

Faith
and **FAMILY**

2016 Holiday Edition

THE SAMPSON
INDEPENDENT

Dancing through faith

By Lindy Bustabad

I am Lindy Bustabad, and this is my faith story.

In 2010, I was diagnosed with scoliosis. This meant that rather than having a straight spine, mine was shaped like an "S" and my ribcage and hips were rotated.

Knowing this diagnosis didn't stop me. I continued to dance for the next year until my condition progressed. In the fall of 2011, I was put into a back brace. This large plastic back brace was to be worn 16 hours each day underneath my clothing. This was a difficult time for me because I was going through those "awkward middle school years." On top of that pressure came the pressure of not being able to wear the cutest outfits to school and ripping holes in all of my new shirts. I soon switched to a larger, more aggressive brace in the winter. This brace was only worn at night. After a period of time wearing this brace, my x-rays seemed to be stabilizing, and the threat of surgery was diminishing. I was taken out of the brace and given freedom to continue my life as it was before.

Until this past year, I almost forgot I even had scoliosis. At the beginning of last summer, I went to my doctor for a routine checkup, and he gave me the devastating news that my curves had progressed dramatically. Each curve of my spine was around 45 degrees, the point where doctors prescribe surgery to correct it. I remember sitting in my doctor's office with my doctor and my mom crying. We cried for hours, well past time for the office to close. I didn't understand how I could go from being stable to falling apart with one x-ray. My doctor had me sign the release form for surgery and read out the possible risks and their probabilities. I stopped listening halfway through and signed through my tears. The surgery was scheduled for July 21, 2014. I had half of the summer left to enjoy before my surgery. My doctor predicted a two-week recovery period before I would be back to normal. I didn't believe him.

The summer went by a little too quickly. I went to Washington, D.C. with the

youth for a mission trip, and there I gave my heart to Jesus. I thought that this mission trip would change my outlook on the surgery and give me more faith in God as I started my battle. I couldn't have been more wrong.

The morning of July 21, my family drove with me to the hospital. They put the IVs in, and all I wanted was for the doctors to put me under so I wouldn't feel anything anymore. I was terrified. My doctors were amazing. They came in right before wheeling me back and prayed with my family. I felt safe with them. The next thing I remember was waking up in recovery, and I remember the stuffed animal one of the doctors gave me. It was a Beanie-Baby angel bear, and I still have it today. After the glory of anesthesia wore off, the only thing I can remember is the pain. The doctors took out the spinous processes of my vertebrae, inserted two titanium rods and screwed them into each one of my vertebrae. I ended up with 23 screws throughout my spine, from the thoracic to lumbar region. This surgery isn't a minor surgery, it was definitely major. The moment I started to feel the pain in the hospital bed, I grabbed my dad's hand and started crying, "Why Daddy! It hurts!" In the hospital, I didn't eat as much as I should've, considering I was on three or four different kinds of pain killers at all times. I didn't have a morphine pump, and I was nauseous constantly from lack of food. The first day after surgery, this major surgery, the physical therapists made me try to stand and walk. Everything felt different, and EVERYTHING hurt. They made me stand while I cried and screamed, and they made me walk all the way down the hallway and it hurt. It hurt so badly. I spent part of the week in the hospital, but I didn't spend long enough. I went home, and I continued to get worse. Along with 24 hour nausea, I couldn't stand or sit up for very long. Showering was a blessing and a curse because I continued to pass out in my mom's arms each time we would attempt to shower. I can't really explain how it felt, but every position I tried to sit in, every position I tried to lay down in, everything hurt.

Everything felt new and uncomfortable and painful. Also, my scar, which was around 14 inches long, was not healing properly. My mom took me back to the doctor multiple times, and they continued to work on my incision, in the doctor's office. Multiple times. Finally, around time for school to start, things started to plateau. I started back in dance classes, which probably only hurt my feelings rather than it did help them. Dancing, the one thing I truly loved to do, wasn't the same. And it never would be the same again. As the months passed, my problems seemed to get worse again. My back muscles would spasm at uncontrollable times. I couldn't sit in my desk at school without being in severe pain. I was attending school each day, once again, on pain killers and muscle relaxers. It got to the point where no teenager should have to go through that during their life. My doctors were continually perplexed as to why I was in so much pain all the time. I had a CT scan done in the winter, and the doctors believed that one of my vertebrae was cracked and my spine was collapsing. They also saw some loosening around one of my screws. So, we had to sched-

