

Connecting Women Conference

Hope

Devotional Guide

57 Messages of Hope from Women Just Like You

A Note from the Devotional Team

Women throughout our region and across the country are preparing their hearts and minds for what God will do through the Connecting Women conferences, “Hope,” hosted by Connecting Ministries. The “Hope” conferences will be held in two different locations: Owensboro, KY will feature speakers Katherine Wolf, Annie Downs, and Julie Dunn on October 20 & 21, 2017 and Birmingham, AL will feature Lysa TerKeurst, Katherine Wolf, and Morgan Cheek on March 16 & 17, 2018. Join us to hear these ladies share about finding their hope in Jesus Christ!

This booklet serves two purposes: 1) as a daily devotional to point us to God through His Word, and 2) as a prayer guide for these conferences and the women connected to it. There are fifty-seven days of devotions and prayer emphases. These devotions are written by women from dozens of churches across various denominations from eight different states! I have

been encouraged and challenged by these devotions, and I know you will be, too.

I have to thank a fantastic group of ladies who served on the devotional team: Kasey Goss, Leigha Taylor, Brigitte Cook, Natalie Hinton, Celena Keel, Dianne Colvin, Ginger Mayfield, Maeghan Adams, and Cheryl Goss. I also want to extend a tremendous thank you to the fifty-seven women who have invested their time to contribute a devotion. You will see the author’s name at the bottom of each page. Ladies, thank you for blessing us with your words from God’s Word. And above all, praise be to God, for true hope is found nowhere else than in the saving work of Jesus Christ!

*“You are my hiding place and my shield;
I hope in your word.” —Psalm 119:114*

*Julie Dunn
Devotional Team Leader*

Production & Ministry Team

Cheryl Goss
President, Connecting Ministries

Maeghan Adams
Graphic Designer

Julie Dunn
Devotional Team Leader

Devotional Team Members

Kasey Goss, Leigha Taylor, Brigitte Cook, Natalie Hinton, Celena Keel, Dianne Colvin, & Ginger Mayfield

To Expect With...

“Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.” —Romans 12:12

Both fear and hope are defined by the Merriam-Webster Dictionary beginning with the same three words: “to expect with.” However, the last words of each definition cause the meanings drastically to diverge; fear expects “with alarm” while hope expects “with confidence.” We know these sentiments are enormously dissimilar, even contradictory. Yet if we were to examine these reactions through the perspective of our own tragedy, trial, or affliction, would our attitudes and actions reflect the profound distinction between hope and fear?

Romans is a letter from Paul conveying the theological and pragmatic pillars of the Christian existence to the church of Rome. Among Paul’s marching orders for the Christian life is Romans 12:12, instructions for responding to adversity: “Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.”

Horatio Spafford was a successful lawyer, husband, and father living in Chicago in the 1870s. His wife and four daughters sailed from the United States to Europe, with plans for Spafford to follow in the coming days. The excursion ended prematurely when the boat capsized and sank beneath the dark Atlantic Ocean; only Spafford’s wife survived.

In John 16:33, Jesus reminds us to expect difficulties in this life. With this warning we are given the option to endure affliction with an expectation of alarm or confidence. The response we choose hinges upon our consuming conviction and comprehension that Jesus has already overcome this world and secured the victory.

Spafford eventually boarded a Europe-bound boat and sailed across the Atlantic, over the graves of his beloved children, to reunite with his tragically reduced family. During this indescribably painful affliction, Spafford clung to his confident expectation in Christ. During his journey, he penned these powerful words: “When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll. Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well, with my soul.”

Jesus, I pray for each woman connected to these conferences. Regardless of our circumstances, let us find hope in your unparalleled sacrifice and victory.

*Mary Austin Wolf Hall
Shades Mountain Baptist Church
Birmingham, AL*

Hear the Solidarity

“Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord” —Deuteronomy 6:4

When our son was four-years-old, we were informed he had significant hearing loss and needed corrective surgery. Within forty-eight hours, we were relieved to hear the surgery was successful. However, because our son had been mostly deaf during his toddlerhood, he continues to struggle with filtering noise. He is often distracted, overwhelmed, and confused. He cannot focus when there is more than one voice.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is part of the traditional Shema prayer of the Jewish people. The Shema begins with, “HEAR, O Israel:” It reminds me of when I have to catch my distracted son’s attention and say, “Listen...focus!”

The Israelites had just completed forty years of wandering as a consequence of the first generation’s rebellion against God. Now, the second generation was ready to claim the Promised Land and Moses was reminding this new generation of Israelites that God is a jealous god, “the One and Only”. They were to “Love the Lord with all your heart...soul...might” and “these words....shall be in thine heart.” They were to remain a unified people bonded by their sole devotion to “the One and Only” while conquering a polytheistic culture.

Today, Christians are bombarded by self-loving memes, crusading media blurbs, blogs promoting anything and everything, and subliminal advertising messages. These were all created to distract, confuse, and mislead us through this maze of life. There are days when our heads spin with all the contradictory philosophical ideals, theological arguments, and political propaganda. SO MUCH NOISE! It is difficult to HEAR the voice of “the One and Only” in the midst of this chaos.

Just as our family is continuing patiently to teach our son to prioritize noise, we must teach our children through example and the Scripture to hear God’s voice. The world is noisy, but there is only One who can have our heart. This generation of the church is called to HEAR and unite... much the same way Israel was called to HEAR and unite. The solidarity of the church can be achieved only by a collective returning to “HEAR.”

Lord, open our ears to hear and unify our hearts in devotion to You alone.

*Sarah Maglinger
Lewis Lane Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

Citizenship Status

“But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for Him to return as our Savior.” —Philippians 3:20

On the day I’m writing this, my granny took her last breaths on this earth. Her suffering has ended and as John writes in Revelation 21-22, her eyes enlightened at the sight of the gates of pearl, streets of the purest gold, and the River of Life that leads to the throne of God. All the beauty that Granny had seen up to this point would not have even satisfied the thirst she had to fix her eyes on her Savior and Lord. There will be neither light nor sun in Heaven, because the glory of the Lord and the light of Jesus illuminate this place. My granny—healed of her pain, freed from her chains, and forgiven of her sins—would be singing, playing the piano, and worshipping because she was a citizen of Heaven.

Spending these last days with my sweet 88-year-old granny, I have been reminded of the unwavering faith she possessed throughout her life, even to the end. She told her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren of conversations she had with Jesus to tell Him that she was ready for her faith to become sight. She longed for the day when the brokenness of this world would no longer have a hold on her. The love she possessed for her family there would be no rival,

but the faithfulness we witnessed throughout her life for her Savior proved where her citizenship lay.

Granny was faithful in her life, but better than that, Jesus Christ is infinitely more faithful. We have no hope of tomorrow, no strength in our weakness, no boldness in our fear without the love that Christ showed us on the cross. If there were no crucifixion and no resurrection, our citizenship would remain in its ever-sinful state of the chains on this earth. But with His life, His sacrifice, and His intercession for us, our citizenship can be changed. Granny’s faithfulness proved to the world where she belonged, but only because Jesus was always faithful to her.

Where does your citizenship belong? Does your life reflect it?

Lord Jesus, help me to be more faithful to represent the One who is ever faithful.

*Jill Pendergraft
Pleasant Grove Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

Great Is His Faithfulness

“The faithful love of the Lord never ends! His mercies never cease. Great is his faithfulness; His mercies begin afresh each morning.” —Lamentations 3:22-23

Oh, how I love these verses. Through the tragic diagnosis of terminal brain cancer in our seven-year-old daughter, I have seen these verses proven true over and over. In the short six months from Kayleigh’s diagnosis to her heavenly homegoing, we felt the presence of the Lord in mighty ways.

I can assure you—absolutely nothing will bring you to your knees faster than the fear of losing your child. It rocks your world. I’m sure you’ve had moments when your world was rocked—maybe a health issue, relationship, financial difficulty, struggles in the workplace, unemployment, feeling unloved or undervalued. The fiery darts hurled at us each day by the Evil One are crafted to cripple us and make us ineffective. They are designed to make us feel like we are not good enough or cannot be used. He sneaks those little comments into the back of your mind: How could God possibly use me? I’m no one, I have no gifts, I have no talents. Dear one, wipe those thoughts from your mind. Believers, you are the daughter of the King of Kings. If He has called you to it, He will equip you to complete the task.

This does not mean we will not face trials and sufferings. We live in a broken, fallen world. We will face sickness, hardship, and loss. The difference is that we as believers have a Savior who loves and cherishes us. He understands our grief, hurt, and pain—and He is standing right next to you just waiting for you to call on His name, waiting for you to claim His promises, waiting for you to trust that He is who He says He is—God Almighty, the Prince of Peace, the Great I Am, Faithful, Just and True. He is all you need for each and every day.

And for every one of those difficult days you face, remember, each dawn brings new hope. Choose to hope. Choose to trust. Choose joy!

*Thank you, Jesus, for a new day!
Please hold me close, guide my
steps, and teach me to draw my
strength from you alone. Help me
choose you!*

*‘Carrow McClendon
Central Baptist Church, Decatur
Hartselle, AL*

Yes, Your Yoga Pants are Too Tight

“Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is Christ.” —Ephesians 4:15

I am a people-pleaser by nature and desire that everyone always feels wonderful about herself. In fact, I would rather parade my pasty-post-baby-cellulite body clothed in only a swimsuit through Walmart on Black Friday than confront a friend on a sin issue.

However, Ephesians 4:15 tells us that this is not biblical. We are not to be pharisaical sin police pointing out everything our sisters in Christ do wrong with hearts of pettiness, haughtiness, or judgment. Rather, the truth should flow out of us to others in LOVE.

Then, WE, not just the person confronted with her sin (who will hopefully repent), WE will become “mature” and more like Christ. I, WE, all desire to be more like Christ but doing that often means leaving our comfort zones.

To whom do you need to speak the “Truth in Love”?

A friend: Those yoga pants so are revealing that I can see your panty line, but there is a sale at Target and I would love to go shopping with you!

A youth: This is going to hurt and I hate to see you hurt, but the boy

you’re dating is not a follower of Christ and that relationship should end.

A young lady facing an untimely pregnancy: Your baby is being created by the Lord Almighty. Please, let me walk beside you to help make this life possible.

A co-worker who is toying with the idea of an affair: Satan is out to steal, kill, and destroy your marriage. I can pray for you and would love to get you and your spouse to a counselor.

Most importantly, an unconverted friend or family member: We are all sinners in need of a Savior. That savior has come! His name is Jesus, and He died for you and me.

Jesus, help us to share your truth in love with confidence. Give us the confidence to know your truth is the ultimate truth and that we can boldly love with the unending love you have given us. I lift up the speakers of these conferences— Lord, empower these ladies to share Your Word with truth and love.

Hannah Goebel
Pleasant Valley Community Church
Owensboro, KY

The Word for Every Moment

*"You are my refuge and shield;
I put my hope in your word." —Psalm 119:114*

My momma urged me to get the word of God in my spirit and memorize it. There would be those moments in my life when I would desperately need it, and I wouldn't have time to grab a Bible or my phone app. The psalmist must have known what Momma knew so well. Throughout Psalm 119, he reminds us to hold on to God's word, and not listen to those who doubt His laws. By doing so, God would be our refuge and shield. Psalm 119:11 tells us that by keeping God's word hidden in our hearts, we can use the Word to keep us from sin. Jesus taught the importance of having the Word in us, not just for the desperate moments in our life, but for our daily prayer life: "If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you" (John 15:7).

One of those desperate moments in my life came when my then three-year-old grandson went into rare and sudden liver failure. We were told he had about a week to live without a transplant. Someone started a Facebook prayer page and within hours it had

over ten-thousand followers. My daughter Hannah and I did not want the page filled with sadness or doubt, so we requested that people share Scriptures of healing, strength, peace, and hope. We wanted others to see that when we hope in His Word, it isn't just a happy wish. Rather, hope is to wait on, to expect, and to be ready to see His Word come in to action and be fulfilled! Deason did receive his transplant, and we will forever give God praise! But we know that no matter what the outcome, we would always have hope in His Word.

