

YOUR BEST

God's Redeeming Work

Practicing gratitude while battling breast cancer

Girl Chat

5 sisters share their BEST advice on beauty, fashion & dating



Tony Guerrero

"Every moment of every day is an opportunity for worship."



Rebecca St. James

BLM's exclusive interview with Rebecca, as we get ready to partner with her in our upcoming conference

Premier Issue! 2011
BESTLIFEMINSTRY.COM

Becoming Your Best



Four years ago, my middle daughter, Chandra, was violently attacked. It was a pivotal turning point in the journey of our lives. Our family was faced with the realization that we had two choices. *We could remain shaken and become bitter. Or we could go to the God of our Salvation and develop strength and become better. We chose the latter.*

After some desperate soul-searching, I realized that something must be done to encourage those who have experienced the dark days of life: physical abuse, depression, divorce, loneliness, loss, insecurity, addiction, and just the overall everyday burdens that women continually carry. So with God's new calling over my life, and with the help of friends and neighbors, Best Life Ministries was created.

A women's conference was developed that would partner with the local church and provide: *Help-* offered through relevant workshops for those who have experienced pain, or just feel overwhelmed from everyday life. *Hope-* delivered through Biblical teaching about salvation through a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. *Healing-* encouraged through personal prayer with our attendees, and

connecting them with local church.

The journey has brought us to our first issue of YOUR BEST and we're thrilled to deliver helpful articles and tips that will offer encouragement, foster creativity, and transform your weary spirit to feel refreshed and energized.

God's grace, mercy and peace extends to the very depths of our souls, if we're willing to reach out and grasp it...embrace it...and live it.

His Word tells us in John 10:10b "I have come to give them real and eternal life. More and better life than they ever dreamed of."

More and better life. Not just a better life for you, not just existing, but traveling on your own journey, and becoming YOUR BEST.

Blessings, *Kathy A. Weckwerth*



Kathy & daughter, Chandra

Credits BEST LIFE MINISTRIES

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The Lake of Life

By: Kathy A. Weckwerth

My husband's family owns a cabin up north. It's nothing spectacular or fancy, but just a very simple structure that sits up high on a grassy hill, overlooking a lovely lake.

From the wrap-around deck, you can relax and nestle into a comfy chair, sipping your tea, while busy little hummingbirds flit about you, sipping their nectar and jetting to and fro.

For these past seven years, I've made my way from the deck at the top of the hill, down those 97 wooden steps to the glorious deep blue-green waters of Lake Vermont. The trek down is never really difficult; you just have to make sure you go slow enough so as not to lose your balance and fall.

I've been out on the lake when it's been calm and peaceful, like a big clear pane of glass. I've breathed in clean, crisp air, while I've watched the cows chew cud across the way, as I've at the turtles sunbathing in the warm light of

a summer's day. I've relaxed and enjoyed the very essence of the moment.

And then there were days when I was out on the lake with my family and we panicked as the gas gauge was misread, and ended up stranded in the middle of the lake, wondering how we'd ever reach home.

On other occasions, I've been out on the boat when a sudden rain storm would move in, setting the boat to rocking back and forth, waves pushing us side to side, while my heart pumped a little harder.....a little faster.

One day, I happened to be in a large yellow inner tube in the middle of the lake, rising to the occasion of riding the waves, fearful as my little Iowa-girl- self, incapable of swimming, was certain that near-death experience was close by. I settled into the tube, while settling into the fear of being tipped over, and soon, gasping for breath, was suddenly overtaken by the realization that I had been

thrust out, only to discover I was wearing a bright red life jacket which would save me. I bobbed to the surface, having seen my life flash by in a few seconds all the while hoping this would not be the end. My own family watching my excursion remained calm and confident in that life preserver.

“There are days when out on that Lake of Life, we feel stranded in the middle... unaware that somehow...someway... we are completely out of gas.”

While on that lake, I've felt pleasure and contentment, rest and relaxation, but I've also known fear, panic and dread.

At times the lake was calm and I would feel confident in myself and abilities, and yet at other times the waves came crashing down and I felt very, very small.

This beautiful lake reminds me of our lives. There are days where we tenaciously make our way down the 97 wooden steps and jump into the Lake of Life, releasing our spirits to lap up every beautiful ray of sunlight and every glorious echo of rippling water and cooing loon. But on many occasions, there are days when we lose our balance on our own steps, while trying to get there, falling and bruising our egos.

There are days when out on that Lake of Life, we feel stranded in the middle.... unaware that somehow....someway... we are completely out of gas. Or we feel the waves as they are crashing in so hard on us, and we're thrown into the depths of despair, sinking towards the bottom,



desperately searching for a life preserver.

Here's what I know about this Lake of Life. I know that we can learn from scripture and the story of the disciples out on a troubled trip, filled with storms and crashing waves. In Mark 4:37, Jesus and the disciples were on a lake. "A huge storm came up. Waves poured into the boat, threatening to sink it." But the thing that bothered the disciples was that Jesus was peacefully sleeping right through it. No fear....no concern.

When the disciples finally wake Him up, He addresses the lake and says, (vs 39) "Quiet! Be Still!" And then to the disciples He questions, "Why are you so afraid? Do you still have no faith?"

The Lake of Life can be smooth transitions. It can be rough waters. It can offer times and spots that are troubled and frightening. But that's just it...it's life. Jesus did not protect the disciples from experiencing the storm. Instead, He allowed them to journey through it, while He rested peacefully next to them. And when they woke Him, He reminded them that through Him, they had the power to not fear or dread....but to experience the Lake of Life faith-filled.

Sometimes the challenge in our lives comes from tripping down the stairs as we head onto the Lake. We get off the beaten path, we get lost and stumble.

Sometimes the challenge in our lives comes from being in life and experiencing trials and hard times in our marriages, our jobs, or with our families and friends.

“What I know is simply this.....if you know Jesus as Savior, you are never alone. He rides the waves with you; He's there with the gas tank called His Word. He is the Life Preserver that you wear around your chest. He is the One who stills the crashing waves and will not let you drown.”

Often we can find ourselves in the middle of life and we've just run completely out of gas. Or the next wave is coming up so high; it's going to drag us under.

What I know is simply this.....if you know Jesus as Savior, you are never alone. He rides the waves with you; He's there with the gas tank called His Word. He is the Life Preserver that you wear

around your chest. He is the One who stills the crashing waves and will not let you drown.

He is also the same Creator who provides the days of sunshine and warmth, when life seems filled with good things and beauty. But He's in that boat with you and He's out now on your Lake of Life.

In John 10:10b, Jesus declares this strong foundation for our daily life....

“I came to give them real and eternal life. More and better life than they ever dreamed of.”

No matter where you are today, whether you are walking down the 97 steps, or out in the boat on a calm day, or even in the midst of a horrible storm.... you are never alone. Jesus came to help you live a better life than you ever dreamed of, and the way that you begin, is by putting your faith in Him no matter what's happening out on the Lake.

And I believe that the “better life” Jesus speaks of ...is simply this ...experiencing through Christ...
Your Best Life.

WORSHIP: YOUR BEST LIFE

By Tony Guerrero

THIS IS IT. THIS IS YOUR ONE LIFE.

When we talk about finding your “best life”, it’s not meant to imply that you have a bunch of separate lives to choose from – your best life, your worst life, your exciting life, your forgettable life...it’s all one life, rolled into one cacophony of good and bad, memorable and forgettable, happy and sad, victorious and defeated moments. And this life doesn’t end when you die.

As Christians, we believe that our lives in Christ are eternal, that after “this” life here on earth, we move on to the “next life” in Heaven. But, really, it’s the same life. Death is not a split between two different lives, it’s a blip, a blink, in one life. You will be here, then there. After all, our lives aren’t our bodies, but our souls, and if our souls are to go on eternally and at no point “cease to exist”, then our lives in Heaven are really a continuation of this life here – it’s the same life.

If we are to believe that Heaven is a place of perfection – no sin, no pain, no sorrow, no regret and continuous fellowship and worship with our Father – then it’d be easy to conclude that that life must be our best life. But, given that that life is the same life as this one, then that “best life” has already begun! The primary difference is location – where we are physically, here on earth or in Heaven with our Maker – and decisions.

Decisions? Yes – anything in this part of your life that separates you from God comes from your own decisions, your “free will” to decide to do or be that which pleases or displeases God. You decide if today will be a day of selfless worship or selfish pursuit. And that is really what separates this life from your best life.

IN THE QUEST FOR OUR “BEST LIFE”, PEOPLE OFTEN SEARCH FOR SOME FORM OF “HEAVEN ON EARTH”. BUT THERE IS REALLY ONLY ONE THING WE CAN DO ON EARTH THAT WILL RESEMBLE HEAVEN, AND THAT IS WORSHIP.