"Dancing, the one thing I truly loved to do, wasn't the same."

ule another surgery for the middle of December. I had to miss school for four weeks in a critical time period before exams. Also, I had to stop dancing for the rest of the season. I had to quit my competition team and give up my position in every dance. This was the worst part of the already terrible news. The day of surgery, I went in thinking my spine was falling apart, but the doctors realized that I had an infection around my screws rather than a cracked vertebrae and collapsing spine. My doctors took out as much of the hardware as they could to reduce the infection. They cleaned the area and made sure that the fusion was all still strong. They left

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in about an 8-inch section of hardware where my bones were still fusing. I woke up from this surgery and immediately, I felt a difference. No more spasms in my muscles. I thought I was good to go, until I started getting headaches while in the hospital. My head would hurt with migraine strength for hours, and I wasn't sure why. My doctor believed I had a spinal fluid leak, and he reserved the OR for me the next day to go back into surgery once more. I had to lay completely flat in my hospital bed for 24 hours in hopes that it would repair itself. This was my breaking point. I was unbelievably angry with everyone. I was angry with my doctors for messing me up, angry with my parents for making me do this, angry with other patients that had been through the surgery with no problem, angry with everyone back at home enjoying school and sports and dance, angry with myself for being angry at everyone. I yelled at God for making me go through one more thing that I felt like I couldn't handle. I knew I couldn't handle it. I screamed at Him to make it all end, one way or another. And it made me feel worse when my parents were upset. The worst thing in the world for me is seeing my Daddy cry. I have tried to forget some of the awful things that went on in the hospital during that stay. I have tried to forget, but I know some of them I can't forget. The only thing that kept me sane while laying in bed was my Daddy, when he turned on Andy Griffith on the hospital room TV. I couldn't open my eyes long enough to watch it with him, but I remember laying through the pain, hearing Opie and Aunt Bea and Barney's voices. And I remember that was one of the only ways I could go to sleep. God must have known that I was tired of the pain. I woke up the next

morning without a headache. My doctor put a picc line in my left arm, and prescribed 4 to 6 weeks of IV antibiotics to kill the remaining infection. I went home with my mom as my doctor, and that's pretty scary. Because I didn't have the same length of the hardware in my spine, I had to wear another brace, which many of you saw me in, until I finished fusing. I wore this brace 23 hours a day, and it was horrible. But after my second surgery, I felt miraculously better. I was able to sit up and watch TV and catch up on my schoolwork, and I was even able to attend Christmas with my family. Things started to get better.

I said earlier that I gave my heart to Jesus in Washington, D.C. last year. But truthfully, it feels as if it were for nothing, because I lost touch with Jesus during the following months. I just couldn't understand why it had to be me to go through all of what I had to go through. One of the things that reminded me that Jesus was with me was when I received your cards. I read each and every one of them, and made sure I knew exactly who it came from. If I didn't, I made mom show you to me in the church directory. I still have all of my cards. I am so thankful to have a church family that loves Jesus like you do and cares enough about me to send me a card with a short hand written note in it.

Truthfully, I wish I could've told you about how I saw angel in the hospital room, or how I heard God speak to me in my ear while sleeping on the couch with pillows piled around me. But I can't. Because it hasn't been until the past few months that I really felt my connection with God strengthen, especially this summer at VBS. I have helped Mrs. Donna Landice with Missions class for the past five years, but I wasn't able to



“I am trying to grow in myself as daughter of Christ as well as grow in who I really am.”

help last year due to my surgery. Being able to go back to VBS and teach my first class has taught me so much about God and how great He is. I have learned that even if you lose touch with God, He is always there for you, you just have to reach out to Him. I have also learned that I am not

alone. I am not the only one who had to go through this much of a struggle. There are kids far worse off than I am, and I truly need to be thankful for that. I am thankful for being a part of the mission project this year with Duke Children's Hospital during VBS. Just like your cards lifted me up and helped me through a difficult time, I want the children in the hospital to be lifted up and reminded that God is with them, because I know I needed a constant reminder of that in the hospital.

