

Mini Memoirs:
Poetry as a Medium for Memories

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for Lukus, my ministry partner, my husband, my love

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Abstract

For the critical paper, I explore the use of poetry as a form of memoir. Over the years, I have journaled by writing poetry, and for the purpose of this paper, I have studied the marriage of poetry and memoir. My critical paper research has directed me towards how memoirists (including autobiographers and biographers of the past) have used poetry in their writings and how the truth about the past is verified and enhanced by poetic works. Poetry seems to be a vehicle of preserving truth, thus proving the veracity of the emotions and experiences within a historical context.

Since poetry serves as both an ancient and modern medium for memories, its value should be more thoroughly explored. Poetry as memoir, or poetry presented within a historical narrative, not only preserves the emotional integrity of the persons involved, but also preserves the integrity of the surrounding culture, and the integrity of the historical details as well.

My creative manuscript is blend of poetry and prose, capturing the heart and history of my life as a church-planter's wife from 2012-2014 in Salt Lake City, Utah. In August 2022, we celebrate our ten-year anniversary at Gospel Grace Church, and I desire to commemorate the milestone by compiling a collection of poems, scenes, and stories, focusing on the early years of our ministry. My purpose for writing is to present truth in a beautiful way, pointing people towards Christ, who is the perfect embodiment of beauty and truth.

Artist Statement

Artists are worship leaders. Whether their created form is seen, heard, or read, the artist directs people to praise someone or something. As a Christian artist, I write as a personal act of worship to God and with the design of pointing others toward worship of God. Desiring God's social media account boils down John Piper's concept of how people are always worshipping in this quotation: "All of life is worship. Whether we worship God or something else, our lives advertise what we value most" (Desiring God). Every human wants food and drink, health and safety, love and relationship, purpose, and transcendence. We all want more, and we all want there to be more than just what we have or who we are. The wanting makes us worship. Whether we admit it or not, humans want God. My aesthetic seeks to draw from the innate human need and want for God. I see God most clearly in the word, in Jesus Christ.

Through Jesus, a whole world unfolds. He is the hermeneutic for understanding life. Whether my writing explicitly speaks of Jesus, I desire my writing to point to him. As I ponder the process of writing both poetry and personal essays, my brain reminds my heart that dark moments must be addressed. These moments, though sometimes troubling, intimate the presence of God in my life. I am thankful for the exercise of writing in memoir style, not only to remember important life events and try to make sense of them, but also to identify how Christ was there in the middle of it all.

Memories, like a ball of tangled yarn, are difficult to work through, but as I follow the threads, they each lead to the theme of a redeemed life. I have written poems and memoirs about growing up with an "old" dad with much older stepbrothers and sisters, dealing with my traumatic youth with a mentally handicapped adopted sister, handling fear in the middle of Tornado Alley, enduring pregnancy sickness and loss, and dealing with the difficulties of being a

church planter's wife. Hope for my future and my family is born in seeing my past through the lens of redemption.

My creative process is ever evolving, and my creative works are varied. When I entered the MFA, the piece I submitted to the admissions board was a memoir blending poetry and prose called "Ruthie and Me." I had written "Ruthie and Me" for my mom, to validate my herfaithful mothering of both me and my sister. My adopted sister, Ruthie Jo, arrived from India in 1979, when I was just three years old. From the first day, both my mother and I knew that something was desperately wrong with this young girl. In dealing with my sister's attachment disorder and mental handicap, my mother taught me to trust Jesus and to work through difficulties by prayer and a little bit of piano playing.

As I wrote this piece, I had unknowingly developed an aesthetic for the mixture of creative nonfiction and poetry. Each of my chapters began with a poem as an epigraph, followed by a short chapter. In writing this tribute to my mom, I discovered personal truths that opened my eyes to several issues I had never understood up until that point. I could finally see why I had confidence in my very early conversion to Christianity, why I struggled so deeply with anxiety, and why I so desperately wanted to be safe. I remembered how music soothed the screams in my home and how the church provided the regular routines that made me love God's sovereign hand of control and protection.

In writing my first memoir about my childhood with my handicapped sister, I recognized I have a desire to work through more of my history, not only to understand myself but to help others understand themselves. For me, writing a memoir brings about something rather like validation for all involved. I try to avoid vindictiveness when I remember people who have

harmed me or those I love. As negative feelings rise in response to memories, I counsel myself: “We are all human, and I have harmed others along the way, as well.”

The biblical Joseph modeled processing hurt through a redemptive lens. Because he chose forgiveness over bitterness, he embraced the larger story that eclipsed his own pain. He embraced the gospel: we sin, God saves. He is honest in retelling the sins of his brothers, but he is not in bondage to their abuse. “As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Genesis 50:20). Joseph was able to see that ultimately, God was sovereign over his pain and the sins of others, thus placing, not the abuse, but the amazing power of God to turn evil into good, at the center of the story. My heart for writing a memoir, either in the form of poetry or narrative prose, is to showcase the gospel of grace.

Recently I have written some chapters in another story in my life that must be told, not only because I need to process it, but because my husband asked me to write about it. This is the history of our nearly ten years of church-planting in Salt Lake City, Utah. Since our experience is not over, I have hesitated to write it. Still, time runs quickly along, and I fear I will forget the fantastic things God has done in these years. Much pain is involved in this story, not only my pain, but also the pain of those who have been involved in the church plant. I am tentative to write about church discipline issues, false teachers, the oppression of Mormonism, unkind parishioners, burnout, or my own battle with fear and control, but if I do not include any of the negatives, I have no way to show how miraculous it is that there is even a Gospel Grace Church in 2022, a healthy body with nearly 500 regular attenders, in the heart of Salt Lake City.