Our eternal lives in Heaven will be filled with the worship of our glorious Creator. After all, it is this that we were created for – to worship Him. If that is true (and it is!), then we could only achieve our best life when we are completely fulfilling our true purpose for existing. In Heaven, we will be living in our purpose and it will be better than anything we can imagine now. But God has allowed us a precious glimpse of Heaven here on earth when we worship Him. Sadly, we often let the opportunity to worship slip through our busy hands. Our “best life” is available to us at every moment of the day. However, it is often our decision to ignore it!

IN A NUTSHELL, YOUR “BEST LIFE” IS ONE THAT IS FULL OF WORSHIP, AND WORSHIP IS A DECISION. SO, YOU HAVE THE POWER TO TRULY BEGIN YOUR “BEST LIFE” NOW, BY SIMPLY WORSHIPPING GOD IN EVERYTHING YOU DO.

Our church culture often presents worship as a time for singing praises, and to be sure, this can be a part of it. As a musician, I am grateful that God accepts my music (and my warbling voice) as a form of worship. But singing music to God is simply one way to worship. The fact is, every moment of every day is an opportunity for worship.

Worship is, at its core, honoring God. Thus, when you serve someone in need, you are worshipping. When you talk to God, you are worshipping. When you intentionally guard your heart and your eyes from evil, you are worshipping. When you avoid gossip, you are worshipping. When you lovingly correct your children, you are worshipping. When you conduct your business ethically, you are worshipping. When you mourn and cry out to God, you are worshipping. When you love others, you are worshipping. But, in all these and many other possible examples, the worship isn’t just the act, but an intentional committing of your thoughts and deeds to honoring God. Basically, whenever we live our lives – every moment, thought and deed – as an act of worship dedicated solely to God, we are living our best life.

So often, we let even the smallest opportunities to worship pass us by. Sure, when the music starts on Sunday morning, it’s an easy reminder that we’re supposed to worship. But when our kids act out and we get upset, we aren’t often thinking of worshipping. Still, it can be a great opportunity to stop and commit a frustrating moment to the Lord in both prayer and action. Even in the worst of times, stopping to thank God for the lessons you are learning is a great form of worship.

WORSHIP GOD FULLY, HERE IN THIS LIFE. Or, should I say, here in this part of your one life! Your best life doesn’t begin when things start “going your way”, or when you don’t feel



Tony Guerrero is a musician, author and speaker. His work in the jazz field has garnered him an international audience, critical praise, strong radio airplay and a regular presence on the national jazz charts. In the Christian Worship world, his music is performed regularly in churches worldwide and he is a Dove Award nominated producer. He speaks at conferences around the world and his articles have appeared in several publications, including *Worship Leader Magazine*. His book “*Attracting Quality Musicians*” has become a textbook for university worship curriculum. Tony also founded FACT Alliance and the “Let’s Respond” campaign which addresses the issue of human slavery. <http://www.tonyguerrero.com/>

any more sorrow or pain. And while we must still wait on Heaven, the great act of worshipping our Creator need not wait. Worship the Lord your God, your Father who loves you and created you for worship. Your best life can begin now. •



God's Redeeming Work

By Linda Schubring

I'm 36, and I'm a breast cancer survivor. My cancer journey is one of detection, tests, cancer diagnosis, more tests, a bilateral mastectomy, recovery, aggressive chemotherapy, recovery, radiation and more tests. My cancer journey is one of deeper trusting, profound healing, and participation in the sufferings of Christ. From the beginning, my husband and I sensed the invitation to live out loud our thoughts, feelings, and faith. In the joy and pain, we've sought to tell our story and live our story. In all the unknowns, God has surprised us with great communion with each other and with a multitude of others.

In this cancer battle, I committed to look at everyone. See everyone. Practice gratitude and steward the big smile I've been

given whether I'm feeling strength and freedom like in the photo, or a heaviness of my tears leaning on my smile. One day, I saw a woman named, Dora.

After my second chemotherapy infusion or what became affectionately known as my "chemo parties", my husband, Brian, our dear friend, Joyce, and I stopped by the pharmacy to pick up some meds that would help me navigate the pain. As I was chatting with the pharmacy tech, I noticed an older small Latina woman at the counter beside me. They informed her, her medicine would be filled shortly. Thanking God for my insurance, I paid for my three bottles and walked over to put them in my bag.

The small woman walked up to me and asked me if she could ask me a ques-

tion. "Yes." I stood feeling a little light headed. By the time I was standing I noticed she was a full foot shorter than me. I leaned over to look in her sad eyes. She asked me, "Do you feel pain after the chemo?" "Well, yes," I replied, "but the drugs help manage it. The first several days are bad, but then I start to get better and I feel pretty good right now."

She asked if my hair was gone. I nodded. She had had hers shaved, too, once. Hers was now a couple inches long. Her nails were long and yellow. Her eyes were pleading.

She went onto explain that her chemo didn't work and began to list all the places her cancer had remained as tears rolled down her face. "Now, I'm only on hospice." My heart broke. I instinctively began to gently wipe away the tears on

her face. I asked her name. Her name is Dora. I introduced myself and asked if I could pray for her. She said yes and told me she'd pray for me too. I told her I wanted to pray to Jesus right now, and she grabbed my hands. I leaned down

“This is part of why I am here. Part of why I am going through this. Thank you for being with me.”

further to put my forehead on hers. My forehead that had been anointed with oil several times in the last few months needed to be on hers. I began to pray, not recalling what all I said. I felt very present to her, very present to the One who had created her, created us. I prayed for the loneliness of chemo, for the cells in her body, for comfort, and for her

courage that introduced herself to me, a stranger with a scarf. Our cancer had united us. She thanked me and prayed I'd have little ones who would care for me, too, her loneliness was breathing out of her. I held her face and reminded her she is not alone. “I will see you around,” she said. “Nice to meet you Dora.” I replied.

Brian and Joyce stepped into our circle after I hugged Dora. Joyce, who had tears in her eyes, hugged Dora, too. Brian

and I stepped out and I told him, “This is part of why I am here. Part of why I am going through this. Thank you for being with me.” Joyce, Brian and I walked out of the hospital in awe of the sacred moment, and in awe of the redeeming work of God in our midst.

Read more of our journey at spacebetweenwe.wordpress.com



Zechariah 2:10-3:5

“We will shout and be glad! We will break forth and run for joy! You, O Lord God Almighty, have roused Yourself from Your holy dwelling that You might come and dwell with us. You have looked upon us in compassion and delivered us with Your mighty hand. You have rebuked our accuser and removed our shame. You have clothed us in Your righteousness and crowned us with everlasting joy.”

(The Worship Bible)



Life as Anthology

By Sarah Zook

Here is a question for you: When is the last time you read an anthology? Some literature class in college? Yeah, me too. But lately I have been mulling over the concept of an anthology. An anthology is a collection of works compiled by a person. And that person, the compiler? They get their name attached to it. They get credit for piecing work together that they didn't even do. Someone sat down and wrote their little heart out. Maybe it was published on its own. Maybe it made it into a magazine somewhere. Who knows? But then someone else, the maker of an anthology, plucked that work from where it was and put it in a book. The author's name is still there, but so is the name of the one who put it together with other works.

Why is this a big deal? Well, an anthology that is really well done is phenomenal. When you read an an-

thology, a really great anthology, you are reading the product of someone's careful discrimination. They read work after work, essay after essay, story after story, and chose only a few. They edited down a sea of material into one piece made up of many different works, but brought together for a reason. Perhaps they are all the same topic, or maybe the authors had something in common. Possibly the literature gathered there is related because it is meant to set you in a certain mood or help you understand the facets of a concept, however broad or intangible. The point here is that creating an anthology, one worth reading, is hard work. It is creating, but in a different way than writing is creating. Creating an anthology is about creating something greater than the sum of its parts. That person deserves their name on the cover. Selecting what goes in the anthology

is difficult, but even more difficult is choosing what to leave out. The Bible is a sort of anthology; but recently I have been reflecting on life as an anthology.

You are the compiler of the anthology of your life. You have only limited space and you have to carefully curate what goes in and what stays out. You don't want to get sloppy about it or the anthology isn't anything you want your name on. You have to work at it a bit. When you think of your life as anthology, you begin to live much more purposefully. There are some parts of your life you get to help author and you can't forget to lean on God to help you edit. But often the stories that are playing out are outside our own control save that we can choose not to include them at all; or, even to seek out stories that may not naturally find their way in. I have begun to

let this idea of anthology guide who it is that I spend my time with.

I put up a little sign in my dining room that says "Gather here. Let us join in the anthology of one another's lives." to remind myself that the people in my home are shaping my anthology and I am shaping theirs. I am choosing them and they have become part of a large cast of characters and a set of stories that dictates what my anthology is really communicating. What am I selecting in them (and they in me) that makes this worthy of space in my anthology? This is not to say I am exclusive of people. In fact it guides me in the opposite direction; choosing to include unexpected characters from unexpected places is exactly what I want in my anthology. And let us not forget that it is in the broken places we are urged to look for signs of the Kingdom. And every good story has a Kingdom.