So that is my faith story, and, in truth, it's still being written. I am trying to grow in myself as daughter of Christ

as well as grow in who I really am. No matter how hard I may try to forget the events of the past year, I know that they will stick with me for a long time, and that is probably a good thing. If I don't remember, I won't be able to tell others and show others that God does heal. Before surgery, I took for granted little things like being able to bend. At camp this summer, I had to practice getting in and out of a loft bed because I couldn't move quite like I was supposed to. Last week, I celebrated my one year anniversary of my surgery, as well as starting dance classes for the first time since December. However, it's not completely over. I continue to worry about my spine, and I anxiously await each doctor's appointment. I appreciate all of your prayers during this continuing process. I am thankful to God for his grace, and I am thankful to my church for its support.

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Never give up on someone because God doesn't

By Tony Matthis

When I was 13 years old, I was supposed to be baptized but was only dunked in the water. Billy Todd followed me that night and he said he could tell the water was tainted. The only problem was it meant nothing to me because the Preacher had come around during the week with the visiting preacher and talked me into it. It made things look good for revival service if you had some baptisms.

For the next 27 years, I lived my life for me and not for God. I was really wild once and pretty rowdy when I got away from home. Along the way, I met Eleanor and even though her mother promised her on our wedding day that she would buy her anything she wanted if she just wouldn't marry me, well guess what, she did it anyway. Over the next 6 years, we had two sons, Eleanor went to Church and I did what I wanted to do. Sunday

was my day; I had worked hard all week and Sunday was fun time. I would leave her and the boy's home every Sunday and any other chance I got, and go hang out with what I thought was my friends, whether it was riding motorcycles or just hanging out. I never physically abused Eleanor, but I mentally abused her and left her and our two boys alone so I could have a good time. Even though I was a complete sinner, the Lord still prospered us through our hard work and good fortune even though I never gave him credit for any of it.

Then in 1978 the good Lord decided to humble this sinner. I broke my back changing tractor tires when one fell on me and crushed one vertebra and fractured two more. For the next 18 months I was useless in my eyes because I could not work. During this time, the Lord began to work on me through the Holy Spirit and opened my eyes to what I really was...A SINNER AND A LOSER.

“People wondered how I could act so happy and carefree.”

I accepted the Lord as my Savior there on that bed in Fayetteville Hospital and turned my life around. When I was able to go to church, I publicly gave my life to the Lord at Mt. Gilead Church, and Reverend Oliver Skerrett baptized me into the FAMILY OF JESUS.

I became the GOOD CHRISTIAN by following the LORDS COMMANDMENTS and studying his word just as the Scribes and Pharisees did in Jesus' time. I went to church, tithed, tried

to treat my fellow man with love and respect, but still had a hot temper which would lead to hurting friend's feelings. Most importantly, I became a good husband and father. Man was I living the perfect life: we were prospering even more than before, which I attributed to me being a good Christian, and I thought to myself, HEY LORD LOOK WHAT I HAVE DONE FOR YOU. Uh-oh, time to humble the ole boy again.

In May 2012, I had a 95 percent blockage in the Widow Maker of my heart. Larry Scronce has always said I didn't have one but we proved him wrong. Dr. Newman put the stents in, but I just couldn't get better. After many tests and studies, Dr. Newman found that my aortic valve was 90 percent gone and I would need an aortic valve replacement; I was going to get the biggest calf's valve ever put in. People wondered how I could act so happy and carefree. I just knew I was going to heaven because I



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was a GOOD CHRISTIAN. The Lord must have said "This is one hard-headed sucker."

I went into what was supposed to be 3 to 4 hour operation not knowing what was about to take place. It ended up being 10 hours for my family, but only a few minutes for me; but that few minutes would change my life forever. While Dr. Landvater had my heart in his hand and was about to put it back in, my heart ruptured. At this point, I died and my soul left this mortal body and started to heaven. I could see the brightest light of pure white but it was not blinding. It was comforting and the warmest feeling of being completely wrapped in the love of MY SAVIOR. As I moved toward the light I looked back at my body and heard Dr. Landvater say "If we are going to save him, we have got to move and pray for the Lords help. I saw the extra team of surgeons as they jumped into action. But the most amazing thing was the Lord telling me it was not my time and he was not finished with me here on this earth. The Lord spoke to my soul not to my body and I don't know if it was him or the Holy Spirit but it was as

real as when Eleanor hollers at me. After recovery, I confronted Dr. Landvater about what had happened and what he had said in the operating room and he turned as white as a sheep. He said there is no way you could know that, but I did, and the Lord used this to strengthen Dr. Landvater's faith as well as mine. I asked him if he had panicked and he said "No. If the Lord and I panic, you die. We were prepared with an extra team of surgeons and the Lord was prepared to do his part."