Father, thank you that you alone are my hiding place and my shield when sin, trials, and heartache appear in my life. Remind me to keep your word in me, so that at all times in my life I will remember to wait on, to expect, and to HOPE in YOUR WORD. Amen.

*Becky Coffelt
Mountain Pointe Ministries Church
Altoona, AL*

Blessed Faith

“And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her from the Lord.” —Luke 1:45

Mary, favored by God and blessed among women, demonstrated her love for God by believing the message that she would bear the promised Messiah. God blessed Mary for her faith. Today, Mary serves as an example to all believers of a life lived in complete trust in the promises of God’s spoken word.

Faith is the key element in a believer’s life from beginning to end. Scripture says, “For by grace you have been saved through faith” (Ephesians 2:8) and we know, “Without faith it is impossible to please Him” (Hebrews 11:6). However, if we are honest with ourselves, we struggle with unwavering faith. We say we have faith and trust in God’s plans. We even encourage others to have faith amidst their trials. But when our world begins to fall apart and our faith is tested, do we run from God or towards God and His promises?

Beloved, it is in these moments of testing that our faith in God can shine! We can choose to be like Mary and respond in humble, secure faith, or we can hide within our walls of insecurity and doubt, failing to recognize the hand of God at work within our circum-

stances for His glory.

Faith. Easy to say. Hard to live. Recently, a sudden change in my son’s health caused me to ponder, “Lord, do I really believe what I say I believe? Do I have complete faith in you and your promises? Do I truly trust you?” Have you been there? It’s not fun, is it? I have realized it is only by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ that we have the ability to live a life of confident expectancy, full of hope and faith. Beloved, do not lose faith; seek His face and believe His promises for, “He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it at the day of Jesus Christ” (Philippians 1:6).

Father, thank you for Mary’s model of blessed faith. Help us each day to place our faith, hope, and trust solely in you and your plan for our lives. May you receive all the glory, honor, and praise. Amen.

*Amber DeVore
Faith Church
Gallatin, TN*

Hope in a Broken World

“May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” —Romans 15:13

Have you ever experienced the feeling of hopelessness? I know I have. Personally, it came in seasons of hardship in my marriage, multiple miscarriages, and the sudden death of my father. I have also allowed myself to feel hopeless over every day circumstances, but that’s certainly not what God intended for those who belong to Him, those who trust Him fully.

Thankfully, I have experienced the God of hope restore me repeatedly. Some of the deepest and most intimate places I have been in my personal relationship with my Savior occurred because of the hardships that I had endured. He proves to me that all I must do is trust in Him by trusting in His Word. It doesn’t take long for me to realize that His power is made perfect in my weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9).

The Holy Spirit is POWERFUL. He can and will change your thought process and your perspective. He can and will change your default from hopeless to hopeful. It’s a hope so powerful that you’ll overflow with joy and peace so divine that those around you can literally

sense it. I don’t know what you may be dealing with in your life right now that is allowing you to feel hopeless, but I do know that the same Holy Spirit who is living in me is living, or can live, in you, too. You have full rights to the power of the Holy Spirit who can deliver you from hopelessness and fully restore your joy, peace, and hope!

Heavenly Father, I know that my hope comes from you, and I want to thank you that because of Jesus we have that hope. Holy Spirit, allow that hope come alive in my life. Restore my joy and fill me with your peace. I want to be the woman who is always hopeful no matter the circumstance, simply because my heart belongs to you. You have given me the gift of salvation and that alone brings joy, peace, and hope in a broken world. Thank you, Father, for the power of your Spirit and your hope! Amen.

*Laura Harris
First Baptist Cleveland
Cleveland, TN*

Ready, Set, Change!

*“The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.”
—Isaiah 40:8*

“Change” is probably my least favorite word in the English language. No word strikes fear and panic in me faster than the word “change”. It seems as if every time I get comfortable, the Lord decides He needs to shake things up a bit and throw me a curveball. I am not a gifted athlete, so those curve balls always catch me off guard. When I think of the word “change”, adjectives that come to mind are scary, unwanted, necessary, suffocating, sad, and the list goes on.

My family has experienced much change the last couple of years. In two years, we experienced a cancer diagnosis for my father, the addition of our third adopted child, a move to a different city (two months after adopting our son), new schools for our two daughters, a new sitter for our son, the loss of a precious family friend at the age of 16, and the loss of our friends’ seven-year-old daughter when she lost her battle with cancer. This doesn’t even include changes I have experienced in my workplace—a new principal, losing a student in a horrible accident, and multiple students losing parents or significant caregivers. In a world where things are constantly changing, one thing is

certain: change is inevitable.

How do we remain steady when the winds of change are constantly swirling around us? We remember the One who never changes. Malachi 3:6 says, “I, the Lord, do not change.” It doesn’t say “Sometimes I don’t change,” or “If you obey my commandments, I won’t change.” It simply states, “I, the Lord, do not change.” What a comfort to know we can count on the steadiness of the Lord and His Word! Colossians 1:17 states that Jesus “is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.” Part of living and caring for others is encountering change. It could be with family, friends, or your job. When you feel the winds of change swirling around you, remember the One who holds us steady.

Lord, though change is inevitable and often hard, we are thankful that You are constant and Your Word stands forever.

Paige Betterton
Wooley Springs Church
Toney, AL

Of Power

“For God has not given us a spirit of fear but of power and of love and of a sound mind.” —2 Timothy 1:7

Fear is a response from the flesh that is often exasperated by the enemy of our souls, hoping to distract us away from the One true authority. Fear in itself is not the problem. Fear keeps us alert and often out of danger. However, when fear grips our hearts, holding us hostage, we need to be reminded that all authority was given to Jesus; the enemy has no right here.

As Paul faced his final days, he penned encouragement to Timothy, expecting Timothy to be afraid of what was to come. Paul warned him that the Truth entrusted to him will come under attack and that there will be suffering because of standing for Truth. Paul urged Timothy, “Be empowered by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Paul reminds him that all authority is in Jesus and in HIM there is no fear.

One of the key words here is “power”. There is power. No one can even say, “Jesus is Lord” except by the power of the Holy Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12:3)

In Jesus, we find power. There is power to have courage: the cour-

age that causes us to be sure of the gospel truth and to speak it; the courage to love even in situations where it is hard to love; the courage to be self-controlled when we would rather let fear overcome us.

Through the reading or hearing of HIS truth, we are empowered by the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

Like Timothy, we are encouraged to keep feeding the white-hot flame of God’s gift, to receive the courage to speak His truth in His amazing love with a sound mind.

Holy Father, I pray for the women connected to these conferences, that we would embrace this truth. Thank you for Your spirit of courage and for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit through Jesus. Cause us to keep our eyes on the One true authority. May we be found as a testimony of your power, with love and a sound mind.

*Darlene Runyon
Living Hope
Owensboro, KY*

Jesus, Light of the World

"When Jesus spoke again to the people, He said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"

—John 8:12

"Light of the world, You stepped down into darkness..." This is the first line of a beautiful song about my Savior, the Light of the world. How amazing it is that Jesus, the Son of God, did this for me. He left His throne in Glory to step into the darkness of this world. He left the perfection, safety, and comfort of Heaven to enter a world that would ultimately execute Him on a cross.

The part that truly blows my mind is that He knew. He knew He was coming to suffer and die. My simple mind finds it difficult to comprehend. How could someone knowingly leave His throne to become despised, rejected, and crucified by men? The answers flow from God's Word. Jesus stepped into the darkness because He loves me and wanted to rescue me from sin. He wanted to give me hope and peace. What a glorious Savior He is!

My life has been radically changed because Jesus took the punishment I deserved. He chose to make a way to forgive me instead of condemn me. Amazingly enough, that's not the end of the story: upon surrendering my life to fol-

low Him, I had His Spirit within me. He shines His light on my path so that I will know how to live in a way that glorifies Him. He gave me His Word so that I can know Him better and reflect His light into the world.

Jesus planned it all down to the last detail. He made a way for salvation, He gave His Word and His Spirit to guide me, and He provides opportunities for me to share His truth with others. My favorite truth to proclaim is about a King who left His throne to step into the darkness of sin and death. He died on a cross for you and me so that we can spend eternity with Him. Trust in Him today.

Father, I pray for those who have never repented of sin and believed in Your Son. Open their eyes to the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ so that they too may have the Light of life. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Karen Carnes
Central Baptist Church
Decatur, AL*

Oh, the Waiting

"I love you, LORD; you are my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress, and my savior; my God is my rock, in whom I find protection. He is my shield, the power that saves me, and my place of safety." —Psalm 18:1-2

Standing in the bleak hallway of the hospital, already plagued with emotions of every sort waiting for news about the outcome of Dad's open-heart surgery, I received a call from my doctor. There were concerns about a recent mammogram. My mind was jumbled as the information came at me. There was a suspicious lump. I needed to see a surgeon.

Then there was the waiting. Oh, the waiting. My husband was a rock. My family was loving and prayerful and concerned. My church shared hugs and prayers through the waiting.

But when the nights are dark and long and the questions continue to come, there is One who gives strength like no one else can. In moments like these when our faith is tested, we can truly find the source of our strength. For believers in Jesus Christ, we can rest in His protection. He is our shield. His power is beyond measure. His salvation is sure. We can run to him. He is a safe place.

I did have a lumpectomy with all results coming back clear. My dad recovered beautifully and was up preaching again in six weeks. I am

so grateful. I can audaciously sing along with David who declared these words after being rescued from all his enemies, "For this, O LORD, I will praise You among the nations; I will sing praises to Your name" (Psalm 18:49). Yes, Lord! I give you praise!

Have you ever noticed that throughout his life, David took time to give God praise even when things were not going his way? He praised in the middle of battle. He praised in the midst of super intense family struggles. He praised in the good times and in the bad times.

I love you, Lord; you are my strength. I acknowledge your power. You are my rock in the good times and in the bad. When the phone call strikes fear or when the results are clear, I give you praise. Lord, help us to praise you at all times and in all circumstances. Amen.

*Al'Lora Leonhardt
Fort Mill Church of God
Fort Mill, SC*

Rejoicing in Our Suffering

"...And we boast in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope." —Romans 5:2-3

At some point in our lives, we've all been there. We've all wondered, "Why me?" or "Why is this happening?" Either you have, you are, or you will experience storms in your lifetime. Whether they are like a light rain or a roaring tempest, these experiences are very real to you. When you face these storms, what is your response? Do you turn from God in anger, or do you run to Him to lift you up? My dear Christian sister, your suffering is not random or without purpose. It is meant to build trust in the Lord by forcing you to turn from your own understanding and place your trust in our Creator. The storm is meant to mold you in to who you are destined to be.

I have a friend who suffered greatly growing up. Her parents were physically and verbally abusive and addicted to drugs and alcohol. At times, the only thing she had to cling to was her faith and hope for the future. Those storms that she faced helped her become the person she is. God used her childhood to give her a unique perspective in order to help others overcome similar situations today. When the troubles of this world pound on

you, lean on our Lord and depend on His merciful, saving grace to get you through. When you submit to Him, He promises to guide you, to protect you, to be your refuge and your strength, and He will carry you through to the end. No matter what you are facing today, you can have confidence that God is in control, that you are exactly where you are meant to be. I once read that your sufferings have informed you, educated you, and helped you along in your journey. You may despise them, but these sufferings are yours. So try to find hope in your suffering today. It is designed to transform you in accordance with God's perfect plan for your life.

Father God, please help us to remember that you are in control. Remind us that we can trust in your love to carry us through every storm. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Leigha Taylor
First Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

Expect the Battle

“Finally, be strong in the Lord and in His mighty power. Put on the full armor of God, so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes.” —Ephesians 6:10-11

The “armor of God” may seem like a war-time uniform that Christians would pull out of the closet on days that a battle is coming. I challenge you to rethink that perspective. Each day we are at war with the enemy. He is at work looking for our areas of weakness. He will attack marriages, selfishness, and confidence. Wearing God’s armor makes it much more difficult for that attack.