It is easy to get overwhelmed by whatever piece you are currently reading and forget that you can choose to include it, but more importantly, you can choose not to. In my own anthology, I often get distracted by mediocre works - things that use my time and pull away from the compilation I would like to see forming. Sometimes my anthology starts looking like a book about the

corporate world rather than compassion and people. Sometimes my anthology starts leaning toward depression rather than joy. Don't get me wrong. Part of a good anthology is variety - it adds depth and keeps it interesting. Henri Nouwen wrote "In the midst of sorrows is consolation, in the midst of the darkness is light, in the midst of the despair is hope. The cup of sorrow, inconceivable as it seems, is also the cup of joy. Only when we discover this in our life can we consider drinking it." You need the darkness to properly offset the brilliance that is light. But when the darkness begins to consume the anthology of my life, I know it is time to change, time to edit. This comes in the form of choosing with whom my time is spent, where I work, where I volunteer, what I read, what I watch, where I live, what I do, my reactions to situations, and on and on. Life is too big and there are too many works and characters I could include. Sometimes I realize I am continuing to "read a work" I already know I do not want in my "anthology" and I just need to walk away. Sometimes I need to remember that I can include only an excerpt rather than the entire essay.

Sometimes I need to consider including a new theme I had not planned on including and I have to

rely heavily on God as my Editor - does this fit with my life anthology?

Someday, when all is printed and bound, and the back cover closes over the last selection of the anthology that is my life, I want it to be clear that each selection was included for a reason. Was it read purely of puppies and rainbows? No. Who wants to read that? But does it reflect the compilation of someone who lived with purpose and who reported to a watchful Editor? I hope so. I hope it reads of joy and compassion. I hope it is funny. I hope there is adventure and variety. I hope it gives a good sense of family and home. I hope each character has depth. I hope the pain is genuine and raw and not without hope. I hope every story includes a Kingdom and redemption. I hope the anthology that says it was compiled by Sarah Zook is a really good one - one worth reading even if it isn't required for a college lit course. But that means that right now, I have to be fully engaged in the hard work of carefully selecting the pieces, the works, and the people that make up my life, knowing that a good one will be greater than the sum of its parts.

“Creating an anthology is about creating something greater than the sum of its parts.”



Running Uphill

By: Dr. Mary Schulze Michener, Ed.D.

None of us want to suffer. We don't want difficult times in our lives and we definitely don't want pain. Let's face it, life is about the ups and the downs. *My head knows that God is always with me, and that I don't face difficult times alone, however my heart often forgets.* Then I go back to being independent, self-reliant, and doing it on my own...and I fail.

In living our best life we need to know how to get through those difficult times without avoiding them, tucking them away, or pretending they never happened. I encourage you to learn to suffer as Christ suffered. Here is how I finally "got it."

I was out on a long walk near my house when I started to get this strange urge to run. I started hearing something within me say, "Run. Do it." First I have to say this, my body is not built for speed. Also,

I have already had two knee surgeries. My first thought was that running would hurt. I was certain my knees would start to scream with pain. Then I heard, "It won't, I am right here with you. Trust me." Well, then I had no choice. I started running. I was huffin' and puffin' and my legs were burning, but I did it without pain in my knees.

I was wondering why He asked me to run. I was definitely frustrated with my weight, again. I had been diagnosed with low thyroid just like all of my siblings. I knew something was wrong when I gained seven pounds in one week. I was working hard to get this weight off and if running would do it, I was willing. I started walking/running twice a week as part of my regular workouts. It was great God time. Yet I knew God had something more in me.

It was early spring and very wet and muddy outside, as I went for a walk/run. I usually go into the woods near my house where the trails are very sandy. It is much harder to run in mud than sand. It happened again. God wanted me to run all the way back home. Of course it is up hill at the end.

At this point, I was really frustrated, not with running but with my weight. It had been almost a year since the diagnosis of low thyroid and I was still struggling to get twelve pounds off. I felt defeated, but didn't want to give up. Before this, I had lost over 40 pounds and feared gaining it all back. Here I was out on the trail running and for what? Was it going to work this time? So, I finally asked God if I was ever going to get this weight off? What I heard was interesting. It was "yes" but I would "suffer as Christ

suffered.” My first thought was, “Do I really have to suffer that much?” I finished the run somewhat confused.

A couple of days later I had an “ah ha” moment. I had been thinking a lot about how much Christ suffered for us. His suffering has always been too much for my mind to wrap around. It makes my heart break. Christ came to bring us to the Father. He didn't have trust issues. He never tried to live outside of the Father's will. He never went without hearing His Father's voice. When He suffered, He drew strength and peace from the Father. 1 Peter 2:21 (NIV) says:

“To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.”

This may be elementary to others but it was new to me. Maybe I was just ready to learn it. Many times I had tried to give



this whole weight thing and many other things to God, but what I really wanted was for Him to fix it for me. What He wants is for me to lean into Him, and He will show me how to do it. Christ gave me the example to follow. When it is unbearable, when it really hurts, when I want to give up, when I am suffering, I am to press in even closer to the Father. The suffering becomes easier to bear with Him. This doesn't mean it doesn't hurt, or it isn't hard. Instead, there is new strength when I don't think I have any left. I need to lean on Him from the start and not wait until I have exhausted myself trying to do it on my own. I am learning obedience from what I suffer, and suffering as Christ did actually means God takes my burdens. As hard as it is to give up my own will, life really is easier when I do. ❖

Spotlight on:

DAVE HERRING BAND



Delivering an authentic rich sound, while expressing their deeply held conviction to the heartbeat of today's worship, you will find the Dave Herring Band.

Good news for worshipers.... this band is not just a typical worship band, but delivers all-enveloping, God-honoring, power-filled moments of worship...every time.

While searching for the best fit for our ministry, we found the Dave Herring Band. Inspiring, moving, poignant, heart-felt, and encouraging are some of the words to describe the impact that the Dave Herring Band offers while transforming worship times into God-meetings.

These guys offer more than just great music.....they inspire worship.

Purchase their newest CD “Invocation” today at: Bandcamp (<http://daveherring.bandcamp.com>), iTunes, Amazon, or Spotify. Visit their website: daveherringband.com



The Calling

By: Deacon Aaron Wessman

I was in a state of panic. It was 2004 and I was ready to graduate from St. John's University with a degree in mathematics. Yet, somewhere along the way, I started to feel that God was calling me to be a priest. It was crazy! But, inside I knew it was true. So I decided to do the only thing I really knew to do: I prayed.

A year later there I was, prostrate on the ground, begging God to clearly show me the direction to take. Just months before starting the training program with the Glenmary Home Missioners, a Catholic missionary group, I trembled with fear and anxiety knowing that I was soon to begin. I felt deep in my heart that God was whispering quietly for me to move forward, but my best intentions were stifled with reservations. Somehow, within a few months, I entered the Glenmary training program in Hartford, Kentucky.

I can still smell the cedar walls of the chapel in Hartford. It was within these walls where I said goodbye to my mother and aunt as they dropped me off to begin the program, and where I said goodbye to the comfortable surroundings that raised and nurtured me. It was also within these walls where I learned about community, where I began to pray more earnestly, where I wrestled with the meaning of a call to the priesthood, and where the support of friends and formators helped me to move forward to the next level: the Novitiate.

"So I decided to do the only thing I really knew to do: I prayed."



Deacon Aaron Wessman

The Novitiate, a two year long program of intense prayer, silence and reflection, was a process of letting go...of everything. I entered the Novitiate invigorated to pray and spend time with God. Yet, ironically, as I progressed through the year, I could hardly force myself to even speak to God. I remember the beautiful fountain in the chapel where I tried to pray many nights during that time. The water trickled over the side, washing clean anything in its path. I believe God's grace worked like that water for me during this time. It helped to prepare me for my formal theological studies at St. Meinrad Seminary in southern Indiana.