The Lord used this to open my eyes and show me the way and what I still was the good Christian but not the good son. The Lord is still humbling me: Since this all started I have been in the hospital 10 times and I sure hope it doesn't take a whole lot more humbling to soften up this hard head. The Lord is not through with me in this life and whatever it is he wants me to do when he calls I will answer. Since the Lord has made me aware that I need to be the good son and not the good Christian, I know that all things are in his hands. Since the Lord has returned me to his service on this earth, he has guided me in leading a

dying friend to his salvation and praying with another and his family as God took him into his bosom.

It is not about me but about him, for his glory and the salvation of the lost. If I can touch just one person and get them closer to salvation the Lords investment in me has been worthwhile.

With every head bowed and every eyed closed I want you to look at your life. Are you the sinner even though you might not be as bad as I was if you don't know him personally as your Lord and Savior you are still a sinner. Nowhere in the Bible does it have a scale rating of 1 to 10 for sinners, a sinner is a sinner PERIOD. Or are you in the scribe and Pharisee mode as I was for so long being the GOOD CHRISTIAN thinking that you are not as bad as so and so or I have already got my place reserved in Heaven. The biggest deterrent to people accepting Jesus is worrying about what others will think. What does it matter what others think God knows it all and when you get to Heaven all your sins since salvation and short comings will be on a big screen display for all to see. So when God calls, say YES.

The second most important thing that God has given me next to being a brother of Jesus Christ through my salvation (Romans 8:14-17) is he blessed me with a Soul Mate that never gave up on me. During all of these trials she has been with me every step of the way.

"If I can touch just one person and get them closer to salvation, the Lord's investment in me has been worthwhile."



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My faith walk

By Beth Bartlett-Best

I knew I needed to be the person God intended me to be, so I started another chapter. I applied to Campbell's Divinity school and resigned my teaching position. Upon my acceptance into graduate school, I began applying to churches as a youth minister. I actually only applied to one, where my application turned into a full time youth ministry position. Youth grew in numbers and in faith, along with adults. The church struggled when the pastor that was there when I was hired resigned after 4-5 months of my initial hiring; an interim pastor filled the pulpit and was a wonderful pastor to the people, and the mentor I needed to grow spiritually and professionally in my service.

After serving the church for a year,

I was approached by a few deacons in the church, as well as the pastor, about my feelings towards being ordained as a minister. I had not only been leading the youth and children's ministry, but I had also had the opportunity to fill the pulpit on Sunday mornings and Sunday nights, and had Bible study for adults on Wednesday evening when needed. I visited "shut ins", members who were in the hospital, and shared devotions at a local nursing home weekly. I was excited about the idea that people, men and women, saw God's leading and leadership within me and my potential to be a minister of the gospel, but I also remembered what my daddy had said about making a living as a minister, and at the time, and sadly, even still today, there was much controversy about "women in ministry". Through prayer and seeking

God's will, I accepted the nomination to be ordained. The deacons of the church voted unanimously to support the decision for me to be ordained, an ordination council was established and through the most humbling ordination service of over 400 in attendance, I was ordained ... and the battle began.

A small group of people left the church after my ordination. Some families didn't believe in women ministers. I very vividly remember receiving a phone call at 6 a.m., on a Thursday, from one such member that stated if I was ordained, he would remove his support and money from a local university, and take his family and money from the church. It devastated me. My heart was broken to pieces wondering if I had done the right thing by accepting the nomination of ordination. Before my ordination service, the church, at a regular business meeting, was to vote on my ordination, and the church pews were full of support for me; there were a couple of small groups meeting to support and denounce my ordination. Unfortunately, there are always hurting hearts and broken people following a war; the group against the ordination got up together that night and

"My heart was broken to pieces wondering if I had done the right thing by accepting the nomination of ordination."

left the church to start their own.