If you were expecting snow, you would put on a coat. If you were going to the beach, you would take sunglasses and sunscreen. You need those resources. In your daily life, you need His armor.

Think about a soldier dressed in armor. From the outside, you don’t know what is underneath. You don’t know if that soldier is short or tall, has great hair, or is covered with pimples. God’s armor disguises our flaws and covers them in His promise.

What are the key components of the armor?

The belt of truth, which Satan hates, but God loves. The belt shows a soldier is ready for battle, just as truth surrounds our witness as Christians.

The breastplate of righteousness shields our heart from allowing

Satan to hold us hostage to guilt and shame from our sin. Jesus died on the cross to pay for our sins and when we accept Him as our Lord and Savior, we can be confident before God.

Our feet are prepared with the gospel of peace. You wear shoes to keep your feet from harm. We know there will be trouble on the path, but we are prepared as we live out the great commission and share His word.

The shield of faith—our faith gives us the ability to fend off attacks from any direction.

The helmet of salvation covers our minds from doubting the truth of God’s saving work for us.

So, put on His armor. Make it difficult for the enemy to attack. Gain God’s strength. Let the world see Him instead of you. Take comfort knowing you are not alone in the battle. You are protected by His armor.

Lord, Thank you for providing Your armor. Thank You for giving us protection from Satan’s lies and deception. Remind us each day that we are protected when we put on Your armor. Amen

*Ali Propst
First Bible Church
Decatur, AL*

Hope through Encouragement

“May our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and by His grace gave us eternal encouragement and good hope, encourage your hearts and strengthen you in every good deed and word.” —2 Thessalonians 2:16-17

Ever wonder why some people have a more positive outlook or why it appears that better things happen to everyone around you? Me, too! I would love to have the patience of some of the women around me. They literally act as if nothing is bothering them! I mean, we are women! We always have things on our minds!

Here is what we need to remember: in order to have hope in every day life, not only must we give our hearts and wills daily to the Father, but we must also give Him our minds and emotions. God doesn't want these things because He is controlling; He wants these things because He really does want what is best for us. He created us uniquely different from men and from each other, because He has a plan and a purpose for each of us. We can have daily hope because of His love. Even when things look as if they are falling apart and will never improve, we know that God wants to strengthen and encourage His children in all things. He doesn't expect perfection as we often believe. NO! God loves you for you. He wants to encourage your heart and consistently remind

you of your eternal hope in Christ Jesus. He wants to use everything you experience daily to strengthen you to walk closer to Him and to be a blessing to everyone around you.

You are special. You have a purpose. You have HOPE. Ask the Holy Spirit to be your guide today and help you find encouragement in everything you do and say. God does not disappoint.

Father, thank You for Your love, Your hope, and Your continuous encouragement. Help me to find the good in everyone and everything I see today. Help me to find encouragement for myself in the beautiful things You've created, as well as how You choose to use me for Your Kingdom. Lord, I specifically pray for the conference attendees, that they would find encouragement in your Word. In Jesus Name, amen.

*Amy Prater Hardin
Legacy Owensboro
Owensboro, KY*

Renewing Your Mind

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.” —Romans 12:2

In the 21st century, we have some incredible technology, but as with all good things, it is tainted with sin. Thus, we are constantly surrounded by social media that may have subtle influences over our minds. Open your Facebook newsfeed and you will find every opinion from how to define sexuality, to what your role as a woman is. But just as Paul admonished the first century Christians in Rome not to be conformed to this world, we must heed this warning as well. Be alert, dear sister!

What feeds your mind the most—the world’s opinions or God’s Word? In today’s passage, Paul encourages us to “be transformed by the renewal of your mind.” To do this, we must read His word daily. We can also pray Scripture. How powerful it is to pray a Psalm when we are at a loss for words! Thanks to technology, we can hear His word at any time as well. Sing Scripture! Singing can have a powerful effect on our minds and can even help us memorize Scripture. Write Scripture on cards and place them in areas you see often (in your mirror where you put your makeup on, in your car, in your office, or in the laundry room).

Doing these things will help you meditate on His word throughout the day, helping to renew your mind.

When we are renewing our minds regularly, we will be able to “discern what is the will of God” in all aspects of life. Are you struggling to know the Biblical approach to hot topics? Do you know how your role as a single, wife, or mom is supposed to mesh with your identity in Christ? Do you have bad relationships that need mending? Instead of turning to the world for answers, turn to the One who knows all. Then you will be able to consider every issue in light of the Gospel and know how to live as a Believer in this world.

Father, reveal to me where my thoughts are being influenced by the world and give me a strong passion to renew my mind by your word. Transform me, Lord. Amen.

*Emily McMath
First Baptist Church
Monroe City, MO*

No Fishing Allowed

“He will again have compassion on us, and He will subdue our iniquities. You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.” —Micah 7:19

I had gone too far. The baggage I was carrying was too much for the stowaway compartment and too immense to shove under the seat in front of me. Yeah, I had definitely done it this time. My heart was heavy-laden from the guilt and shame. How could God ever forgive me?

Corrie ten Boom states, “God has taken our sin. He has thrown it into the sea of forgetfulness, and He has posted a sign that says, ‘No Fishing Allowed.’”

Oh, that we may understand the “sea of forgetfulness” — it doesn’t have a “stowaway compartment” of unforgiven sin, or a “fishing hole” for retrieval. We should not choose to remember what God has forgotten.

If we ever reached the “depths of the ocean” that Micah spoke of, it’s highly doubtful that we would find all the sins that had been cast out by our Creator. The Word is striving only to express the depths that God has gone to rid His creation of our self-inflicted baggage. He has compassion, once again on us (as we have needed it before), and He has subdued our iniquities... He has placed the dominion of sin un-

der our feet. Under our feet, ladies!

God goes even further to persuade us of this promise of forgiveness in 1 John 1:9 that states, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

So rest in the promises of God, dear sister. Resist putting on that scuba gear or casting your fishing line, and allow your sin (baggage) to settle at the depths of the ocean, where God so adequately intended it, but not in your stowaway compartment.

Oh God, help us trust that when we fall at Your feet and ask for Your forgiveness, that You, in all Your greatness, forgive us, just like Your Word says. Give us the strength to turn from our sin, to stand on this knowledge, and to let go of our past inadequacies as we walk closer with You.

*Sara Hodge
Abundant Faith Church
Evansville, IN*

Forerunners

“We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf...” —Hebrews 6:19-20

At the crux of the Christian hope is this notion of Jesus as our forerunner (Hebrews 6:20), the one who blazes a trail through death with the anchor on whose chain we desperately cling. Yet what about Jesus’ forerunner, the one who blazed the trail for Him? What about John the Baptist, the one whose call to preparation still echoes in the deepest places of our souls? “With the spirit and power of Elijah”— I imagine John’s voice was so spine-tinglingly authoritative he could’ve summoned the rains in one breath and called down the fire of heaven in the next, a holy vortex indeed. Only this type of forerunner could have turned such stone-cold, wayward hearts back to God before the main event had even begun.

Yet as we anticipate the return of Jesus, the final redemption of creation and restoration of God’s beloved people, it seems we are now in the surprising, even mind-bending position of being Jesus’ forerunners ourselves, just like John was and just like Jesus is to us. How could we, the fair-weather receivers of His gospel, ever hope to emulate this commanding voice in the wilderness? How could we—the broken parents, the dis-

obedient children, the unwise and unrighteous—ever wholeheartedly proclaim, “Prepare ye the way of the Lord”? Well, we can because He already has. We are forerunners of grace and forerunners by grace.

In John 1:7, simple handles are put on this most daunting of tasks: “He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through Him.” We pull back the curtain of the yet-to-come kingdom of God when we bear witness to the ways in which the light of Christ has illuminated the dark auditoriums of our own souls. As we share our stories of grace in ordinary places—to ordinary people—it all becomes oddly sacred, and some who hear will find themselves for the first time amidst the wreckage of the holy chaos; and they will never be the same. Then we’ll all turn around together with bated breath, craning our necks toward the door in the back of the room, ready for Him to come, the One we’ve been waiting for.

*Katherine Wolfe
Hope Heals Ministry
Culver City, CA*

Promise-Keeper God

“God is not like people. He tells no lies. He is not like humans. He doesn’t change his mind. When He says something, He does it. When he makes a promise, He keeps it.” —Numbers 23:19

One of the greatest mistakes we can make in this life is somehow to compare God to man: compare God to us.

To do this is huge and costly because the concrete nature and character of Almighty God doesn’t come close to us—not even on our best day. We will end up selling Him short, denying His presence, and missing out on His power.

Maybe you wrestle with fully trusting God because man has lied to you. Maybe you feel insecure in your faith because you feel at any given moment God may pull back in His plan or purpose for your life. Because they disappointed you, maybe He will? Because they rejected you, surely He will, too? Man has betrayed and disappointed you far too many times, so you’re suspiciously waiting for God to do the same?

As a believer, God will never change His mind about you, friend. He will never cease to tell you the truth, never stop pursuing you, never stop caring for you, and never stop loving you.

Sovereign God will be faithful to keep every single promise that He has ever made about you. All those promises that were penned

so long ago are for you. What He vowed, He’ll make good—in His time and in His way.

In our great big world of chaos and disappointment, we can trust God. We can believe Him. God is every bit of who the Bible says that He is. Let’s never put Him on the same level or playing field as man. Others may fail us, and we may let them down. But God? He never will.

Christ is honest. Trustworthy. Never fickle or wishy-washy. He’s the most solid and sure, come-through-for-you person that you and I will ever know. All that He is, He is for YOU.

Father God, I confess that I have often compared you to man. I’ve allowed my disappointment with others somehow to affect my relationship with you. Help me see you for who you really are. Help me trust you with all of my heart. Thank you for your countless promises. I’m choosing to believe that you are nothing but true.

*Rhonda Weeks
First Baptist Church
Cleveland, TN*

Hope in the Mission

"After this I looked, and behold, a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and languages, standing before the throne and before the Lamb, clothed in white robes, with palm branches in their hands, and crying out with a loud voice, 'Salvation belongs to our God who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!'" —Revelation 7:9-10

Revelation 7:9 is a sweet promise.

Our hope in the mission is the promise that sin will be no more. This gospel will go forth to all the nations and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14). Wars will cease, racial tension will be no more, sin will no longer have any hold, and sickness and death will be eradicated when Jesus returns. We can have hope that there will be an end of everything the fall of man brought into being. Hope that in the new heavens and new earth all things will be made new.

Our hope in the mission is in the words "It is finished." This goal of getting the gospel to our neighbor, to our city, to the nations WILL HAPPEN! Jesus has already done the work to purchase His people from their sins. The payment He made on the cross sealed that deal. He will have his multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-language bride. What a beautifully diverse bride she will be!

Our hope in the mission is that Jesus has come, and He is coming back. This scene we read in Revelation 7 will come to pass. Hope of

all hopes! Things may look bad in the moment, but in the end Jesus wins. Salvation belongs to Him. He is worthy of our praise. Let us live in this hope, live out this hope, and share this hope with the hopeless around us.

Holy Spirit, help these truths to sink deep into our hearts. May we be freed by these truths to walk as Jesus walked and to go with Him on His mission. May knowing the happy ending encourage our hearts to have hope on the darkest days. Remind us of Revelation 7 when it feels as if we are losing a battle. Give us grace and boldness to take the gospel of Jesus to those around us. Thank you for letting us be a small part of your mission of reconciling the world to yourself. Give us a pure and holy passion to see Revelation 7 come to pass. May we know you and make you known. In Jesus Name, amen.