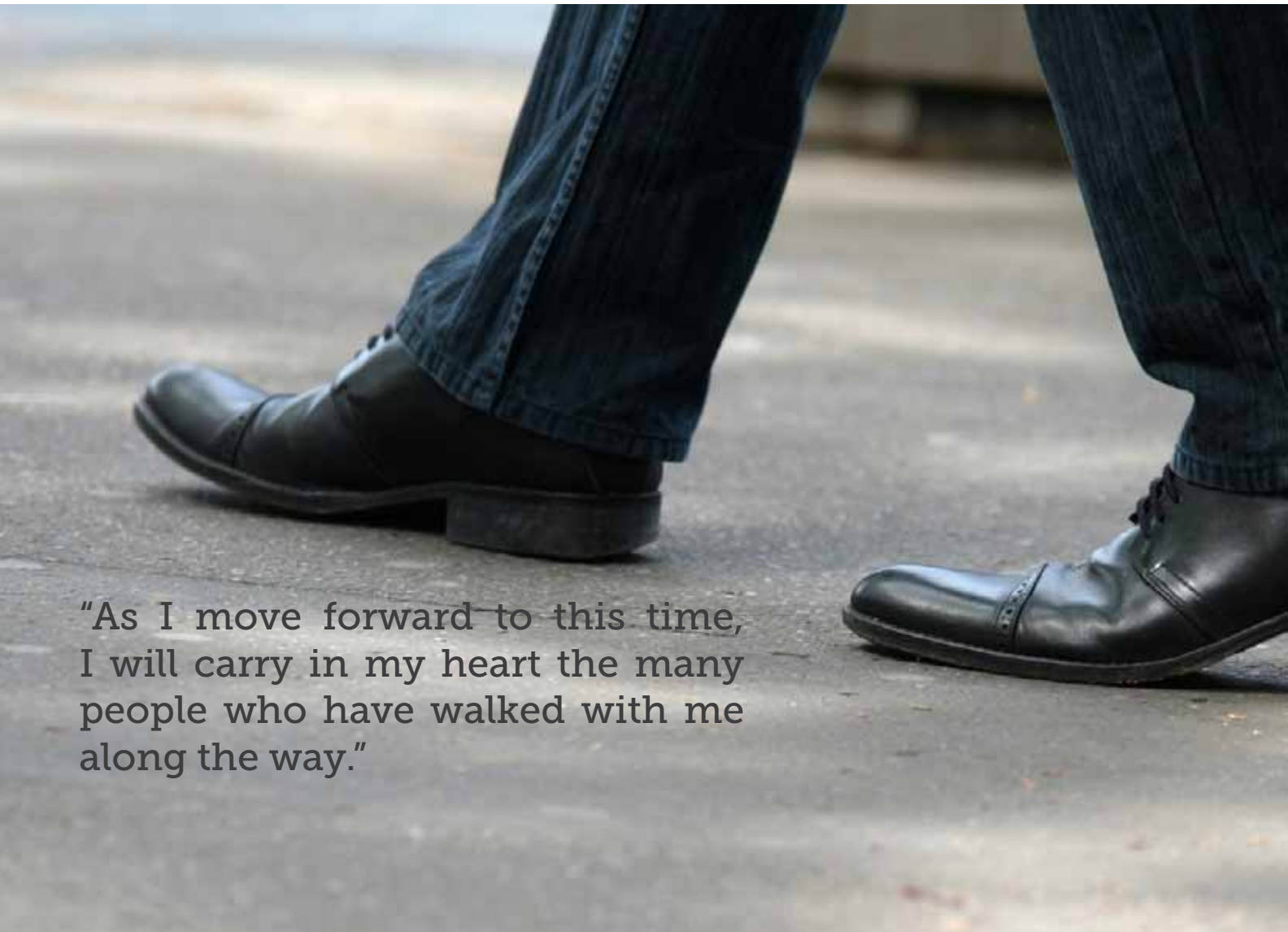
My years at St. Meinrad helped to bring about a maturity in my discernment. I encountered the blessings and challenges of balancing formation. I realized how much God will bless someone who says yes to his call, but I also learned more realistically what he asks in return. Ultimately, it is only because of those who have journeyed with me along the way that I could ever have experienced the blessings of making my Perpetual Oath in my religious community, Glenmary, and being ordained to the Diaconate. I am forever indebted to those people for the love they have shared with me.

My Perpetual Oath and ordination, which occurred during the last month, were amazing. These events were heightened with intensity because of many reasons, but one is the most significant: they are final and permanent. In a cultural environment where change occurs more rapidly and often than breathing, making a final commitment to anything can be overwhelming. Adding upon that the sacrifice and struggle to live the Christian life in general, and one practically runs from the task of being asked to be a priest forever. It can only be grace that ultimately makes this possible.

I am now a deacon in the Catholic Church, and one year from now I will, God willing, be ordained a priest. Following this ordination I will be assigned to serve in some of the poorest and most non-Christian areas of the United States. In my community,

“I felt deep in my heart that God was whispering quietly for me to move forward, but my best intentions were stifled with reservations.”

we call this Mission-Land USA. As I move forward to this time, I will carry in my heart the many people who have walked with me along the way. Perhaps it was someone who said a prayer for me; perhaps it was a word of encouragement during a tough time; perhaps it was a hug that was much needed; perhaps it was a professor who opened to me the mysteries of God. Whoever it was, I will hold them dearly in my heart and use them as a source of life and grace to undertake the responsibilities of being a missionary priest in the United States.



“As I move forward to this time, I will carry in my heart the many people who have walked with me along the way.”



Money Matters

With Val

Q: We bought our condo 6 years ago and paid 140,000.00 for it. We owe 120,000.00, but the condos like ours in our area are selling for 90,000.00 We really want to move... what can we do? (Our contract won't let us rent it out).

A: There are a couple options if you are unable to keep the property as a rental unit.

First, sell the condo and bring the difference of the amount you sell it for, and the amount you owe, to the closing table. This will keep your credit intact.

Secondly, you could sell the condo and negotiate with your current lender to take less than what is owed. This is called a short sale, which in simple terms means you are selling the property "short" of what is owed. This process can take a long time, several months or longer, depending on your lender. Your lender also has to approve the short sale which means that you typically have to prove hardship and will require documentation showing that you cannot afford the payments etc. Also, if you sell it short there will be a waiting period before you are able to qualify for another home loan, anywhere between 1 and

5 years depending on the situation. Therefore, you may have to rent for several years before you could qualify for a new home loan. There may be other tax, credit or judgment implications so you will want to consult with a real estate lawyer and tax accountant.

It might seem discouraging right now, but don't give up! What you feel you're losing on the side of selling your home, you will make up in the amount of money you save when you're purchasing a home. It all kind of evens out.





Diabetes and Your Best Health

By: Dr. Deb Peterson

As you may have seen on news programs or read in newspaper or magazine articles, the United States has a growing epidemic of type 2 diabetes mellitus. There are two types of diabetes. Type 1 diabetes used to be called juvenile-onset diabetes. It occurs randomly, and while it usually affects younger people, it can affect anyone at any age. With type 1 diabetes, the pancreas loses its ability to produce insulin in normal amounts. Type 2 diabetes is most often seen in adults over age 40, but with the increasing level of obesity in our country, it is now seen in just about every age group, including children. In type 2 diabetes, the pancreas usually makes enough insulin. In fact, it often overproduces insulin, but the cells of the body develop resistance to the effects of insulin. Insulin controls our blood sugar levels. If the cells cannot use insulin properly, the blood sugar levels rise and diabetes develops.

Did you know you may be able to control whether or not you develop type 2 diabetes? Did you know that even if you can't prevent it, you may be able to delay the onset of diabetes? Here are a few guidelines that may help.

UNDERSTAND YOUR RISK FACTORS

Certain ethnic groups carry a much higher risk of diabetes. These include Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, and Pacific Islanders. Your risk is also increased if you have a family history of type 2 diabetes. Being overweight substantially increases your risk of diabetes after age 40-45 if you have other family members with diabetes. You may not be able to control your heritage or your genetics, but you can control your weight.

WEIGHT CONTROL

Losing even 5-10 percent of your body weight can lessen the risk of developing diabetes. It can also improve your blood sugar levels if you are already diabetic. For instance, if you currently weigh 200 pounds, losing 10 to 20 pounds can make a difference!!

EXERCISE

Regular exercise is good for all of us. It helps with weight control, helps our bones and joints, and is also a great stress reducer. Many studies show that modest exercise (walking) for 30-45 minutes 4-5 times per week is enough for heart health, stress reduction, and weight management.

DIET

There are no "magic bullet" foods that prevent diabetes, but following a healthy diet throughout your life is the healthy choice to make. Eat plenty of fruits and vegetables. Eat non-starchy vegetables such as spinach, carrots, broccoli and green beans. Choose whole grain over processed grain products. Include dried beans (legumes) and lentils in your meals. Include fish in your meals 2-3 times per week and choose lean meats. Choose non-fat dairy products such as skim milk and non-fat yogurt and cheese. Perhaps the most important part of diet is control of portion size. We live in a "super-sized" culture where our ideas about normal portion sizes have been skewed tremendously. It can be helpful to eat your meals off a salad plate rather than a dinner plate. This helps re-train the brain about normal portion size.

If you start to experience any of the following symptoms, consider seeing your doctor for evaluation as they may be warning signs of diabetes: frequent urination, excessive thirst or hunger, unexplained weight loss or fatigue, frequent infections, blurred vision, cuts and bruises that are slow to heal, or numbness/tingling in the hands or feet. Early detection and treatment are both important in terms of lessening the risk of complications of diabetes later in life.