In the days that followed the business meeting that rocked the congregation, covering the front page of the town's newspaper, was a picture of the church that had been ripped completely in half with the title, "Church Splits Over Ordination". Within the article, people spoke of several differences they had within the church in the past with programs and growth, but mostly the article focused on the ordination of a woman. I have to say, it was one of the toughest times of my life. I sat in my office reading and rereading the article, reading and reread-



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ing scripture, praying on my knees at the altar for peace because I felt as if I had brought down a congregation by dividing the unity that was supposed to bring people together in a place of worship. During this time, people still mailed cards for special occasions or "I'm thinking of you moments", since texting hadn't been invented yet. I was overwhelmed by the calls to the church, calls to my home, calls to my personal phone, visits, and cards sent to me in support and affirmation of my divine appointment to be recognized as the minister of the gospel that I was.

I was a little over half way in completing my graduate work, Michael and I welcomed our first son, John Michael, and new a pastor made his presence to the church. Throughout the three years before the new hire, and the calm after the storm, our youth ministry was at its peak, adults programs were growing and I felt like I was right where I needed to be. Welcoming a baby and a new pastor was exciting, but God was about to test me again.

Explanation of God

By Danny Dutton
8 years old

One of God's main jobs is making people. He makes them to replace the ones that die, so there will be enough people to take care of things on earth. He doesn't make grownups, just babies. I think because they are smaller and easier to make. That way he doesn't have to take up his valuable time teaching them to talk and walk. He can just leave that to mothers and fathers.

God's second most important job is listening to prayers. An awful lot of this goes on, since some people, like preachers and things, pray at times besides bedtime. God doesn't have

time to listen to the radio or TV because of this. Because he hears everything, there must be a terrible lot of noise in his ears, unless he has thought of a way to turn it off. God sees everything and hears everything and is everywhere which keeps Him pretty busy. So you shouldn't go wasting his time by going over your mom and dad's head asking for something they said you couldn't have.

Jesus is God's Son. He used to do all the hard work like walking on water and performing miracles and trying to teach the people who didn't want to learn about God. They finally got tired of him preaching to them and they crucified

him. But he was good and kind, like his father, and he told his father that they didn't know what they were doing and to forgive them and God said O.K. His dad (God) appreciated everything that he had done and all his hard work on earth so he told him he didn't have to go out on the road anymore. He could stay in heaven. So he did. And now he helps his dad out by listening to prayers and seeing things which are important for God to take care of and which ones he can take care of himself without having to bother God. Like a secretary, only more important.

You can pray anytime you want and they are sure to help you because they got it worked out so one of them is on duty all the time. You should always go to church on Sunday because it makes

God happy, and if there's anybody you want to make happy, it's God. Don't skip church or do something you think will be more fun like going to the beach. This is wrong. And besides, the sun doesn't come out at the beach until noon anyway.

If you don't believe in God, besides being an atheist, you will be very lonely, because your parents can't go everywhere with you, like to camp, but God can. It is good to know He's around you when you're scared, in the dark or when you can't swim and you get thrown into real deep water by big kids. But... you shouldn't just always think of what God can do for you. I figure God put me here and he can take me back anytime he pleases. And this is what I know about God.

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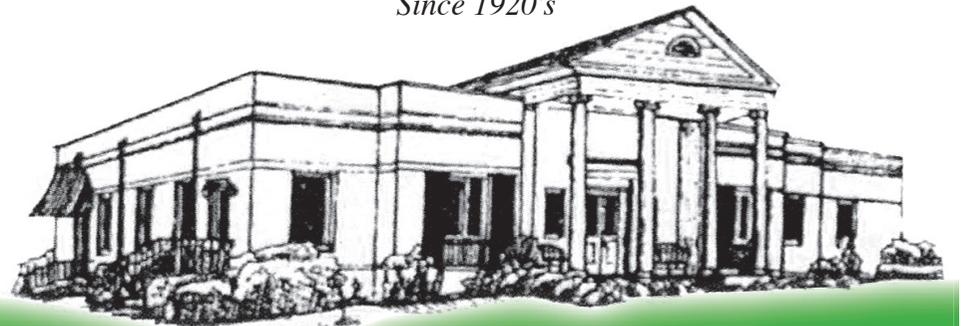


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Restored through faith and forgiveness

By Clinton resident

I sat down with a close friend and fellow Christian not too long ago and shared my story of faith and restoration with her. Having known me for as long as she has, it wasn't a surprise to her that I had faith, but what brought about the restoration in my life flooded her eyes with tears.