Janna Woodfall
Pleasant Valley Community Church
Owensboro, KY

Permanent Weight Loss

“Knowing this, that our old self was crucified with Him, that our body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin; for he who has died is freed from sin.” —Romans 6:6-7

Diet. What is your first reaction when you hear that word? Starvation? Depravity? Misery? Dread? Usually a negative connotation comes with the word “diet,” but the results of a diet are usually positive, especially when a shopping trip for new clothes is involved! Dieting for good health or weight loss involves putting off old habits and putting on new ones. We have all seen before and after pictures of someone who has lost so much weight that she is almost unrecognizable. Would it not be awesome if we could do the same with our spiritual “diets”?

What if we became unrecognizable from our pasts and truly understood what the Bible means when it says, “Our old self was crucified with HIM”? When Paul says, “Knowing this” he is referring to something that should be common knowledge to us, a knowledge that is part of who we are. It’s as if he’s saying to us, “duh!” He is trying to make us understand that we no longer are slaves to our old “Adam” nature; that nature is crucified—killed, done away with, annihilated—when we choose to become a Christ follower. Our body that was overweight and unhealthy from sin is gone! We are FREE from that

body FOREVER! Our “old self” has been rendered inoperative, invalid; it no longer has power or control over us. John MacArthur says, “Should no longer be slaves of sin” carries the extremely significant meaning ‘can no longer be slaves of sin.’” Wow!

Will we be perfect? No! When we diet, physically, are there times we “fall off the wagon” and have that piece of cheesecake, pint of Ben & Jerry’s, or entire bag of dill pickle chips? Absolutely! Do we stay there? No! We gain control, throw out the unhealthy, and pick up the healthy. When we spiritually “fall off the wagon” into temptation, we do not have to stay there. Satan is POWERLESS to draw us back into that “old self”; we are subject to God’s jurisdiction, not the Enemy’s.

Thank you, God, that as a believer I am no longer a slave to sin! I AM YOUR CHILD and FREE from sin!

*Carrie Wigton
Macedonia Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

In Our Father's Eyes

"I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in His holy people." —Ephesians 1:18

What a prayer this verse is for us. In today's world so many of us are running aimlessly to get children to the next event or to move up the career ladder. We are often too busy to focus on our one true purpose. We lose ourselves, and we lose what we consider "our worth". This verse reminds me clearly that this imperfect world is so temporary. It's quite simple—if we stop, open our eyes, and remain still, God will show us our value, our worth, and our purpose, because our worth is completely encompassed by Him. He has called us and created us for greatness in Him. He wants bigger spiritual blessings than we can fathom for ourselves. Jesus Christ's dying for our sins created our "worth". We serve God the Father, and He is such a Father. He has a forever home for us, and in this Scripture "glorious inheritance" is used to describe it. Inheritance in itself creates acknowledgement of family, and specifically in this Scripture, God's family. When our eyes and hearts are open to the hope that Christ offers us, we are in our purpose, will grasp our worth, will

love and serve God, and will love people and serve them according to our Father's plan. We cannot do enough to create our worth, so God sacrificed His one and only Son to save us from our sins. He thought us worthy enough to mold us in His perfect image; thus, we have eternal hope. Opened eyes, opened hearts, and accepting Jesus as our Savior create our calling, and He will provide great spiritual blessings for us as His children. He promises us a hope and a future.

Father, you are El Roi, the God who sees. Thank you for giving us the opportunity to see the hope that you offer each of us. We will fail, Father, but that does not devalue our worth in your eyes. Thank you for giving us hope by giving us Jesus on the cross to save us from our sins. Amen.

*Kimberly Saxon Bingham
Faith Community Fellowship
Trussville, AL*

Are You Worth It?

“The LORD values those who fear Him, those who put their hope in His faithful love.” —Psalm 147:11

Do you feel valued? Maybe you are divorced, lonely, or just stuck in the mundane of life. Sometimes we get bogged down with feelings of inadequacy. We feel as if we are not enough. We all struggle with being a good mom, spouse, friend, and employee. Sometimes we do it right, and sometimes we mess up. Does it make us worth less? When we put our trust in Him and fear (reverence) Him, we are so valuable to Him. Friend, you are a CHILD OF GOD. Nothing can take away your value from the LORD. Nothing can separate you from His love. After all, we are created in HIS image. We can't get more valuable than that!

I love the song that talks about being a “Child of God,” by Bethel Music. On so many days, we need to be reminded WHOSE we are. No matter what I face, I am HIS. I put my trust in Him, because He faithfully loves me. You see, earthly love fails us many times, but HIS love never fails or gives up on us. We can never earn grace or His love. He values us just the way we are.

There are days that I lose my cool

with my kids, days that I don't respect my husband, days when I forget to do something important that I should have done. There are days when my heart aches because I am lonely. I can start feeling like I am not valuable. I feel somebody could do it better than I do. Why did God place all these people in my life knowing I would mess up? He reminds me that my weaknesses are made perfect in HIM. Although I may fail, that doesn't change my value with HIM. He doesn't keep a tally and demote me. He says, “You are a child of God, and I still love you.” I can rest in His unconditional, perfect love.

Dear Jesus, thank you for loving me and seeing my worth. Thank you for your unconditional love that renews me every day. Help me to seek you at all times and put my hope and trust in you.

*Michelle Jessup
Asbury UMC
Madison, AL*

Shine Your Light

“Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in heaven.” —Matthew 5:16

Believers in Jesus Christ have this amazing blessing of being the light of the world! Do we live as if we are? The uniqueness of this blessing comes from Christ, the Light of the World. We are the light because we have The Light, Jesus. Ephesians 5:8 says, “For you were formerly darkness, but now you are light in the Lord; walk as children of light.” We can walk in the light knowing the darkness. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8). Believers came from darkness into light. Doesn’t that make our light even brighter? We should be excited about this light Christ has given us, and we should shine it brightly. But how are we called to shine this light?

As Christians, our light can shine in one of two ways—in a way that Christ is seen or in a way that we are seen. When we are seen in our light, we are glorified. Our testimony focuses on what we have done and all that we have accomplished. Church is about what we received from the service and if the worship touched us. We allow our light to shine before men in such a way

that they see our good works and glorify us.

Instead, Jesus tells us to shine our light for Him. When our light shines for Christ, it shines in such a way that when our good works are seen, our Father in Heaven is glorified, not us. When others see us, they see Jesus. They see Jesus in our actions, our words, our decisions, and our life. The focus of our life, everything that we do, should be focused on pointing others to Christ so that our Father in Heaven will be glorified. Being the light of the world is an honor; live it so that your Father will be glorified.

Dear Jesus, help us shine our light for You in a way that only our Father is glorified. When we are tempted to live in a way that our light glorifies ourselves, redirect our actions and thoughts to be focused on You.

*Amy Smith
First Baptist Church
Montgomery, AL*

Grief & God

"The LORD is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit."

—Psalm 34:18

The older I get, the more aware I am of death. It seems as if death has been such a theme around me lately—babies to miscarriage; parents/grandparents of friends and family to disease, complications, and suicide; and even a former high school teammate to cancer. Even though believers have the promise of heaven, life here is still hard.

My husband and I grieved back-to-back miscarriages in early 2016. Though we were already a family of four with two beautiful children, we desired more. And though the Lord is faithful and we are currently in our third trimester of pregnancy with a baby boy, I will always grieve the two babies we lost. Though my grief will not always be tear-stained pillows each night as it was early after experiencing those miscarriages, my heart will always possess the void that I longed for those babies to fill here with me on earth.

Where the vast majority of the Bible is God speaking to us, the Psalms are unique in that these are words God has given to us that we can communicate back to Him. The Psalms are filled with the authors expressing praise, fear, joy,

anger, love, discontent, thankfulness, and confusion... all the emotions that we experience as God's image-bearers. Psalm 34 conveys praise that the Lord answers us, saves us, hears us, and is close to us. Verse 18 specifically provides great comfort that I am not alone in my grief and that while my heart is broken there is One who is near: the Father.

For those who are followers of Christ, who have repented and believe in Jesus, we should grieve death, sin, and suffering because we understand that while there is good in this world, our world is broken and not as God originally designed. Yet take heart, dear sister, for Jesus acknowledged that in this world we will experience suffering, but He has overcome the world (John 16:33).

Lord, each of us carries some sort of grief. Help us to remember that You are near and that Your Son has overcome the world.

*Julie Dunn
First Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

We Must Persevere

“Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him.” —James 1:12

God never said it would be easy. Every day we face trials. They may be little or big. I face many small trials daily. One trial is anxiety. Different things trigger it, and there are times it consumes me. Another trial I face is anger. I let the little things bother me and continue to build until I explode. No one knows when or why. When I explode, I don't think straight and become mean and hurtful. A third trial I face is self-confidence. I don't like to step out of my comfort zone because I begin to doubt myself. When I was asked to write a devotion, I was very hesitant. I would think to myself “I can't do this!” or “Why would women attending the conference want to hear from me?” or “I don't know the Bible that well and I don't know what to write.” I thought I was off the hook until I received a text asking if I were still interested. Something was telling me that I needed to do this, so I said yes.

These small trials can be overwhelming. I want to fix it myself, but things become worse. When I begin to feel anxious, angry, or start to doubt myself, I have

learned to take a deep breath and pray to God. I can work out and be physically strong, but no one or nothing can give me the strength that God can. I must have faith and not doubt that He is there to provide me with strength and guidance to persevere through every trial I experience.

In James 1:2-3, James says, “Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith provides perseverance.” He goes on to say that through persevering we become more mature and complete.

Lord, may we be reminded that even during our small trials in life You are there. Help us to have faith and not doubt You because You will provide us with the strength and guidance we need to persevere.

Wendy Goss
First Baptist Church
Decatur, AL

Pressing in When the Wait is Long

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” —Jeremiah 29:11

Waiting is not what I want. Waiting can make me feel like my prayers are going unheard and unanswered. Waiting can also make me more prone to take things into my own hands to help make something happen sooner rather than later.

But God loves us too much to answer our prayers at any other time than the right time.

I love the encouragement we receive from a familiar passage in Jeremiah 29. The prophet Jeremiah wrote a letter containing a message from God to the Israelites who were living in captivity for seventy years in Babylon. The people waited and waited, hoped and lost hope, and surely felt rejected and forgotten by God.

Many of us know Jeremiah 29:11, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

But what we don’t often realize is these popular words of comfort and hope were given to those waiting in exile. Before God told them of the future hope they could count on, He told them He would

make good on His promise and bring them back to their homeland. Even though they weren’t seeing deliverance in that moment, God was urging His people to trust Him for what He would do.

Right after He soothes the peoples’ worries, He encourages them to press in to Him: to pray and seek Him. Sometimes we miss this part.

“Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” – Jeremiah 29:12-13

No matter how long the wait is or how rejected we feel, God wants us to press in. Just like with the Israelites, He’s waiting to be seen by us in the middle of our despair.

Seek Him. Seek His Word. Seek His ways. You will find Him!

Lord, I want to see You. Hear You. Follow hard after You even when the wait is long and the road seems hopeless. I love and trust You. Amen.

*Lysa TerKeurst
Proverbs 31 Ministries
Charlotte, NC*

Strength in God

*“But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory,
and the lifter of my head.” —Psalm 3:3*

When we envision God placing a shield around us, it often seems we are damsels in distress cowered down in a corner with God as our hero. And this is true! God is our hero! Yet, we are also called to be “strong in the Lord and the strength of his might” (Ephesians 6:10). The ways of this world have given us all the caricature that we are the underdog, but God sees so much more from us. Ultimately, Jesus is the only one to help us sustain the problems of this life. We seem to underestimate how often the Bible tells us to be strong and put on the armor of Christ. We are not always the victims of this world, as much as society wants women to believe. In every situation I have faced, it was evident when I had not placed my hope and trust in Jesus. Complaining, doubt, worry, and fear became strongholds. Our actions in tough situations can reflect our faith or lack thereof.