Our bodies are the Lord's temples. We honor Him by taking care of ourselves and staying in the best physical health possible. Doing our best with weight control, healthy eating, and regular exercise may prevent diseases such as diabetes and also give honor to God.

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God- this is your true and proper worship."

ROMANS 12:1

Yours In Health and in Him,

Dr. Deb



INTERVIEW

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW: REBECCA ST. JAMES

With Executive Director, Kathy Weckwerth
for BEST LIFE MINISTRIES



Q: We heard that you recently got married. What encouragement do you have for young girls and women today, to wait on God for their “Holy Hunk?”

RSJ: “The wonderful thing about the season of life I am in right now is that I can say from the ‘other side of the equation’ – now being married—that it was absolutely worth the wait!!! Marriage is absolutely wonderful. Jacob is the biggest blessing to my life. Just to be cherished and deeply loved by your soul mate and best friend is so powerful and the purity that we saved for each other is a blessing to us every day. There’s a trust and a deepened love that is present in our relationship that is there because we were both faithful to the purity walk before marriage. When we exchanged purity rings on our wedding day it was one of the most beautiful moments of the wedding. I want to encourage young women to hold for God’s best in that mate you’re waiting for! Pray for that person, prepare to be the ultimate mate for your ‘holy hunk.’ Most important—grow in your love relationship with Jesus. He will be the one that ultimately will show you how to love well.”

Q: Your passion is so beautiful as you encourage girls and women to remain pure and abstinent before marriage. Do you feel like in today’s society, God is using you to be an inspiration and a role model?

RSJ: “I’ve heard that a lot of people have been encouraged to know that they’re not alone in the process of waiting. Now having had the happy reality of marriage in my own life I have had a lot of single girls—and

guys—who have told me my message has had an impact and that my song ‘Wait For Me’ encouraged them on the journey. I think my message now that I am married is much more powerful in the fact that I can speak from the position of saying, ‘Hey—waiting for God’s choice is absolutely beautiful—and well worth the wait.’”

Q: You have a brand new book that will be released on Sept. 26th, entitled *What is He Thinking?* How is this different from the *Wait For Me* book that you wrote a few years ago?

RSJ: “It’s a completely different book. The concept of the new book centers around me interviewing a dozen or so of my Christian guy friends—and really getting inside their heads on the answers to the questions most of us girls can never ask! We talk about the things Christian guys are actually looking for in a mate—what are the turn-offs—what things are important in the process. Questions like ‘what are you looking for in mate?’ What virtues are important to you—are modesty and purity in the girls you date really virtues that you are looking for?

The resounding answer was ‘yes!’ Are you looking for more than just physical beauty?

The resounding answer was ‘yes!’ Are you really looking for a woman that has a heart for God and brings spiritual values to the table? And again—the consensus was ‘yes.’ I think it’s a Book of real encouragement for young women to hold out for a man that will honor her—like these guys will honor their future wives.”

Q: You are going to be partnering with us on October 29th in St. Cloud, MN for Best Life’s PURE Conference



where we will be hosting classes during the day, that will encourage women in their everyday walk to remain PURE with their attitudes, mindset and heart about marriage, parenting, priorities, as well as offering classes for young teens and single women to remain abstinent while looking to God for their value. What do you hope people will come away with when they attend your concert that night?

RSJ: “The thing I most hope is that they will get a vision for how beautiful God’s mandate is for us to remain ‘pure.’ It is such an amazing honor and blessing to save sex for your spouse. It’s the most romantic way—it’s the way of protection for physical and emotional health—

When you’re waiting there is true freedom. To be drawn onto a lifestyle of immorality and pleasing the flesh brings a real bondage. When you can live a life that’s holy and guilt free before God it’s the road to true joy! I pray that people will get the appreciation of the real value of the message and calling of purity in life –and be encouraged that they are not alone and that they can do it!”

Q: Your new CD “I Will Praise You,” has just been released and it’s absolutely fabulous!! What was the

(continued)

“I want to encourage young women to hold for God’s best in that mate you’re waiting for!”

(continued from page 19)

inspiration behind the song that encouraged you to write the hit single by the same title?

RSJ: “The concept behind that song is encouraging us as believers to worship God in the valley—as well as on the mountaintop. That’s a concept that’s easy to say, and sometimes hard to live! Someone just made the connection in an interview that I was doing—making the comment that when they worship God, it leads to purity of life. Our eyes are centered on Him and there’s something about worship that does purify the heart. Our focus is off ourselves and the things of this world—it’s on Jesus and His Kingdom—and the reality that we’ll be worshipping Him there for all eternity. No matter what our circumstances are –worship can bring us into a heavenly mindset and that’s a beautiful thing!”

Q: As a former Worship Director, your music has had such an impact on me and my congregations, but you’ve also had such a huge impact on encouraging today’s generation, with girls and women who are desperately seeking role models. When people hear the name, Rebecca St. James, how do you hope people will think of you?

RSJ: “I hope they’ll think of me as a woman who loves God passionately –and loves people passionately –that’s how I would like to be remembered.”



Rebecca St. James is both a Grammy Award winner, multiple Dove Award recipient and a bestselling author. In 2008 (for the 7th consecutive year) she was named “Favorite Female Artist” in Contemporary Christian Music by readers of CCM Magazine.

“No matter what our circumstances are – worship can bring us into a heavenly mindset and that’s a beautiful thing!”

Days Are Long... Years Are Short

By: Karen Ziemke



It is 6:38 am. I am sitting at my dining room table; typing and watching the morning haze clear from the sky, my trusty cup of coffee close by. I know that in less than an hour, the full pace of the day will be upon me as all three of my little ones will be clamoring for breakfast, clean clothes for the day, a fresh diaper, a hug and a kiss. My six year old will have three hundred “very important” things to tell me, my four year old will change his shirt three times and then drench himself in the milk that he’ll have insisted on pouring all by himself. My six month old will have crawled backwards, wedging her chubby little leg under the sofa, and call to me to rescue her again.



And that’s all before 8 am! **The days can feel so long and tiring. Sometimes it can feel as though my kids will be small forever. That this stage will last forever, like some sort of parenthood purgatory.** Do you ever feel like that, too? In the last two weeks, my baby girl, Stella Kate, has cut her first tooth, learned to crawl, pull up, said “num-num,” “mama,” and “dada,” clap, and wave bye-bye. I really think the Lord allowed her to have a giant spurt in development in order to get my attention and remind me that I need to be intentional and tuned in, because this precious time is passing with or without me.

Someone very wise once told me, **“When you have small children, the days are long... but the years are short.”** Those words have been bouncing around my brain as I run to and fro. Lately, God has been softly reminding me how precious these days are.

We’re in the process of buying a house. It’s a foreclosure. It needs a new roof, a new furnace, and more. It requires a renovation loan involving all kinds of red tape from the lender, getting bids from contractors, and researching the next steps. It feels like my life over the last few weeks has been consumed with all that it entails, and my brain never stops buzzing with thoughts of what I still need to accomplish. Add that to all of my other obligations and responsibilities, and I’m feeling like cotton candy-spinning in circles all day, but inside I’m all fluff and no substance.

All the while, I’ve been hearing God ask, “Karen, are these things of eternal

“WHEN YOU HAVE SMALL CHILDREN, THE DAYS ARE LONG... BUT THE YEARS ARE SHORT.”

value? Don’t forget what is most important to Me. Remember Who your days belong to!”

Ephesians 5:15-17 says, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.”

What does it mean for me to make the most of every opportunity? I’m still learning. I’m asking the Lord that exact question right now. Here are three things He has shown me so far:

1. I NEED TO BE INTENTIONAL WITH MY EFFORTS.

Are these things of eternal value? I want to sow my time where it will reap a harvest in my children’s hearts. I am on the lookout for “teachable moments” in the day, where I can use a news story, an event in our lives or our friends’ lives, or something we witness while out and about, to teach my children about the things of the Lord and build their characters. Pray that God will help you recognize these moments in your day.

2. I NEED TO IDENTIFY HIS PRIORITIES FOR MY TIME.

Don’t forget what is most important to me. My children are living, breathing, eternal souls that the Lord has entrusted to my care. Where I spend my time and how I use it indicates where my priorities are. The Lord is help-

ing me to recognize that discipling my children is an important calling, worthy of my highest priority and sacrifice. Not the house we're buying, not soccer practice, not even volunteering. I'm learning not to let what is "good" overtake what is "best." Pray that God would help you see what is important to Him.

3. I NEED TO REMOVE DISTRACTIONS AND TIME-STEALERS. Remember Who your days belong to. The internet can be such a drainer of my time. I start out checking e-mail, and then think of something I "should" do. Before I know it, an hour has disappeared. Maybe for you, it's television, or

your Kindle, or even keeping a spotless home. Pray and ask God what might be stealing your time.