May 8th holds very significant value in my life, but May 19, 2013 changed my life forever. That was the day that I finally realized that God loved me, and no matter the sin, I was forgiven. Having grown up in a Christian home, I knew all about forgiveness and God's unconditional love he has for his children. Despite knowing this, three years ago something happened that caused me to doubt God and question does he really forgive.

I asked to remain anonymous in this

story because who I am isn't important, but rather the story of restoration I have to share is what matters. For anyone who recognizes the story, please just focus on the message and not who I am.

For years, I battled with a demon who consumed my body and everything about me. That demon led me to make choices that I would have otherwise not made and ultimately changed my life forever. It was almost five years ago that I became an addict, the product of several major surgeries and health issues that caused doctors to prescribe enormous amounts of pain medication. In the beginning, I was taking the medicine for all the right reasons, but in the end, that was the farthest thing from the truth. I had become an addict. That addiction led me to make choices that hurt and disappointed my family and myself, but most of all, disappointed God.

As I entered treatment on a Wednesday night, I knew as the double doors closed behind me, that one woman was going in, but there would be a different, a changed woman coming out. With guidance from my family, I entered a 30-day program, but not without hesitation. After all, was I really an addict?

During my first few days of treatment, I tried to convince myself, and my family and medical team, that I wasn't truly an addict, just a case of a patient who wasn't taking the medication as prescribed. I fought for 12 days. It took me that long to finally realize that I had a problem and I needed help – help that was far greater than that the program was providing. As I sat through counseling sessions and meetings, we were constantly told that “once an addict, always an addict.” Forget always, I was trying to convince myself that I was one to begin

with. But on that 12th day, as I sat in the non-denominational church service the facility provided, I heard a message of forgiveness. Not only was it about God's forgiveness of us, but us forgiving ourselves.

With my eyes filled with tears, and my heart filled with joy, in that moment I realized – if God can forgive me for what I have done, I can surely forgive myself, because if I am worthy of God's love and forgiveness, I am worthy of self-forgiveness.

In those first 12 days of treatment, I was really hard on myself. There were many moments I questioned how God could allow me to go through something like this. I felt unworthy of his love and mercy. For more than three decades, God had given so much to me. He had blessed me with so many things, and here I was repaying Him through sin and



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doubt.

That night, when I left the service, I felt some sense of relief, but something was still eating away at me. On an outside table, volunteers from the church had displayed Bible verse cards, cut the perfect size to fit into your pocket. I picked up Phillipians 4:13, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me," not realizing at the time how true the words in that scripture were and how much they related to my life. Despite realizing that God had already forgiven me, I just couldn't bring myself to offer forgiveness to my own thoughts. I continued to pray over the next few days and ask God to help me forgive myself.

Finally, I realized, it's all in words. Being told I was always going to be an addict didn't sit so well with me. Please, for anyone who has done AA or NA, don't think I am trying to challenge the steps of the program, as this applies to me and my trust in full restoration from God. How could I always be an addict if God had healed me of my addiction? When God heals us of something, it no longer consumes our bodies. We are survivors! That's what I am – a SURVIVOR of addiction.

I knew then what I still know today,

that God had healed me. Not only had I prayed for guidance and understanding, but I repeated Phillipians 4:13 to myself every day, all day long. During our recovery sessions, they talked about cravings and struggles. I won't dare say I haven't had struggles, but I can say because of God's divine healing and his restoring of my life, I have never had a craving.

Today, I sit here as an almost three year SURVIVOR! One of the counselors at the program loved to call me "30-day wonder" without ever telling me what that meant. I finally learned that for people in AA or NA, or another recovery program, that refers to someone who does a 180 degree turn, and changes their life forever.