It is essential that we prepare ourselves daily as wives, mothers, and sisters in Christ to face life’s challenges with the armor of God (Ephesians 6:11-18). We have grown so accustomed to spending our time with friends and even in

women’s groups as a time to complain, often utilizing opportunities of a captive audience to explicate how badly we have been jilted. In these moments when we are spiritually weak, the Lord can lift our head so that we can keep our eyes on Him. Ladies, let’s face life’s uncertainty and tumultuous times with the strength of Christ, thriving in His glory.

Lord God, we thank You that You did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, love, and self discipline. We are grateful for the lessons that descend from life’s trials. They are often the times in our life where we finally come running to You. Please shield us so that we may be strong in striving to bring others to Your grace. I pray for the women of these conferences, that they would look to You as their shield and that you would strengthen them. Amen.

*Laura Castlen
Yellow Creek Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

Hope In Him

“The nations will put their hope in His name.” —Matthew 12:21

One of my family’s favorite praise songs is “Our God” by Chris Tomlin. Listening to my children’s sweet voices sing along to the lyrics “Our God is greater, our God is stronger, God, you are higher than any other,” is a daily reminder that He is worthy of our praise. God wants us to realize that He alone is God, and that He can do all things.

We don’t always understand why things happen: why sickness and cancer are too close to home, why certain public officials are elected over others to office, why there is persecution in so many places. Deuteronomy 29:29 tell us, “The hidden things belong to the Lord, our God, but the revealed things belong to us and our children forever.” Even though we may not understand the whys, God knows, and everything is for His glory.

Our nation is currently going through a great political divide. Riots and marches are making news headlines, as well as what our current elected officials are and are not doing right. God gives us governing authorities to help us, and the Bible teaches us that we are to respect our leaders. “Everyone must submit to the governing authorities for there is no author-

ity except from God, and those that exist are instituted by God” (Romans 13:1).

It is easy for us to rejoice or to become discouraged when elections for public offices are held. Ultimately, whoever is elected, God is still God. He is the great I AM. We are to trust in Him, and know that He knows what is best for us. Our faith and hope should be in Him, our Creator, our Heavenly Father. We are to hope in HIM. Not ourselves, not our leaders, but HIM.

Are you putting your hope in someone of this world, or are you putting your hope in Christ?

Heavenly Father, thank you for these wonderful women who will attend the conference. I pray they will put their hope in You, no matter what is going on in their lives. Help them to know that You love them and they are a part of your divine plan. Amen.

*Natalie Hinton
First Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

Light Overcomes the Dark

"But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him, on those whose hope is in His unfailing love." —Psalm 33:18

Have you ever endured trials and tribulations that have left you so burdened that you had a hard time speaking the name Jesus? "But the eyes of the Lord are on those who fear Him..." triggers thoughts of my own experiences of abuse and how the Lord has saved me from my own condemnation. How could I go back to bad situations if I truly love God? This question kept me further and further away from God. Satan takes us at our most vulnerable and makes us feel like the least worthy of love. A friend once reminded me that God does not condemn—the enemy does. Satan was using my failures to trap me in pain and bitterness.

I have had a hard time understanding what it means to fear the Lord. Because of condemnation, I equated fear with anything but love. When I struggled to speak with God, He still reminded me that this inner turmoil wasn't the way it had to be. Jesus wanted a relationship with me because HE breaks all chains. It was the loving conviction of Jesus on my heart that kept me turning back to Him. Notice I said conviction, NOT condemnation. Satan condemns so

he can keep us tangled in his web of bondage, but JESUS gave me the freedom to accept His voice of conviction, not as condemnation, but that of His unfailing love. There are no sweeter words than, "Amazing grace how sweet the sound, was blind but now I see."

Most gracious Father, I pray for every woman reading this devotion, as well as the women connected to the "Hope" conferences. We represent different generations, races, ethnicities, denominations, backgrounds, and circumstances, yet we all carry burdens too difficult to bear alone. We wear our scars and hold ourselves to standards that we cannot attain. Help us, Father, accept that even though we will sin, Your love for us is unwavering. Set us free from our bondage and give us peace knowing that our hope comes from Your unfailing love. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Meredith Crocker
First Wesleyan Church
Tuscaloosa, AL*

Producing Perseverance

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance.” — James 1:2-3

If God isn't surprised when we go through bad circumstances, then why should we be? He said we should consider it pure joy for our faith to be tested, so that our faith can produce perseverance. He tells us in James 4:6, “He gives more grace.” We receive more grace by having more faith, so our faith has to be tested to be strengthened. If God, the answer, existed before Satan—who is the problem—then we should realize that we have the answers before our problems exist. If we knew the outcome to everything, where would our walk of faith come in to play? We may not know how to handle trials, but He does.

When we persevere through a situation, we get to experience God on a new level. As a Christian, I have always heard about the, “peace that surpasses all understanding” (Philippians 4:7).

I never truly knew of that peace until I experienced—what I believe so far—was the worst storm of my life. My three-year-old son was full of energy and seemed to be perfectly healthy until he became deathly sick with Hepatitis

A. He went into acute liver failure and was placed #1 on the nationwide transplant list! Had I not had my faith tested, I would have never experienced the peace of God that is truly indescribable. Thankfully, we did make it through to the other side of that storm through prayers and Jesus Christ. God honors those who, by His grace, rise above circumstances and shape them for His glory. He never promises us that once we give our life to Him, that life will be a calm, easy task. God wants us to use every situation, good or bad, to glorify Him. Therefore, when we do that, we grow with Him spiritually to become more mature in Christ. And that is worth the perseverance.

Dear Lord, I pray that when my faith is being tested that I won't worry about the outcome; rather, that I will rejoice in Your Name through the storm. Amen.

*Hannah Cornelius
Altoona, AL*

Forgiveness Restores

*"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted,
forgiving one another as God in Christ forgave you."
—Ephesians 4:32*

I'd like to think that I am kind, tenderhearted, and forgiving; but the truth is, many times I am not. I have a daughter who is more like me than I'd care to admit...she looks like me, acts, laughs, talks, and even needs to get in the last word like I do. Our similarities cause us to have runs-ins. I recall a day of schooling when I scolded her for not knowing the answer to a question. I said things like, "Why don't you know this?! You should know this stuff!" Her response was, "I just don't know it! Are you saying that I'm not smart?" Her words crushed me because I was neither kind nor tenderhearted in my actions toward her, and it made her feel insecure. Though I did not intend to tear her down, that's exactly what I was doing.

The fact that I am a sinner means that I don't always act like my Father in Heaven, and for this very reason, I need forgiveness. Although my daughter resembles me, she is an image-bearer of God and should be treated as such. In that moment, the Holy Spirit allowed me to see my sin through my daughter's words. I was immediately moved by grace to apolo-

gize to both my daughter and the Lord.

In our home there is a process to forgiveness ... we apologize for the specific sin we committed and the offended person immediately accepts by saying, "I forgive you." Forgiveness is received with a hug. After my apology, my daughter gave me huge hug! When I speak to my daughter, she should be a recipient of grace, because I am a recipient of grace. This means that we have to die daily to ourselves looking solely to Jesus Christ. God's love for us is unconditional and the very foundation for our forgiveness. No matter what our offense or how long we have been away, God is waiting with loving open arms.

*Father God, thank you so much
for your forgiveness in spite of my
many failures! Lord help me to be
kind and tenderhearted, but when
I'm not, give me the grace to ask
humbly for forgiveness.*

*Dar-Isha Bishop
Forest Baptist Church
Louisville, KY*

All-You-Can-Eat (But Not a Buffet!)

“Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions.” —2 Timothy 4:2-3

I love a good breakfast buffet. It’s entertaining for me to watch the people around me formulate their perfect plate—no two people choosing the same combination on any given day. My husband most likely will pile up omelets, sausage, and pastries galore—no doughnut left untouched.

I, on the other hand, tend to stick with the more traditional, “eggs, bacon, fruit, toast” kind of route. I guess you could say I like to play it safe.

I think Paul, the writer of our Scripture, and I will get along really well. He’s a, “don’t beat around the bush” kind of guy; and this is a, “don’t beat around the bush” exhortation. Paul gives us a clear warning here. He tells us there will be a time when people will prefer to hear the things they want to hear instead of the Truth. He tells us there will be a day when instead of being served up the Gospel of Jesus Christ, people will want to pick and choose the aspects of the Gospel that they prefer: a buffet line, if you will.

Friends, I believe we are living in that time now. It’s so easy to find a

pastor, teacher, leader, church that seems to focus on aspects of the Gospel that make sense to us. Yet, a Gospel that doesn’t tell the whole story isn’t a Gospel at all, which explains why studying God’s Word in its entirety (yes, including Leviticus!) is key. Every single chapter, word, and sentence included in the Holy Bible is there for a reason that only God specifically knows, yet we must trust it is included for our utmost good and His glory.

May we be women who choose to say yes to all the gracious promises and convictions that the Spirit puts on the table—regardless of our own personal promises and preferences. Sausage and pastries included.

Lord, we love you. We want truly to know You. Help us to be women who long not only to hear the Gospel, but also receive it. May we display Your glory in all that we think, say, and do. In Jesus’ name, amen.

*Morgan Cheek
Church at Brook Hills
Birmingham, AL*

The Command to Remember

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”

—Joshua 1:9

Oftentimes, as we read this verse, we hone in on “be strong and courageous” and “God is with you wherever you go.” I’m most encouraged, though, by the question that the Lord leads out with...“Have I not commanded you?” The Lord, valuing relationship above all, is reminding Joshua of the past: God’s provisions and judgments against the Israelites.

The Lord, being gracious as He is, is reminding Joshua of the obedience and courage that he exhibited when asked to spy out Canaan. Also, He warned that the doubters and giants that existed then would inevitably exist again; however, the Lord’s deliverance was certain. The Lord’s command remained: lead Israel to the land of milk and honey. As Joshua assumed the mantle of leadership, he simply needed to be reminded of what God had already done: both for and against them.

See, sister, the Lord wants you to inhabit the Promised Land. You may be like Joshua and need affirmation to be strong in your home, work, or ministry. The Lord longs to encourage you to do His work and sometimes He does that by reminding you of what He has done in your life. You may also be like the Israelites, with countless doubts and fears about the future.

Perhaps you’re living with consequences after some bad decisions. The Lord longs to encourage you as well today through reminders and often even by the faith of others. My encouragement to you is to learn from Joshua’s example, the Israelites’ mistakes, and the Lord’s promises for all.

Look back upon things that the Lord has commanded you. Recall whether you obeyed or lived in fear. Then, regardless of how you responded, give praise that God has delivered you and surrender your doubts in those situations and the consequences that you have lived in—good or bad.

Be reminded, be encouraged, refuse to be afraid of what God has for you and claim your Promised Land today. It will require you to be “strong and courageous,” and you’ll have the Father “with you wherever you go.”

Father, remind your daughters this day of your love, strength and never-ceasing presence.

Theresa Stier
Central Baptist Church
Decatur, AL

Light Shines in the Darkness

*“The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness has not overcome it.”*

—John 1:5

My husband and I have been married for nearly seventeen years. We have six beautiful daughters, live on a mini-farm, serve the Lord together at church and in our community, and are best friends with each other. It’s a pretty dreamy life. From the outside, it appears as though we have it all. This wasn’t always the case.

We were spiritually and emotionally unprepared for marriage. When we had been married for one year and he fell from the pedestal I had placed him on, I didn’t really know where to turn. I didn’t understand why the Lord would allow me to be hurt so badly and why my dreams were shattering. I felt like a failure and was embarrassed. I considered divorce. Then the Lord began to shine light.

God began revealing that my worship had been misplaced all along. My husband was very much human, prone to sin, and therefore a lousy target of my worship and adoration. My relationship with the Lord was merely intellectual and stagnant. Though we looked good from the outside, our spiritual life was a flimsy facade and crumbling fast. We both realized

our need for a Savior and for a relationship with Jesus.