John 4:35 "When you plant you always say, 'Four more months to wait before we gather the grain.' But I tell you, open your eyes. Look at the people. They are like fields ready for harvesting now." •

The ABC's of the Middle School Years

By: Kandy Stevens

Pencils . . . loose leaf paper . . . 2-pocket folders . . . manual on how to survive the middle school years. . .

If only that manual existed for parents who suddenly wake up and find that their sweet little elementary child has morphed into some type of alien-life form that they don't recognize. Fear not! As a 20+ year educator, specializing in middle school, **I promise that you will get through these rough years.** In the spirit of back-to-school season, I would like to share some secrets of surviving these years as a parent and helping your child to thrive as well.

THE ABC'S OF THE MIDDLE SCHOOL YEARS



Always remember that you are your child's first teacher. You may not ever hear that from a classroom teacher, but in general, we all believe that as well. The experiences that you share together as a family only enhance your child's education. Something as simple as routines and habits become discussion points in class. Trust me, your child is learning every moment they are at home on how to become the great person God has planned them to be.

Be in touch. As soon as possible, meet your child's teacher(s) and find out the best way to contact them throughout the school year. Nothing is more shocking than learning at mid-term that your child is falling behind. Sadly, many teachers assume that parents get all the information they need from their child (you can stop laughing any time) or from the school's website system. I have had parents ask for weekly e-mails reporting how their child is progressing in my class. That may not be feasible for all teachers for all students, but I have yet to meet a teacher that didn't want to communicate with parents.

Cheer 'em on. Middle school is the beginning of spreading your wings to discover who you are. It is a delicate tight-rope act in the life of a child merging into adulthood. There are many opportunities for kids to try new and exciting activities, ranging from athletics to academics and from music to speech. No matter what your child chooses to explore, encourage them to do their best – regardless of earthly rewards.

Don't drop out. Unfortunately, over the



years, I have seen too many parents assume that because middle-schoolers are fairly self-sufficient that they need less parental involvement. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Even if they profess differently to their peers, they want and NEED your involvement. Knowing their routines and knowing their friends helps them navigate through the difficult choices they will face in the upcoming years.

Exude love. Even though the mushy-gushy hugs and kisses days are probably a thing of the past, your child desires to hear that you love them. Develop your own signal that only your child knows to tell them that you love them. On occasion, leave them a note in their backpack or on their pillow that simply tells them that you love them. A little love note goes a LONG way.

Even though, I can't offer a manual of survival techniques on the school supply shopping list. I can point you to one really great often-overlooked parenting book. Yes, it is God's word. There are all sorts of stories, proverbs, psalms and prayers that can help you and your child navigate through these difficult years. Additionally, **practice the 3 P's: pray, pray, and pray some more.** I guarantee that together with God, you and your child will be equipped for an A+ school year!

Good, Better, B.E.S.T.

By Kara Haakenson



**“ Good, better, best.
Never let it rest.
’Til your good is better
and your better is best.”**

As a child, I remember hearing these words in the process of my education. It was a catchy little saying meant to motivate and encourage me to press on when things became difficult. But what I did not know was that the man who spoke these words was the translator of the Bible from Hebrew to Latin. The man, St. Jerome, dedicated his life to the study of the Scriptures and to the accuracy of the translation for future generations. He spent his days hovered over a parchment with a scribe by his side, meticulously copying each word. There is depth to his words that should cause us to stop and think. These words describe what God desires to do in the life of every believer and they have the potential to change our lives – if we let them.

This past year, we began a weekly discipleship time with our children called **B.E.S.T. - Becoming Effective Students of Truth. We felt led to challenge our children to dig deep into the Word of God, study the commands of Scripture, and to hide the Word in their hearts.** God desires each one of us to become effective students of truth and to allow Him to move us from good to better to BEST!

We are commanded as believers to “sanctify Christ as Lord in [our] hearts,

always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you ...” (1 Peter 3:15). Only a believer who is becoming an effective student of truth could be ready to make a defense. **In order to live our best for Christ, we need to be part of the work God desires to do in us.** One might call this process sanctification or simply put ...“good, better, best”. God desires each of us to know Him more deeply and love Him more completely by studying His Word and applying His truth to our lives. That is His best for us.

In His Word, God gives us instructions on becoming effective students of truth. Through Peter, God instructs us to look back. “This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you in which I am stirring up your sincere mind by way of reminder, that you should remember the words spoken beforehand by the holy prophets and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken by your apostles.” (1 Peter 3:1-2) We are commanded to study the Old Testament so that we know the prophecies about Christ and to study the New Testament in order to know the fulfillment of those prophecies through Christ.

The Lord also wants us to have His perspective during our stay here on earth. “Therefore we do not lose heart but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while

we look not at the things which are seen, but the things that are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things that are not seen are eternal.” (2 Cor. 4:16-18) We can only be renewed daily if we feast on the truths in His Word and allow His Spirit to be our strength.

Lastly, God instructs us to have our eyes set on things to come. “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” (1 Peter 1:3-5) **In knowing what is to come, we find courage to persevere, strength to stand firm in the faith, and our hope to endure through the trials we have been promised will come.**

Sanctification is God’s best for us but it demands the cooperation of the believer. Become an Effective Student of Truth and live His BEST ‘til He returns!

We felt led to challenge our children to dig deep into the Word of God, study the commands of Scripture, and to hide the Word in their hearts.

Girl Talk!

Grab a cup of java and sit down for a chat with the five Zook sisters.

Liana, Sarah, Karen, Aimee & Megan



What are your must-have items for beauty and fashion?

Karen: With three small kids, feeling put together keeps me calm when the day is chaos! I like my hair long and layered-- 5-10 minutes with hot rollers or curling iron = glam. I use a primer under my makeup to help it last through my long days. A good pair of boots is a staple for me-- they instantly pull my outfit together, even on days when I'm fishing my clothes straight from the clean laundry basket!

Sarah: I like fashion, but I keep it simple. Best fashion advice I've ever received: "Don't pay atten-

tion to what designers design, watch what they are wearing." For me that means neutral colors, well-tailored pieces, and investing in classics. My staple "everyday" outfit includes jeans with a fantastic fit, a black long sleeve t-shirt, a scarf, and a leather bag. I am rarely drawing fashion attention, but I always look together and polished.

Aimee: How much time do we have? Don't get me talking about fashion! My latest obsession is my "boyfriend" style gold watch with its gem face. I also love my Steve Madden nude heels. Every girl should have nude-colored shoes. For make-

up, I couldn't be without my Benefit concealers. Their Boi-ing concealer and Erase Paste eye brightener are like covering up with new skin!

Megan: I'm crazy about switching up my hair accessories and styles! A cute hair clip, fabric flower pin, headband, or a new hairstyle allows me to make my look appear fresh and different without buying new clothes. My absolute favorite is trying out different up-dos-- it's amazing what a

5 sisters share their BEST advice on beauty, fashion & dating

Tell us how you deal with your body image.

Karen: I've struggled with my weight since having kids. Even as a teenager, I never felt I was thin enough. Since I know being overweight is unhealthy, it's not something I want to accept about myself; it's something I want to change. For me, it has helped to find someone to confide in about my negative feelings. When my thinking is unhealthy, it's refreshing to hear from someone who doesn't live in my head. As a result, I'm better able to make goals and stick to them. Counting my blessings also helps-- remembering that I am loved by my husband, children, and friends, and have worth to God, regardless of what the scale says.

Meagen: I struggle with facial acne, and it's difficult to keep a healthy body image when all you see in the mirror is your flaws. While my acne has greatly improved over time, I spent seven years with varying severity of blemishes, and it has skewed my perception of my face. One thing that's really helped me is focusing on the things that I do like about myself, such as my eyes and hair. So I play up those features! This keeps me distracted from unhealthy obsession and creates a way for me to focus on purifying my thoughts about myself to maintain a more Godly perspective.

difference it makes to step beyond that daily ponytail!

Liana: I'm artistic, and makeup is another outlet for me to get creative and experiment with new looks! For me, a good eyeliner is key. My favorite is the cream eyeliner from e.l.f. It's easy to work with, which allows me to be creative -- and it's only three bucks!

Let's dish. Talk to me about dating and men!

Sarah: I joke about being a protestant nun (permanently single). I had a serious relationship with a guy I met after college. We were engaged, but a few weeks before the wedding he bailed without reason. It took my heart awhile to heal enough to dive back into the dating scene. I have dated a little since then, but nothing serious. I love my life right now (friends, career, house, dog) so add-

ing a man has to be an upgrade, and that has been hard to find. Most of my friends are married, so it is easy to feel "behind," --but I also have friends who are unhappily married. I am keenly aware that being single and happy while waiting is a better option than finding a man just to check something off the to-do list of life.

