would become a few months' incarceration, my life changed for the better. I did something I wasn't sure if I was doing right or how to do, but I prayed in my head and said, "Lord, I'm sorry. I need out of here. I'll do ANYTHING you want me to, God, just get me home, please. I'll be good this time."

I went to court that next morning and my court appointed attorney said we have to reset. I had too many charges that needed investigation, and that she would see me back on January 29, 2015, seven & a half weeks out. So in hindsight I was going to be spending the holidays in jail, and based on my four state jail felony charges, this was only the beginning. I got back to my bunk on D Block in Harris County Jail. I grabbed a little brown bible offered to you by the chaplaincy department in Harris County Jail, and I started reading. I would read chapters and chapters in the bible, not making sense of any of it, then I stopped. I prayed right then, "God please help me understand your Word and what you are trying to tell me. Please help me get through the next 50 days until I see my lawyer again. Please show me how to live a life for You. I am broken, and I need Your help. Lead me in the right direction Lord. I want to know You. Help me trust You, Heavenly Father. I will never leave You Lord. You're are my God." At that moment I had accepted the Lord Jesus Christ as my Savior.

I started to attend church once a week offered by Elevate Church Harris County Jail Campus, and I cried walking through the doors; I cried through the

service; every week I cried; it was the Holy Spirit in me cleansing my soul. I began worshiping constantly; praying all day and all night; talking to God - just me and Him – best friends, - and for the first time in my life, I felt the most free, and wonderful, and loved, and liberated more so than I could have ever imagined. I could feel, and to think ... I felt this FREE behind bars. I did not care at that point what I felt, and how amazing my God was. I knew that God was doing for me what I could not do for myself. At one point He said, "Lauren, HALT; I had to stop you in your tracks. I had to put you in jail to save your life. I have a better plan for you. Take this time in here to know me and understand me and you will see..." Needless to say I was grateful to be alive. I was grateful to be somewhere I was fed, given shelter, and given the opportunity to change my direction.

I started praising the Word of God to inmates that had become my sisters in there. I was using my story to help these young girls that came and stayed one or two nights in jail - enough to scare them - and used what God was giving me to make a difference in my life and the lives of others that came into those four brick walls. I no longer was worried what would happen on my court date, because God had my back. I stopped counting the days, because God told me I need not worry.

My faith and passion for God was shocking to others. They would say "How can you be so happy in jail? Aren't you worried about what will happen, etc." I told everyone I could that I was finally free, the Lord was with me, and He was walking with me, so the Lord would see that whatever happened with my punishment would be fit – He wouldn't allow me to suffer anything I couldn't handle. My whole life I was chasing after relationships that couldn't satisfy me. The only problem was that I was looking in all the wrong places and in all the wrong people. No man, woman, or person alive could take the place of my God. He is ever present and has been working on things for me since before my time. I LOVE my God. I whole heartedly TRUST my God; I BELIEVE in my God; and I will SERVE my God for eternity. The Lord Jesus Christ released me from my pain and suffering and instilled in me a love I never knew I had. I was ready to conquer the world. I was stepping out as a brand new un-imprisoned soul and He was right there walking with me.

On a Legal Note - The judge dropped two of my felony charges; gave me two months of time served for one felony charge which was then knocked down to a misdemeanor, and I was given four years Deferred Adjudication of Guilt, also known as Probation, on the other felony drug charge. Being on probation entails a lot from an individual. I have a lot of provisions of where I can and cannot be (no bars, no clubs, no alcohol). I pay a lot of fees and fines on a monthly basis. I am given frequent and random drug tests. I do several hours of community service. I attend drug rehabilitation classes, and I am required to obtain employment immediately. I am vigorously trying to find a job on a daily basis that will hire a convicted felon. That is a lot easier said than done.

Through all of this: My story, my complaints, my wrongdoings... I must say that I would not change what happened to me for anything – NOTHING – because all the trials and tribulations I went through led me to my best friend, the Lord, my

biggest supporter; the love of my life. I do, however, wish that I could take back the hurt I caused my loved ones – my children, my mom and dad, my grandmother. Because I can't take back what is done, I can only show them the improved me, the Lauren who KNOWS she's loved and a child of God. The Lauren that even though her Daddy is no longer physically here – she still knows her Father walks with her every step of the way.

I wrote a brief (pretty long actually) story to give my testimony on how our Lord Jesus Christ not only died on the Cross for me but how He saved me. I firmly believe in forgiveness. It is harder to forgive sometimes because everyone has a different story, but the Lord teaches us to forgive one another, which also allowed me to forgive myself for the things I have done; the harms I have caused; the bad decisions I have made; and the pain and hurt I have caused.

My God has a plan for me that is bigger and greater than I would have ever imagined, and I am finally on my way to serve my purpose with His lead. Our God is an Awesome God, and more importantly, He is a forgiving God. I proudly am living my life for Him, and could not feel more blessed and happy to do so. The power of prayer is amazing, and the love God has for His children is beautiful.

I challenge anyone who has steered away from God, or who is unsure of God, to get to know Him. Pray often.

I have found that the moment I laid my life down and surrendered to God and His will, is the moment that my life finally made sense and the moment I finally felt that my life had a purpose and that the gifts and talents God has provided me with are the tools that I will use to do work for Him. The Bible tells us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, and that is what makes each of God's children beautifully unique.

Write to Inspiration Ministries

We are committed to corresponding with anyone who writes us! We have several women waiting for letters to respond to. We would love to get to know you better and to encourage your spiritual growth via personal letters. Also, if you would like to have the newsletter sent directly to you, please send us your name, DC#, and institution name, and we will add you to the mailing list free of charge!

We would love to include MORE articles written by our readers, because who better to connect with incarcerated women, than other incarcerated women?

This can be in the form of the articles you've read so far, as poems, as songs, any way you communicate best! In the past 4 ½ years, we have found testimonies to be the most powerful tool in bringing others to Christ, and we love to share the work of the Lord with other women around the country! We look forward to hearing what God is doing in and through you! Don't be shy, Ladies! God has called us to share the Good News with others, no matter where we are! After all, He doesn't choose the qualified, by qualifies the chosen. And that means Y-O-U! We look forward to hearing from you soon!