With Jesus as the light in our darkness, my husband and I began to watch Him rebuild our marriage. I’ve watched the Lord transform my husband in to a man who loves Jesus passionately and serves his family faithfully. I’ve watched the power of God shine light on others’ marriages as well. When I’m obedient to share as God leads, my story of redemption brings hope to others who are struggling—light shining in the darkness.

Jesus, thank you that you ARE light. Shine light into our hidden places, Lord. Bring others to the light for your glory. There is no darkness—no shame, guilt, or condemnation—where we allow your light to shine. You’re so very faithful. We’re so very grateful. In the name of Jesus, the Redeemer and the Light of the World. Amen.

*Katie Braddock
Central Baptist Church
Decatur, AL*

Our Living Hope

“Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In His great mercy, He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you...” —1 Peter 1:3-4

My youngest child was born under very difficult circumstances, which included prematurity, an emergency C-section, significant blood loss to an already tiny baby girl, days on a ventilator, and the news from doctors of significant brain damage. My husband and I prayed, pleaded, and cried out to our Lord for healing with the hope that He would grant our most desperate plea.

Nine years later, our most merciful and gracious Lord has taught us and showed us through this beautiful girl about the “living hope” He offers freely. A “living hope” is not circumstantial, based on feelings or contingent on emotions that can change from moment to moment because of our circumstances. This hope that Christ offers does not shift or change based on our expectations of Him and what we want or desire.

The Hope we have in Christ Jesus is alive because our Savior conquered death. Our hope is, therefore, imperishable, never-ending, steadfast, secure, and unchanging. The hope this world offers us is temporary, unstable, inconsistent, and constantly shifting. Allowing our hope to be caught up in what the world holds most dear will

leave us disappointed, dissatisfied, and continuously searching. In this world, we will find that jobs, money, fame, and possessions are all uncertain, momentary, and disposable.

Christ, once and for all, showed us how He feels about us by dying for us. With every lash of the whip we were on His mind; with the pounding of every nail, the redemption of sin poured out; He drank every drop of the bitter cup before Him because of love, indescribable love. The resurrection is our hope. He is our living hope. As our passage says, we cry out, “Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!”

Father God, we thank You for Your love that is poured out on all of us. We praise You and thank You for the living hope we have in the resurrection of Christ Jesus. God, continue to teach us and show us that our worth is found in You, our hope is in Your Son Jesus, and our security is in our ever-present Lord and Savior. Amen.

*Amye McManic
First Baptist Church
Trussville, AL*

House of Refuge

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.” —1 Timothy 6:17

“Daddy, Joyce was talking with that old man again. They were courtin’ on a cotton sack,” has always been one of my favorite lines from my parents’ love story. My mom and dad married and built a small house. They had always worked hard, and we had everything a youngster needed growing up. My brother and I were taught to share with others what we had. I can remember as a child always having someone living with us. We were never just a family of four; it was always more. There were relatives, friends, and strangers. Our home became their refuge. Momma made sure everyone was welcome, and no one ever felt left out or went hungry. As I aged, my mom acquired a better job. Soon after that, my dad fell ill and passed away. I thought that my mom would purchase the house of her dreams and save her money. Those things never came to pass; she seemed to look for ways to spend her wealth on others. I could not understand why she was giving it all away. When she was approaching the last days of her life, I began to see that Momma’s treasures were not stored up in this world,

but in the Kingdom of God. Her life had been lived in a way so that many lives were touched by her kindness and hospitality. They knew she loved them because she loved God. Before she passed away, she had the privilege to see many put their trust in Christ. Mom found joy in sharing her blessings with others. You also have the opportunity to take your talents and the provisions God has blessed you with to share the hope of Jesus while storing your treasures in heaven.

I praise you, Lord, for all your blessings. I know that everything I have is because of you. Please help me not to hoard up for earthly gain. Help me to share what I have so that you will be glorified and that I will always find my hope only in you. In the mighty name of Jesus, amen.

*Veronna Keen
Westmeade Baptist Church
Decatur, AL*

Practicing Trust

***“The man who trusts in the Lord,
whose confidence indeed is the Lord, is blessed.”***

—Jeremiah 17:7

My son is six and learning to read. According to him, he can't read. He gets frustrated when he doesn't know a word and wants to quit. I remind him of how much better he reads now than he did just six months ago. He just needs more practice and encouragement. Soon, he will be reading without even knowing it. Hopefully, he will always come across words he doesn't know so that he will keep growing.

I am a lot like my son. I want to trust in the Lord and be blessed. Every day, I practice trusting in the Lord. And every day there are situations when I don't know how to do that. I practice trusting God to help my child overcome anxiety. I practice trusting God to help me keep my strong will from creating problems in my marriage. I trust God to help me go against my introverted nature to share His love with others.

This hasn't always been easy for me, and there were many days when I chose not to practice this. I was blessed to have a friend who disciplined me, encouraged me, and taught me to use Scripture and

prayer to trust in the Lord more.

Are you trusting in the Lord for this day? Maybe you need to practice for just this hour, or this minute. If you are able to trust Him today, maybe it's time for you to help someone else learn to trust Him.

...“Lord, I believe; help my unbelief.” (Mark 9:24)

Father, I pray that today you will help me practice trusting in you. Help me trust you this hour, this moment. Give me the desire to study your Word so that when I am weak I can rest in the knowledge of your strength. I lift up the women of these conferences to you. Open the hearts of each attendee to hear Your Word. Call unbelievers to trust in You for the first time. For believers, I pray You would strengthen their trust in Your Word. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Amy Burgan
First Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

Allowing God to Be in Control

“But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.” —Matthew 6:33-34

In October of 2015, I learned I had until the end of the year to find another position within the company or I would be terminated. I began stressing about how I was going to fix this. I was offered this present job before I had graduated, but now I was being terminated. I thought I would be a disappointment to my husband, our families, and our friends. Finding a new job and dealing with the stress of it caused me to lose sleep and experience panic attacks.

God specifically calls us in Matthew 6:33-34 to seek Him and His righteousness and to not worry about tomorrow. How was I supposed to do that? I had to figure out how my husband and I were going to pay our bills. It was during the Connecting Women’s Conference in November of 2015 that I realized God was in control of my life, but I had to let Him be in control of my heart in order for me to find the blessing in this situation. I sought out a friend to pray with me during that conference, and she helped me truly to seek out God and ask Him to take control

of my heart and our family. That weekend, I found the peace to stop worrying about the future and seek God and His goodness every day. In the past year, I was able to find a job, we bought a house, and we joined a new church where my husband and I help with Sunday school and lead praise and worship. God is at work in our lives, and we are loving every minute.

Father, help us to place our worries at your feet. Help us remember you are all-knowing, all-powerful, and that worry is time wasted when we should be glorifying you. I pray that your presence will be found each and every day as we seek to find you and your goodness in our lives. May you control our hearts and our lives. We thank you for your grace and mercy along the way. In Jesus’ name, amen.

*Gabrielle Prevette
White Plains Missionary Baptist Church
White Plains, KY*

The “One Thing”

“Therefore, go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age.”

—Matthew 28:19-20

My first job was being an elementary music teacher. I was completely overwhelmed by the amount of information that students needed to learn and the short amount of time we had together. I would see them at the most forty times a year, so to give the children some clarity of the main concepts, I started a practice as they lined up at the end of class. I would remind them of the “one thing” that summarized what we had done that day. If they remembered only these things over the limited time we had together, they would hit the main objectives of the curriculum.

So here we are with Jesus as He is leaving his eleven disciples after years of ministry together— so many lessons and parables as well as discipline, friendship, and encouragement. And now, His final moments with them. He is sharing His “one thing”. When first looking at this passage, I see “go” along with the phrase “to every nation”. My mind goes to the many messages that I have heard preached on this passage and how I have been so inspired to “go”. “Go” out of my comfort zone, “go” out of my church, “go” out of my city to share

with those who don’t know about the love of Jesus.

But today as I read this passage of Scripture, the one command that stands out to me is “make disciples.” In the time when Jesus was telling them to go and share the gospel to all the nations, it would have been clear that they needed to go far and wide sharing this new message. He seems to be saying, “as you go, make disciples. Once they have believed and been baptized, help them to live a life that brings honor to Me.” Making disciples takes time and relationship. So “go”, be with people, and make disciples.

Lord, help me to live a life with others that speaks louder than my words— a life that reflects who You are and how You have changed me. I pray for the women of this conference, that believers would obey your call to make disciples.

Shawn Clifton
Bridgepointe Church
Owensboro, KY

Worship that is Pleasing to God

“You shall have no other gods before me.”

—Exodus 20:3

The children of Israel had seen the mighty works of God as He ushered them out of captivity in Egypt. He abundantly protected and provided for them on their journey through the wilderness, yet how quickly the Israelites distrusted God! He was poised to bring them into a good land and gloriously presented them with guidelines for consistent devotion to the one true God in the form of the Ten Commandments. Scripture tells us, “When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance” (Exodus 20:18). God’s fireworks must have been a sight to behold! Yet almost immediately, God’s chosen people fell into forgetfulness.

That stubborn strand of DNA, which stretches from the obstinate Israelites into 21st century humanity, makes keeping the first commandment difficult indeed. Often, the things we presume to be significant are not at all what God considers important. And yet, the Bible tells us if we seek God above everything else, the essential matters of living will take their rightful place.

Jesus expounded on the first commandment as He faced Satan’s temptations when He said, “Wor-

ship the Lord your God, and serve Him only” (Matthew 4:10). Keeping this commandment is not only about false idols and pagan worship, but also about our piteous tendency to put human wants and desires above God’s love, laws, and prescription for living. Fundamentally, life is all about priorities. The habits that fill our precious days, the manner in which we spend our hard-earned money, and the activities we deem significant speak volumes about whom, or what, we are serving.

Ultimately, does it matter who the Lord of your life is? Absolutely! It is the difference between blessings and futility, between clarity and confusion, between life and death, between heaven and hell. God wants our total devotion. The unfathomable benefit is that He gives us His love, protection, and direction in return.

Help us, Lord, to love and worship you above all else, so that every part of our lives is consumed by you.

Mary Ruth Wolf
First Baptist Church
Montgomery, AL

Finding Hope in My Weakness

“My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness. Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.” —2 Corinthians 12:9

I am sure there are not many people who want to boast about their weaknesses. I have been weak so many times and brought to my knees in my life. God is really the only one I want to know about those times, but He wants me to share those times with others to help bring them hope. I can say during those times I felt God’s grace and His loving arms wrapped around me.

Sitting beside a deathly ill child can surely make a person weak and vulnerable; it is in those moments that God will show you just how mighty He is. Those are the times when all hope seems lost. It may even be a little like hell: the ache in your heart knowing that your sweet baby’s time is drawing near... thinking about what could have been... the memories you could have shared... what she could have been as she grew up. These thoughts can take your breath away, almost devour you, and swallow you up whole. But then there is this light— this light called hope that causes you to picture her healthy and happy and in the arms of Jesus. You realize in that moment that God’s grace

allowed you to spend the time you had instead of having no time at all. His grace allowed you to make relationships that will last a lifetime, and most importantly, it allows me to share God’s love and the hope I have in Him with others. Hope is knowing that heaven awaits me, and that in my weakness, God has made me stronger.

So, do I want to boast about my weaknesses? Absolutely! I will shout it from the rooftops if it means bringing hope to someone else. God’s grace is sufficient, and my hope lies in Him.

Dear Lord, thank you for your daily grace even when I don't deserve it. Thank you for the difficult times in my life when I can cling to you and your mercy. Thank you for my weaknesses that I can use to spread your love to others to give them hope. Amen.

*Kristi Hayden
Bellevue Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

When My Hope Changed

*“As for me, I will always have hope;
I will praise you more and more.” —Psalm 71:14*

“Baby, I’m so proud of you.” My husband’s voice interrupted my prayers as I waited for the biopsy to begin. I peeked over at him with surprise and asked what he meant. He said, “The biopsy is over and you never even flinched!” I was stunned. As I lay there enveloped in the Lord’s presence, I had not heard the doctor come into the room or felt anything at all. I arrived at the appointment hoping the mammogram results were false, and though the biopsy confirmed the malignancy, I walked out of that visit with a new sense of hope for physical healing and a blossoming relationship with my Savior.