Aimee: As a senior in college, I've seen many of my friends begin serious relationships, and plan weddings. So far I haven't dated anyone, because I just haven't found a good match. It's so important to connect yourself with the right person since marriage will influence the rest of your life--kids, location, ministry, you name it! I'm holding out for a man who'll be a great fit in his character, spiritual devotion and personality. Of course, I wouldn't mind if he owned some nice sweaters as well! I love a man with fashion sense.

What could we find you doing if you had a whole day to yourself?

Sarah: Can I turn off my work phone?! I would get up early, make some French press and sit on my back steps reading, while my beagle Charlie sniffed around the backyard. If I got ambitious, I might play fetch with him or walk to the dog park. I'd catch a yoga class or walk around a lake. My day would definitely include a nap...so luxurious. Seriously. Think about napping.

Ahhh. Then I'd run some errands or clean and grab dinner with a friend (*cough*) Aimee.

Aimee: Because college and my internship keep me busy, I'd definitely be doing something low-key! I'd make some Teavana chai in my favorite mug, watch Gilmore Girls or Hulu, and surf the web for new music. Then I'd probably call Sarah for a chat. And I'm sure my family and friends would see me Tweet quite a bit throughout the day!

Liana: You would probably find me drawing a portrait, or even painting with watercolors. I would also take some downtime to read a good book, watch a show, Facebook, or web surf for craft ideas. One of my favorite websites for inspiration is Craftgawker.com. Even though I don't often end up making stuff, I still like to sit, read, and...well, gawk.



The Bottom Line



with Karen Barton



Movie/Book Review:

The Help

Novel by Kathryn Stockett
 In Theaters August 10th
 PG-13 for thematic material
 Run time: 2 hours, 17 minutes

The book, *The Help*, is a story told from the viewpoints of three different women from Jackson, Mississippi in the year 1962; Aibileen, Minny and Eugenia (aka Miss Skeeter).

Aibileen and Minny are both black maids working for white families. Miss Skeeter is a single, 22 year old, white woman who has just returned from college with a degree in journalism. Skeeter has been given the advice to “write about what disturbs you, particularly if it bothers no one else”. Skeeter, who was raised by her family’s black maid, Constantine, begins to notice the good, and especially the bad, in the relationships between white women and their black maids. She gets the idea to write a book called *The Help* from the viewpoints of these maids. But with the danger involved, will any of these maids help her? This is a story full of secrets and sorrow; laughter and tears; friendship and love; determination and hope.

Aibileen has been raising white children since she was 14 years old. She loves them as if they were her own. And these children love her right back. But what happens, when the little girl you loved and raised becomes your boss someday? Your boss who treats you just as her mother did. Will the cycle ever be broken?

I loved this book for so many reasons! The book opened a window into the lives of southern women, black and white, during the 1960’s. You will find yourself empathiz-

ing with these maids. You will cry with them. You will laugh with them. You will cheer them on!

I am always hesitant to see a movie that has been preceded by a book. This movie was a little more light hearted than the book.

From a Christian standpoint, I felt like this movie did have more religious content than most. Aibileen has a prayer journal and attends a Baptist church with friend, Minny. She often talks of her prayer time with God. God is mentioned many times with “If God is willing,” or “It took God to get me through it.” The movie also speaks of loving your enemies. However, there is also a character who considers herself as a Christian, but she is cruel and godless.

The Bottom Line: The book is definitely better. But I would recommend the movie also. They are both worth the money.



Book Review:

Learning

by Karen Kingsbury

Kingsbury’s second book of the Bailey Flannigan series, *Learning*, picks up right where the first book, *Leaving*, left off. Bailey has gone to the hospital where Cody Coleman is keeping vigil for the seriously injured Cheyenne. Bailey brings Cody a box of items that represent their former relationship. But the conversation does not go the way Bailey, or Cody, hopes. The emotional and physical distance between these two characters was unbearable in *Leaving*, but in *Learning*, it gets much worse!

Broken hearted, Bailey moves to New York City to begin her role in the Broadway musical *Hairspray*. Bailey, who



has always formed friendships quickly and easily, feels ostracized from her fellow cast mates. Most of them do not believe in God and live lifestyles that Bailey is not accustomed to. On top of that, Bailey's self esteem begins to crumble under the eye of the director, Francesca.

Unlike Bailey's life, Cody's seems to be going exceptionally well! Cody continues his life as the head coach of the Lyle varsity football team where he is a motivator on and off the field. But Cody's past starts to catch up with him. Who will Cody turn to for comfort? Will Cody be able to fully open his heart to the possibility of love? You'll have to wait and see.

While reading this book, I couldn't help but feel disappointed. Partly because this book is pretty uneventful, but mostly because Bailey and Cody are both so stubborn and immature when it comes to their relationship.

The Bottom Line: This book may seem like a flop, but maybe Kingsbury is a literary genius because I will still be running to the store on November 29th to buy *Longing!*



Movie Review: *Cars 2*

One word can sum up this movie: disappointing. My husband and I took our two older children, Leila (5) and Leighton (3), to see it opening weekend, as they had been excited for it to come out for almost a full year! Now, don't worry, your kids will NOT be disappointed by the

movie. It will be a movie you will have to own on DVD and watch everyday for a month.

But parents, sorry to say, you will be disappointed. The

best part about going to this movie, was the Toy Story: Hawaiian Vacation short at the beginning. And that alone might be worth your money.

The movie is very James Bond like. Much too intense, much too complicated for small children. I don't think my kids understood the complex plot. There were bad cars galore who use the word "kill" several times throughout the movie. If that's not bad enough, these bad cars proceed to actually kill the American spy car. I couldn't believe it!! Of course they did not show the actual moment the car was killed, but it was implied. To my son, these characters are real. So to have one of them killed is inappropriate in my opinion. Especially for a G rated movie!

I don't understand why Disney/Pixar would deviate from the original Cars movie that was original, funny, charming, and taught about the importance of having a good work ethic as well as the importance of having, and being, a good friend. The only explanation I have is that Cars came out in 2006. The boys and girls who saw and loved that movie are now 5 years older. So maybe they did gear it towards an older demographic.

Another disappointment is that Lightning McQueen is not the main character of Cars 2. Mater is. I loved Mater in Cars! Mater is the definition of a fabulous side-kick! But he is NOT main character material. The other characters from Cars such as Sally, Red, Sarge, Guido and Luigi are not in the movie much either. There are new characters: Miles Axlerod, Francesco Bernoulli, Finn McMissile, and Holley Shiftwell. None of which are charming and lovable characters.

The Bottom Line: All that hype for nothing. Rumor has it, they will be making a movie called Planes next. I hope it's better than Cars 2.



HIT



PICK

Dara McLean
SUITCASES

Hitpick Song: Suitcases
By Dara McLean
Available on iTunes \$1.29

LIST

Hitpick Devotional:
Living the God Life
by John Ortberg
\$3.30 on www.amazon.com

LIVING
THE GOD

Jesus
Calling

Hitpick Devotional:
*Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence-
Devotions for Everyday of the Year*
by Sarah Young
\$8.99 www.cbd.com