It was through Christ and Christ alone that I did all these things. I have forgiven myself. He has offered strength through this situation, one that has brought me much closer to Him. That card is still on my refrigerator. I see it every morning as I reach into the refrigerator for my coffee creamer, and every morning, before I start my day, I recite Phillipians 4:13 to myself. Throughout the day, as struggles arise, and they always will, I remind myself of those words and God's promises.

Faith through the storms

By Chandra Harrington

In a world full of greed
Dishonesty and despair
Never lose faith
God is there.
When you feel alone
And lose sight
The devil is strong but he
Won't win this fight.
God is there to guide
You through,
Pray from the heart
He has room for you.
Pray for forgiveness
And god to come into your heart.
He'll guide you and show you
It's the right start.
God will help you
Fight the temptation
But make the effort
And pray for salvation.
If you think you're lost
You'll act like it to

But when god's on your side
You'll feel brand new.
Things can get hard
And be pretty rough
God is the answer
He'll make you tough.
No matter your trouble
Or tribulation
Leave it to God and he'll
Show you your destination.



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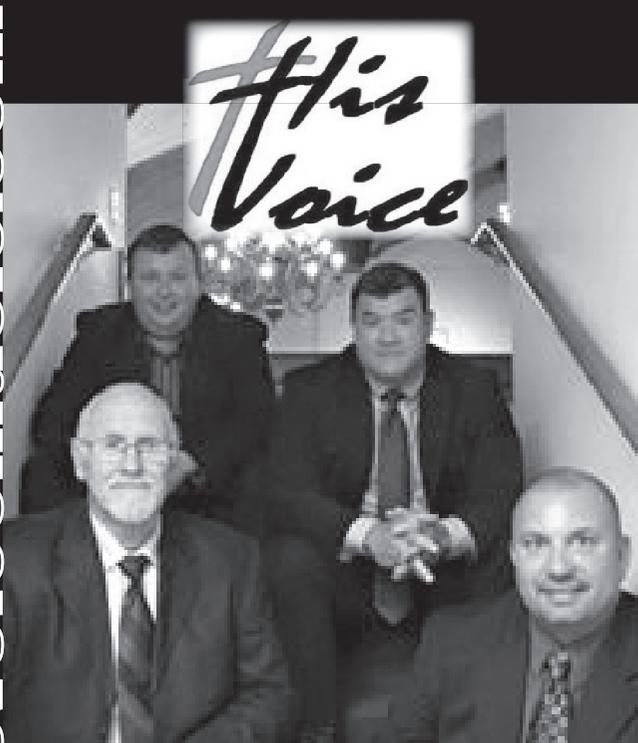
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Thank you Lord for your mercy and grace

By Louise Beheler

In 1950 I graduated from high school at the age of 17. A week later, on June 5, my cousin and I decided to walk to the drug store in Maysville for a coke and crackers. When we came out of the drug store my girlfriend's marine boyfriend was parked in the front of the store. I jumped up on the front of his car. Just playing he got out of the car and came around to where I was with a 25 caliber German Luger pistol in his hand. He said, "Stick'em up." He then pulled the trigger. The gun fired and a bullet hit me in the stomach. He remarked, "I forgot that I loaded the gun." I slumped off the car onto the ground. He picked me up and carried me two doors down to the doctor's office. A friend of my family said, "put her in my car and I'll carry her to the hospital," which was 15 miles away in New Bern.

We passed the highway patrol station on the way and he blew his horn signaling that he wanted to be lead to the hospital by the patrolman. About 15 minutes after we arrived at the hospital the patrolman came up and my friend remarked, "I blew the horn for you to lead me to the hospital" to which the patrolman remarked, "Lead you? I couldn't even catch you."

This took place on Monday and the doctors waited all night for my body to stabilize. On Tuesday they operated, sewing up seven holes in my intestines. In the following days, they pumped poison out of my body and gave me seven pints of blood. I also had blocked kidneys. The bullet, which had stopped near my spinal cord, eventually passed out of my body and I still have it to this day.

I was unconscious all that week and on Friday night my church family had a special prayer meeting for my recovery during which my six year old cousin prayed a very special prayer for me. On Saturday morning around nine o'clock, I came out of the coma. When I woke up

the room was lit up like angels were all around me; it was wonderful and I will never forget it.