Throughout my battle with cancer, the Lord was with me, giving me just enough strength to face each challenge. My faith continued to grow as He faithfully showered me with grace. Shortly after completing treatments, I was asked to give my testimony at our church choir event. Having never done so in front of a crowd, I was apprehensive. My heart was pounding as I took the microphone, but the Holy Spirit quickly took over as I began to speak. I have very little recollection of what I said that day,

except for one thing. I remember declaring, “I know that no matter what cancer does to my body, I’m going to be okay, because God loves me so much that He sent His one and only Son to die for me so that I would have eternal life, forgiven of my sins and free of sickness.” I walked off the stage with a changed heart and new understanding of eternal hope.

Cancer was the hardest season of my life. Looking back, I see that as I clung to hope for physical healing, Jesus was teaching me to have joy in suffering (1 Peter 1:6), praise Him in all circumstances (Psalm 34:1), and trust Him for every need (Isaiah 41:10). The spiritual healing I received enabled me to embrace the true meaning of hope and find purpose in pain.

Father, thank you for everlasting hope. May your joy shine through me as I sing Your praises, telling others of Your faithfulness.

*Kimberly Vernetti
Westmeade Baptist Church
Decatur, AL*

Love Wins

*“Three things that will last forever—faith, hope, and love
—and the greatest of these is love.” —1 Corinthians 13:13*

Love never gives up. The Truth will set you FREE.

These verses played on repeat in my mind over a period of three years after a friendship came crumbling down like an avalanche.

We had met our freshman year of college and immediately became best friends and remained close well into our 30's. Our relationship possessed trust and openness, making it easy to communicate and feel secure. In all those years, we rarely argued, and if we did, it was over quickly. You get the picture.

A few years ago, an unfortunate situation unfolded between us, due to miscommunication and misjudgments, causing our friendship to be divided painfully. Three long, isolating, and confusing years of separation tormented my soul and broke my heart into a thousand pieces. This was the first major disagreement we encountered, and it quickly ripped us in half. Why did this happen? What am I supposed to do?

Incidents like these are hurtful and confusing at the same time. When God's children experience suffering and pain, He is near and can use it for His purpose. As difficult as this situation was for me, I never gave up.

A year into this situation, God gave me a glimpse of HOPE. I knew God's Word was true and that He can be trusted regardless of the circumstances (Hebrew 10:23). God began speaking to me and consistently showing me a peaceful restoration between us. Although my mind didn't understand, apparently my spirit did. I understood my assignment was to pray for my friend and believe that His TRUTH and LOVE would bring restoration and set us FREE. Finally, after the end of the third year, God restored our friendship and set us FREE!

When life drops heavy boulders in your path that may seem impassable, always remember this: God is faithful and can be trusted. His love prevails.

Dear God, remind me that your WORD is alive and true. Help me to understand your timing is always perfect. Teach me never to give up, especially during the dry seasons of life. Use these situations to increase my faith in you. Thank you for being my rock during the storms.

*Beth Eaton
Church of the Highlands
Birmingham, AL*

Kingdom Minded

“Show me your ways, Lord, teach me your paths. Guide me in your truth and teach me, for you are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” —Psalm 25:4-5

“Home is where the heart is.” When people say this, they are usually referring to a physical house. It makes us think of a familiar place: a place in which we have invested a lot of our time and money. My question for you today is, “Where is your heart?” Is it rooted in the material things of this world, like your house, car, or money? Is your heart holding on to how people perceive you as a wife, mother, or daughter? Or, is your heart consumed by another person? Jesus tells us, “Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be” (Matthew 6:21).

How do we line our desires up with a holy God? First, we need to spend time reading His Word and praying, and then we need to start thinking “kingdom minded”. I like to define kingdom mindedness as focusing our mind on God’s kingdom in such a way that it affects our desires and the way we live each day.

When I start comparing my life to others or feel myself wanting more of something that I know I should be satisfied with, the Lord reminds

me that I am not of this world. He says that we are his children and the only approval we need is His. He made us perfect through the blood of Jesus Christ. One day the things of this world will fade away, and there we will be, face to face with our Maker. On that day, it will be revealed where our hearts truly were. So yes, home is where the heart is, and our hearts should be in the Kingdom of God.

This world isn’t all there is, sisters! We have the promise of eternal life!

Jesus, focus our hearts and minds, as women of God to be kingdom minded. Remind us daily that this world is not our home and give us the strength to live out our faith in a way that will draw people to you. Teach us your ways, Lord, for they are not like our ways. I pray this in your holy name. Amen.

*Sam Brand
Crossroads Christian Church
Newburgh, IN*

We Will Get Through This

"For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!" —2 Corinthians 4:17

Christmas 2016, I sat in a hospital room by my mother's side. Mom had been fighting cancer for over five years. Sitting at her bedside, I found myself saying the words she had quoted to me in the past during times of adversity: "We will get through this."

Mom was an example of hope and the meaning of those words—"we will get through this." On my visits home, I would find Mom in the early morning hours sitting in her favorite chair or on the front porch with her hot tea, Bible, and journal in hand. She began her day with her Father. Mom would put all that was on her mind at the feet of Jesus.

Instead of focusing on all that was going on during this fight with cancer, Mom chose to focus on God, the blessings He had for her each day, and on others and their needs. When others encountered her, she would immediately ask how they were doing.

Mom was constantly encouraging others during a time when she had every right to be discouraged. Yet, she chose to smile and seek God's blessings in all situations placed before her. She knew that no matter the outcome that this fight

given to her was only temporary.

Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 4:17, "For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!"

Today, some of you are in the midst of some sort of battle. I encourage you to imprint the words of Paul on your heart and seek God and His blessings. Those moments you feel discouraged will fade when you change your focus to knowing that God is your hope. Hear God whisper these sweet words into your ear—"We will get through this."

Father God, we give you thanks and praise for the promise of hope that you give us in your WORD. In the midst of life's battles, may we remember to seek your blessings. Through your WORD, give us the blessed assurance of hope and victory. In Jesus' name, amen.

April Hawkins
Macedonia Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY

Surrounded by God

“You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.” —Psalm 16:11

Fear is something we all struggle with. Our fears can take many forms varying from the fear of flying, to public speaking, to experiencing a loved one battling a life-threatening illness.

David wrote Psalm 16:11 in a fearful situation. He was on the run because Saul and his army were trying to kill David. Funny thing is you don't sense fear reading this verse. Why is that? What was in David's heart that made him so calm and trusting when he was surrounded with a price on his head?

Reading Psalm 27:13-14, we start to understand. “I would have despaired unless I believed I would see the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living. Wait for the Lord. Be strong and let your heart take courage. Yes, wait for the Lord.”

There is much wisdom about dealing with fear packed in this one verse. Despite his circumstances, David is confident in who God is and in God's plan for his future. David sees God's guidance in his life. His focus is not on his circumstances. His focus is on God's sovereignty.

That's what we want. We want to face fear with a peace, knowing

that God is in control. I love this quote by Levi Lusko: “God wants us to understand that the thing that has us surrounded is itself surrounded by God. So it always is.” David knew this when he wrote Psalm 16:11. He could focus on God's wisdom and joy because he knew his pursuers were surrounded by God. As a result, David was experiencing the goodness of God in the middle of a fearful situation.

When we are facing fearful times, we need to lock in on God's Word. Total dependence on His Word should be our oxygen. We can fully trust that He has surrounded whatever has surrounded us.

Father, thank you for understanding our fears and that we are never alone when walking through fearful times. Help us to lock in on the truth of Scripture and totally depend on you. Thank you that our fears draw us to deeper dependence on You and that we can fully trust You. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Stephanie Battle
Church at Brookhills
Birmingham, AL*

Seeing Our Work as God's Work

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth." —2 Timothy 2:15

What kind of worker are you? Whether we work at home or in the marketplace, we all work at something. The way we work says a lot about what we believe.

In today's passage, Paul gives Timothy some instructions about work. Let's unpack it.

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved..." Your work is a reflection of your relationship with God. Whether we spend our day wiping little bottoms or creating spreadsheets, we work to present ourselves to God. God requires nothing less than our best. Will we live up to this every day? Of course not. But we still get up each morning with the intention of giving our best work as an offering to God.

Paul goes on to tell Timothy what it means to be "one approved" – to be "a worker who does not need to be ashamed." If Jesus were to walk into your home or office today, would you be ashamed to let Him look through your cabinets or computer files? Would you be embarrassed for Him to read the texts you send or the phone calls you make? We are called to live and work in a way that does not bring shame to our witness for Christ.

Finally, we are to "correctly handle the word of truth." As we work as women approved by God, we are to represent God's Word correctly. We live in a sinful, upside-down, mixed-up world. We need to be sure that we are representing God's Word and His principles faithfully. We speak the truth of Scripture regularly and boldly, even when it is unpopular.

How we live and work matters to God. I encourage you to live as if your work is Kingdom business—because it is.

Father, thank You for the work You give us to do, as wives, moms, sisters, executives, teachers, chefs, and more. Help us to live faithfully in the work to which You have called us. Give us Kingdom opportunities today to share Your gospel with a needy and dying world. Give us boldness as we go and grace to start again when we fail. In Jesus name, amen.

*Beth Holmes
Yellow Creek Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

Weak Made Strong

“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” —Psalm 73:26

Some days, my flesh and my heart wear out while training to run, but there is another type of exhaustion that exceeds that physical tiredness I experience on the track. Six years ago, I watched my daddy’s flesh and heart wear out. Being seven months pregnant and a broken-hearted daddy’s girl, I thought I could let my flesh and heart wear out then and there with him. Praise God for the second half of Psalm 73:26, “but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” He remains that same portion for my daddy who—I am confident—is in His presence for eternity. God remained my strength through the remainder of my pregnancy and even through the birth of our third child. Talk about a time when your flesh wears out— pregnancy, labor, and delivery.

Some days when I’m stressed, I need a bigger portion of ice cream to get me through. I pray that we hunger for an ever-increasing portion of our Savior. Praise Him that He is infinite and more than we can ever need or want. He will be glorified in our weakness, and He will deliver us from our current battle. In the book of Habakkuk,

Habakkuk had been wrestling with God as he observed injustice and suffering around him. In these difficult times, we must determine to be like Habakkuk who sought out and waited expectantly on the Lord: “I will take my stand at my watchpost and station myself on the tower, and look out to see what he will say to me, and what I will answer concerning my complaint.” (Habakkuk 2:1)

Dear Jesus, fill our cup with more of You. Overflow our lives with Your grace and mercy. We kneel at Your feet with an aching heart and a worn-out body. We long for the day of standing whole and new in Your presence. Until that time, we trust that You will be our strength. Lord, we humble ourselves before You. Forgive us of our pride as we believe we are capable of accomplishing anything without You. May You be seen and glorified through our weakness.

*Hope Neel
Bellevue Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*

Esperanza

“The Lord is my portion and my inheritance,” says my soul; “Therefore I have hope in Him and wait expectantly for Him.” —Lamentations 3:2

Being bi-lingual, I’ve always loved looking at the word “hope” in the Spanish language. The words “to hope for”, “to wait for” and “to expect” have different meanings in English; but in Spanish, they are the same verb, “esperar”.

I’ve often envisioned “hoping” much like waiting at the bus stop. I know the bus is coming, I expect the bus to come, so I wait for it to arrive. And I wait, still. As I read God’s word, I am given promises, assurances, and expectations. I know His Word is true; so I wait, as I expect Him to fulfill His word.

At the bus stop, I wait most likely because I’ve caught that same bus before and probably because I’ve become familiar with the bus schedule. Similarly, I encourage myself when I am hoping for my prayers to be answered, since I have experienced answers to other prayers many times. And as I read God’s Word, I see that He is faithful to perform it. I expect Him to come to my rescue!