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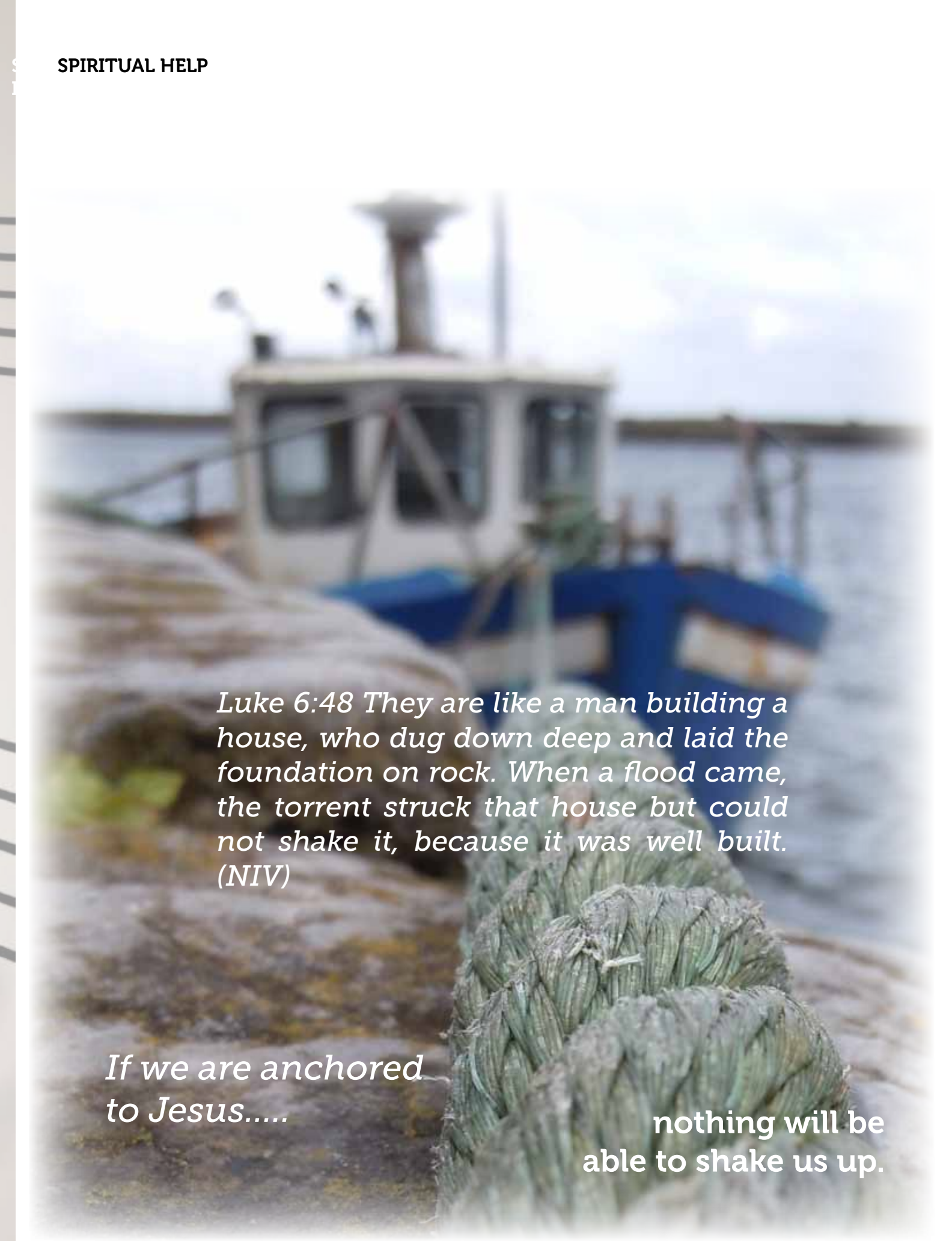
Hitpick Album: I Will Praise You
By Rebecca St. James
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Live Loved
EXPERIENCING GOD'S PRESENCE
in EVERYDAY LIFE

Hitpick Movie:
The Muppets: Green with Envy
In theaters November 23, 2011





Luke 6:48 They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. (NIV)

*If we are anchored
to Jesus.....*

**nothing will be
able to shake us up.**



Start **THE DAY** Right

Dear Jesus,
I'm starting my day by meeting you in prayer.

Sometimes the days seem filled with troubles and life feels overwhelming. The weight of my to-do list is so heavy. I'm just not sure how I can do it all. The demands on me feel like weights that are pulling me down. It's almost too much to bear.

But for today, Lord, I'm laying everything down right here... right now....and I'm going to walk away feeling free...watching the

weight of it all release off of my shoulders and onto Yours. I'm depending on You for strength and wisdom. I'm counting on Your Word that tells me that You never leave me.

Give me hope. Give me peace. And give me a Godly perspective to love those around me and offer them encouragement, just as You offer it to me.

Go before me, God...and make this day a day that counts for You. In Jesus Name....Amen.

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."

II Thessalonians 2:16
(NIV)

White Chocolate Autumn Breakfast Muffins

MUFFIN:

2 cups flour
½ cup sugar
¼ cup brown sugar
3 tsp. baking powder
¼ tsp. baking soda
¼ tsp. salt
1 tsp. cinnamon
¾ cup sour milk (just add a T. of lemon juice or white vinegar to ¾ cup milk)
1 egg
1/3 cup oil
2 tsp. vanilla extract
1 cup finely chopped, peeled apple
1 cup chopped white chocolate

TOPPING:

¼ cup flour
¼ cup brown sugar
½ cup old fashioned oats
¼ tsp. salt
¼ tsp. cinnamon
2. T. oil

INSTRUCTIONS:

Preheat the oven to 400 degrees.

Grease 12 muffin tins.

Mix the first seven dry ingredients in a bowl (flour, sugars, baking powder, baking soda, salt, and cinnamon.) Then, in another bowl, mix the next four wet ingredients (sour milk, egg, oil, and vanilla.) Pour the wet ingredients into the bowl of dry ingredients, and mix just until combined. Be careful not to over mix. Then, fold in the chopped apple and white chips.

To make the topping, put all six ingredients in a bowl, and mix them together. It should be crumbly.

Fill all twelve muffin tins ¾ of the way up with the muffin batter. Then, evenly distribute the topping in each muffin tin.

Bake the muffins for 15 to 18 minutes or until they pass the toothpick test.

*Best when served warm with butter.

Tips from Creative Chef
Musician/Artist Josh Garland

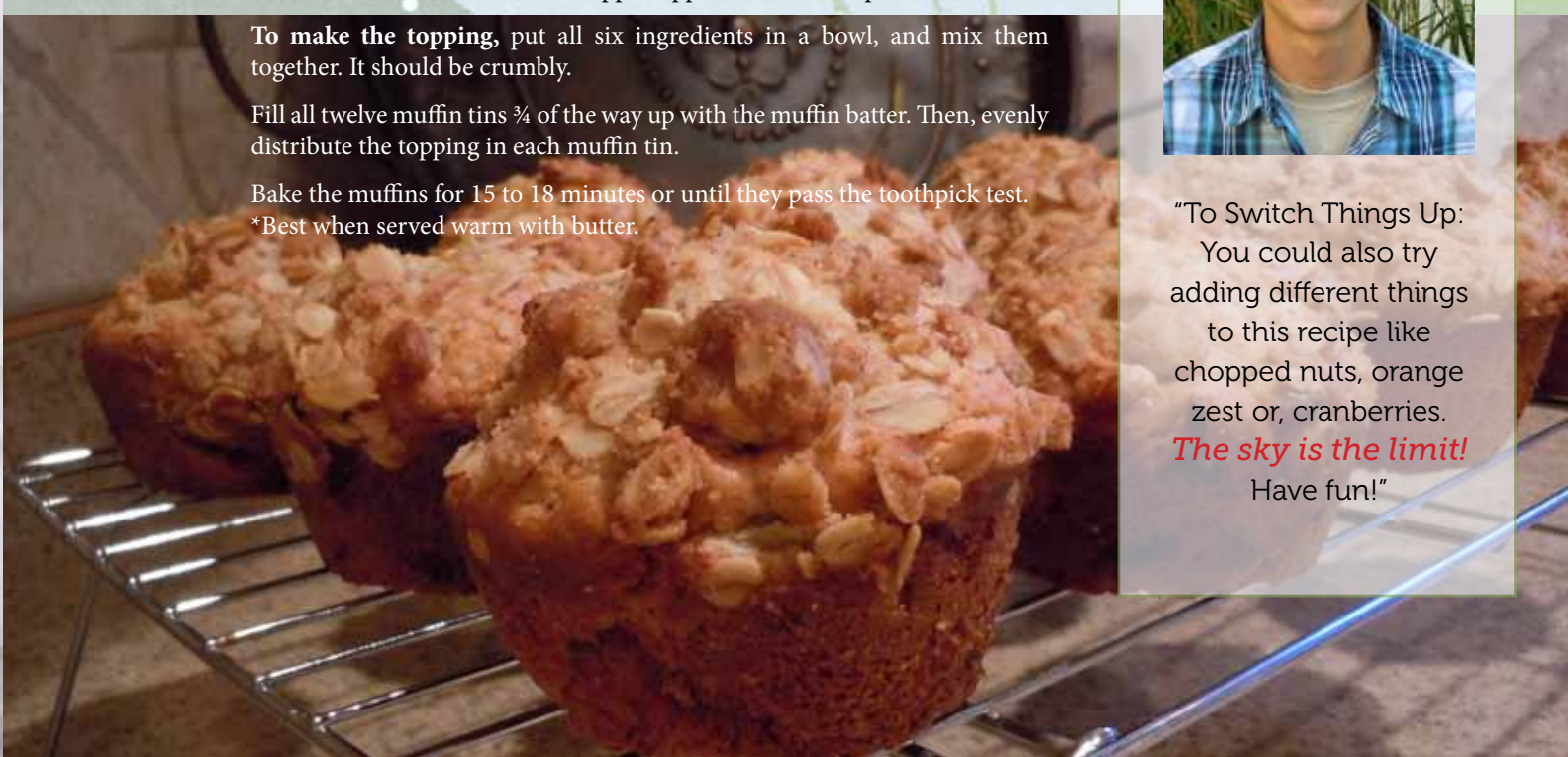


"To Switch Things Up:

You could also try adding different things to this recipe like chopped nuts, orange zest or, cranberries.

The sky is the limit!

Have fun!"



Host an Extraordinary Women's Conference at Your Church or Location!

2012 TOPIC

Fill 'Er Up!

*Filling Up... On the
Good Things of God*

The evidence of who we really are is revealed on the gas gauge of our lives. Are we filling up the tank of our soul with meaning?

PATIENCE

LOVE

GENTLENESS

FAITH

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