I weighed 126 pounds before this all happened, and a month after I came out of the hospital I only weighed 93 pounds. My doctors did not think that I would ever be able to give birth to children, but by faith and the grace of God, I have given birth to two beautiful girls. I thank God every day for His mercy and grace.

Since 1996 I have had cancer four times, with one being a type of cancer that is known to jump around to different places in your body. As a result, I have had four surgeries and 30 treatments of radiation at UNC Hospital in Chapel Hill. Recently when a neighbor of mine discovered that she had cancer, I encouraged her to remember two things in particular. One, she needed to have everyone from Maine to California praying for her. And two, she needed to keep a positive attitude. Have faith that God will help you get better. Because I know His healing power from my own experience. I want to say to all of you, "Don't desert God, for He will not desert you, and He will be with you." I want to close by saying, "Thank you Lord for your mercy and grace."



Where are you God?

By Erica Faircloth

Do you sometimes feel alone...even when you're surrounded by loved ones? I am pretty sure we have all felt this way at one time or another. At times like these, we may even question ourselves about our predicaments or situations that we are in...and then, we may even question God? Have you ever questioned Him? I ask Him questions. I speak to Him, probably not as often as I should, but these are the times that we mainly speak to Him, right? When something goes wrong...

What about when things are great or you wake up in the morning or you see another birthday? Do we thank and praise Him and talk to Him at those times? When things are going well, we feel "on top of the world." Nothing can stop us! But then, we hit "a bump in the road." These "bumps" can be minor or major, but one thing is for sure, He is always with us. He is there with us through thick and thin. We need to learn to trust in the Lord at all times, good or bad, and pray and praise Him for everything. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 In every thing give thanks: for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. He knows what He's doing. He will not give anything to us we cannot handle. 1 Corinthians 10:13 There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be

able to bear it.

One of my favorite songs is "Oceans" by Hillsong United, which starts off "You call me out upon the waters, the great unknown, where feet may fail." No matter where He leads us, He will always pull us through it. Whether it's to teach us a lesson, learn from a mistake or open a new (and maybe scary) door to our life. As long as your faith is strong, you will always find Him. Trust in Him. My favorite part of the song that speaks to me goes like this: "Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders, let me walk upon the waters, wherever You would call me, take me deeper than my feet could ever wander, and my faith will be made stronger, in the presence of my Savior." Whenever I am feeling alone or depressed, I always lift my hands and praise Him by singing this song. That is my way of praising Him. I can always feel his presence flowing through me when I truly praise Him by singing this song.

Try building on to your relationship with God each day. Doing this will not make your life perfect, but it will help your relationship grow with God and teach you to look to and trust in Him. Philippians 4:6-7 Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

God Bless

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Standing strong in my faith

By Faison resident

Once I was sinful for a long period of time. When I repented of my sin, I sometimes wondered if my repentance was sufficient to redeem me. Then one night, in a dream, Satan appeared to me. I turned my back on him and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of the true and living God." When I awoke, I was deeply disturbed about the dream because it seemed so real.

The dream remained on my mind for some time to come and often when I was concerned about the sins of my past or the possibility of forgiveness, I would say the sentence out loud, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the son of the true and living God." In the end, I came to realize that my dream was not just fantasy. I was truly protected by Jesus Christ.

I know Satan is always watching for a chink in my armor, so I will never take that protection for granted, but as long as I am able to turn my back on the devil and confess my belief in my Lord, I will be safe from iniquity—even if that confession is only in a dream.

To God be the glory.



SUNDAY SCHEDULE:

Sunday Devotion & Children's Devotion: 9:45am
 Sunday School: 10:00am | Worship Service: 11:00am

Adam Brinkley,

Pastor of Hopewell UMC
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"Life without God is like an unsharpened pencil - it has no point..." ~ Unknown

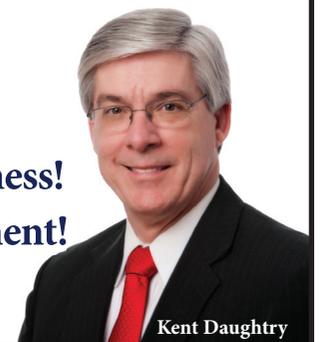
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