If you really needed to get somewhere, wouldn’t you continue to wait for the bus, even if it began to rain, or if the temperature rose to uncomfortable heat? You would,

because you know that in time the bus will come and take you to your destination.

Are the storms of life raining on your hope? Is the heat of trials causing you to sweat profusely? Are you uncomfortable? Don’t despair, sweet sister. Wait. Expect. Don’t lose HOPE. The Psalmist said, “I wait for the Lord, my soul waits, And in His word I do hope.” (Psalms 130:5).

As you hope for your portion—and your inheritance—be patient. Wait and expect, because as our Spanish-speaking sisters know, hoping, waiting, and expecting are almost the same.

*Lord, I will wait on your promise.
I expect you to come to my rescue.
I know that as I hope in you, I will
not be disappointed. Encourage
my spirit as I weather this storm. I
know you will carry me to the ap-
pointed destination. Amen.*

*Brigitte Cook
Legacy Church
Owensboro, KY*

Sacred Words of Light, Love, and Life

“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up.” —James 4:10

As we gather before our Maker this morning, I invite you, sister in Christ, to ask our Father to help us digest these sacred words of His wisdom.

Philippians 2:8-9 blesses us with these words about Jesus, “and being found in appearance as a man, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death on the cross. Therefore, God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name.” Sisters in Christ, He has said we too shall be lifted (James 4:10). What a privilege to receive such a blessing. If only we could understand the magnitude of being lifted by the Holy God- the I Am. Luke 14:11 also speaks to humility and being exalted: “For whoever exalts himself is humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.” Realizing that we exist because of Christ’s sacrifice and acknowledging that we have been given the privilege of being chosen to be a part of His story—a place in His story—our response must be humility. Because Christ died for our sins and invites us to have a rela-

tionship with Him, we can know who He is and who we are because of His love. We can comprehend that the Maker of this beautiful world in which we live has chosen to spread His light and love. We can empty ourselves for Him, and He can infiltrate our hearts’ desires. We can enter a room and realize it’s not about us, but about Him and others in our surroundings. Our place in His story is to bring glory to His name, and not to bring glory to us. To live humbly before our God. To worship and adore the King of Kings who gave His life for us.

Father, I pray for each woman of the “Hope” conferences. Help us to seek your will, to walk humbly, and to see the heart of others. Warm our hearts, Lord. Empower us to bring love, hope, and joy where there is darkness. In Christ’s name, amen.

*Val Russell
The Healing Place
Trussville, AL*

Letting Go of Our Worries

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

—Philippians 4:6

There is nothing I personally struggle more with than being anxious, or worrying, over things in my life. We worry about our kids, our futures, ability to pay all our bills, and many other things. We literally worry ourselves sick. But God commands us to stop worrying and trust Him. In Philippians, Paul writes, “Do not be anxious about anything...” I don’t know about you, but sometimes that seems impossible! But the Bible tells us that being anxious is a sin.

Okay, to obey God, we just stop our worrying and being anxious. This is great, but how do you stop it? It seems as though every time I try to stop worrying, I worry more! That’s when I have to step back and put God back into the equation. The rest of the scripture is ...“in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God.”

I love the words “in everything”. This means that there is nothing too big or too small that my God cannot handle. Then, if He can handle everything, why do I still struggle with letting go? I must step back and allow God to take control, because I certainly cannot

do it on my own.

“By prayer and petition...” Petition means to keep it up. Whenever problems arise, lean on the One who is able, the Spirit within you. Sometimes we have to keep praying about whatever is troubling us; we have to relinquish control ourselves and totally trust in the One who can handle everything. And thanksgiving is that forward look of faith that thanks God for the answer before we see it. Knowing Him, we know that His perfect will, will be done.

So when we let our requests be made known to God, the result is peace. The peace of God that passes all understanding will keep our hearts and minds in Christ.

Father, I thank you for carrying our worries and our burdens to the cross for us. Help us to always turn to you when we face the unknown. In Jesus’ name, amen.

*Celena Keel
Life Community Church
Owensboro, KY*

Lead Me

“My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” —Galatians 2:20

“Spirit, lead me where my trust is without borders. Let me walk upon the waters, wherever You would call me.” I stood in the worship center soaking in the lyrics of the song “Oceans” by Hillsong United. My heart was heavy while I sang with tears in my eyes.

In 2012, my husband and I were told that our chances to be biological parents were very slim. This news should have crippled us; however, we walked out of the physician’s office knowing we would immediately begin the adoption process. Now, in 2017, we are with our second agency and have had four failed adoptions. Through this time, we have been faced with the death of a close friend, the death of my best friend’s child, job changes, and our niece contracting meningitis. I would say trusting God has become a theme in my life, teaching me to trust Him in all situations. I often think: how do those who have not been saved by grace handle situations like these? Truth is, I don’t know. I do know that I can make it through those times because I trust God, and He has my best interests at heart. I may never understand why our adoption process has taken so long, why cancer

exists, or why children get deathly sick.

I can wake each day, knowing God is with me, and that I can trust Him... even on the hard days when trusting seems like a foreign concept... having days when I feel like I’m drowning under the waves of impatience, bitterness, and anger. I can trust that God is reliable, always there, and that He will give me the strength and hope to make it through (Proverbs 3:5-6). God is going to give me way more than I can handle, so that I can remain focused on trusting Him, keeping my eyes consistently on Him.

God, help me keep my eyes on you. Continue to show me what it means to trust You, leading and guiding me through each day. Lord, I pray for the women of this conference, that they will trust You in all circumstances.

Ashley Albright
Central Baptist Church
Decatur, AL

Never Alone

“The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.” —Deuteronomy 31:8

Over five years ago, my world came crashing down. The life I had known crumbled in to a million pieces. I was afraid. I was discouraged. I didn't know how I was going to pick up all the pieces and put them back together again. Divorce does that— it breaks every part of you and your children and kicks your fear level in to high gear. I was afraid to make any moves. What if I did something wrong? What if everything I touched ended in ruins? My heart longed for the life I once had known, for the life my child had known. There were days when I woke up and had no idea how I was going to face the pain.

Looking back now, I have a vision in my head of God wrapping me in His loving arms, carrying me through those days. I think sometimes He had to pick my feet up and put one in front of the other because I was too crushed, beaten down, and afraid to move. Still, He never left my side amidst all of my despair. I felt Him! And just in case I tried to forget He was there, He strategically placed the right people in my path at the right

time—people who encouraged me, prayed with me, let me cry when I needed to cry, and let me be angry when I needed to be angry. You see, even though this divorce completely knocked me off my feet, my God was not surprised by it. He had already gone before me and prepared the way. In the Scripture preceding verse 8, Moses is preparing Joshua to take over leading the Israelites. Moses tells Joshua multiple times to “be strong and courageous,” and that God would go before him and would never leave him. The same God who was with Joshua is the same God that is with us through our battles!

Lord, I praise you for never leaving me and guiding me through the days when the storms of life are overcoming me. I pray for the women reading this that they will feel your loving presence when fear tries to invade.

*Sarah Campbell
Family Baptist
Trinity, AL*

Stepping Out in Faith

“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” —Hebrews 11:1

The word “faith” is often used so casually, but it is not something that comes easily. We must fight for it. Faith is the very basis of our walk with Christ. It is referenced many times in Scripture, but rarely is it mentioned with a context that is an easygoing life experience. Faith is required when life is hard and when there is no answer; however, it is actually when times seem to be going smoothly that we must grow in our faith. If we do not practice our faith during the good times, we will struggle to stand firm in our faith during the tough times.

Romans 10:17 says, “Faith comes from hearing, and hearing from the Word of Christ.” We need to be reading, listening, and practicing our faith during ALL times of life. Faith has to be bigger than the circumstances we face each day. This is the part of faith where the truth of “the evidence of things not seen” becomes truth. The first step of faith is salvation. We take a step and believe His Word and receive the gift of salvation by acknowledging our sin and trusting Him to forgive it.

This process cannot be seen, but we know it is true. How do we know? By faith! Each time we step out in faith, trusting Him with the very thing we cannot see, we are growing in our faith. In life, each time someone is faithful to her words or actions, it is so much easier to trust her again. God, our Father, cannot let you down. And, each step of faith takes you to a deeper place of trust in Him.

What is your hurt—divorce, infertility, cancer, betrayal? The list is endless. We all have broken spots because we live in a broken world. Whatever it is, you can trust HIM. Step out in faith for all that you cannot see. He will be faithful.

Father, help me to step out in my faith, trusting you and hoping for all I cannot see! I pray for the women of this conference, that in their current circumstances you would increase their faith. In Jesus' name, amen.

*Kristi Malzahn
Auburn, AL*

Rest Finer than Wine

“Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.” —Matthew 11:28

Often as women, we find ourselves weary, exhausted, and in need of rest. You know how it is trying to be the best: the best wife, the best mom, fit in the size 8’s, the best worker, and most of all the best Christian. The problem is that attempting to be the best will never be sufficient at giving our souls peace and true rest. In fact, we will grow exhausted from trying harder and harder to seek acceptance from God.

Ladies, we are being invited to come to Jesus through faith and repentance. The same God who created chocolate, wine, and Tempur-Pedic mattresses is saying give my rest a try. And only He can provide this rest—when we trust that He took on the heavy burden of our sin to the cross so that we can rest eternally in Him.

The answer to that diagnosis you just received, or that your husband has been unfaithful, or when you have to turn to stretchy pants because nothing you own fits anymore, and then you are so exhausted and want to cry because

on top of it all, your child just tells you at 8 PM his science project is due tomorrow. The answer isn’t do better. Girls, we cannot do it. He says, “Come to me. Walk with me. Pick up your cross, get in my Word, have a relationship with Me. Jesus says, “In the world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).

God, I come to you now first by saying how amazing you are. You died on the cross for us, and we are so undeserving. You loved us so much that you became man, leaving your throne so our sins and heavy burdens could nail you to the cross. For that, oh, Jesus, wonderfully we say your name. You are the hope in this fallen world. You are the joy we need when we are broken. Jesus, you are perfect. Eternal rest we are promised, as a result of trusting that you paid for our debts. Amen.

*Julie Rice
Lewispport Baptist Church
Lewispport, KY*

Faith & Flies

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

—Ephesians 2:8-9

The early morning hunter must have it. The athlete must have it. The heart surgeon must have it. None of them, however, have as much of it as a dog on a point: devotion.

Moses, my German Shorthaired Pointer, has mastered the art of pointing. Striking a pose is what he does best. Westminster judges would surely be impressed. Locating a hunter's prize is what these pointers were bred to do. Moses' choice of prey? Don't laugh...Flies.

If you want to see devotion, come witness Moses point at a fly. It stands no chance of survival when it enters the interior of our house...or the exterior of our house. When Moses finds it, there is hardly a distraction that can alter his stance. His whole self is devoted to his mission. Is it any wonder this breed of dog carries the name? Pointing is not just something they do; it is who they are.

Grace saves us through faith. It is a gift, but it is not something we deserve by any action, good deed, or work. It is not just a prayer one says at an altar. It is not just a belief that Jesus saves from sin. It

is not just filling a seat at a Sunday morning worship service. It is a devoted way of life. It is not something we do, but it is who we are.

C.S. Lewis said it best. “If you're thinking of becoming a Christian, I warn you, you're embarking on something, which will take the whole of you.”

As you embark on this new journey or as you continue your walk that began many years ago, remember the devotion it requires. It requires not just a part of your life, but your whole life. Is it worth it? Ask our Pointer when he captures that fly.

Father, your grace is more than I deserve. But by faith I accept it and will live out a life devoted to you. Help me to do this with all of my being. I worship and praise you! Help the women of this conference live lives devoted to you. In Jesus' holy name, amen.

*Mandy Mayfield
Brushy Fork Baptist Church
Owensboro, KY*



Learn more about Connecting Ministries at ConnectingMinistries.org or follow us at facebook.com/ConnectingMinistries or instagram.com/connectingtohim.