Beth Kephart’s valuable book on writing memoir is titled *Handling the Truth*. What a weighty task it is, handling the truth! The truth is a tidy thing in God’s grasp, but in my own, it is

not so easily tended. I do not claim to present the truth as he does in his infallible word. I claim to present my memories as I have them and recognize that their veracity will be decided by those who know me best in the context of our ministry. I hope to please them with my presentation and to worship my Lord in the process.

In contrast to writing truthful fiction (also weighty, but not as risky), truthful non-fiction must be just that: truthful. I liked how Beth wrote about memoirists who are not yet ready to write in the genre; she calls them pseudo-memoirists. They think in details, not in larger themes. In her chapter, “What’s It All About?”, she begins with a great question, “Do you know yet what you’re writing about?” (139). She contrasts real memoirists with pseudo memoirists. Real ones say, “My memoir is about navigating loss...second chances...the power of love...” (144). False ones say, “My memoir is about a house I built...a fishing trip...” (144). She says, “The pseudos haven’t connected with the larger world, or with their readers” (144). Through the process of education, including reading, writing, and workshopping, I aspire to move from being a pseudo-memoirist to a real one. My memoir is not simply about planting a church in Salt Lake City, but about spiritual oppression, the messiah complex, and truly believing the gospel of grace.

As I consider the creative nonfiction pieces I have read, the ones that resonate are those where the vulnerability of the author is present. I do love honesty. Tony Earley set the vulnerability bar high for me in his piece, “Somehow Form a Family” (Williford 167). After all, it is not easy to admit your media addiction, but he does it with perfect and relatable honesty. Jo Ann Beard’s, “The Fourth State of Matter” (Williford 1) is another memorable piece because of how she framed an intense scene within a bizarre personal scenario. I was not expecting Gang Lu’s shooting spree because I was too busy wondering why the narrator, Beard, was obsessed with her incontinent dog, while at the same time emotionally distancing herself from her

estranged husband. Her story unfolded like fantastic fiction, which made her writing even more brilliant, because it was true.

I do not know that I am an effective artist in any genre, but I do know that I want to be. From my earliest memories, I was always singing and playing piano. I found a chicken-scratch copy of a song I wrote in early elementary school called “God, I Love You.” I can point to many pieces and poems throughout my life that express that same theme. I know I only love him because he first loved me. This love makes me want to express how God has loved the world in creative ways.

Over the past twenty-five years, since graduating from college, I have spent quite a bit of time reading Christian counseling and practical theology books. I wish I had been able to keep up my reading in more genres, but with each baby born, and the responsibilities of being a pastor’s wife and piano teacher expanded, I was happy to read my Bible regularly, along with many Christian books.

In my childhood, I enjoyed reading poetry such as Robert Louis Stevenson’s, *A Child’s Garden of Verses*. My elementary school’s spelling curriculum included the memorization of several poems per semester. I can still quote “A Good Name” from Shakespeare’s *Othello* or “When the Frost Is on the Punkin” by James Whitcomb Riley, the beginning of Eugene Field’s “The Duel” (“The gingham dog and the calico cat / side by side on the table sat”), and “If” by Rudyard Kipling. I cut my teeth on the King James Version and memorized quite a bit of it (including several Psalms) from elementary school through college.

I mention my early exposure to poetry to share how metered poetry shaped my understanding of and aesthetic for poetry. I seem to speak and think in iambic pentameter because of this early exposure.

Reading for pleasure started in junior high with Lucy Maude Montgomery, Grace Livingston Hill (what a confession!), Janette Oke, and Gilbert Morris. As I got into high school, I had less time for fun reading, but managed to cultivate an appreciation for Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, and the Brontë sisters. In college, I fell in love with religious poetry from George Herbert, John Donne, and Anne Bradstreet. I continued to read for my English Education degree, but also got deeper into religious literature, especially missionary biography, especially by Elisabeth Elliot and Hudson Taylor, led to practical Christian living works. *Desiring God* and *A Hunger for God* by John Piper opened my heart to religious writings that were so well-crafted, I could not escape the truths presented. When I read Augustine's *Confessions* (an early prototype of religious memoir), I was entranced by the marriage of poetic language with autobiography. I wanted to write like Augustine, but I did not have the tools or the intellect for that.

During my life as a pastor's wife, I have written women's Bible studies and children's materials, including discipleship curriculums, daily devotions, and Backyard Bible Clubs. Skits, songs, and stories pepper the lessons I have written because I believe that creativity produces memorability of God's truth. During my quiet moments, when I do not have a writing deadline, I often pen poems and songs.

Education has pressed me towards seeking discipline, correction, and insight from others. Whereas much of what I have written has been for a small group of people I know, in pursuing a master's degree, I perceive possibilities of writing for a broader audience.

One of my workshop partners called the ending of one of my poems a series of "truth bombs." I believe she meant it as a compliment, but I was reminded of my life-long battle to speak the truth in love. "Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every

joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love” (Eph. 4.15-16). Truth and love are not at odds, they are the flesh and bones of life.

My coursework has included the concept of writing to serve the reader. This thought led me to write an article that was published by *The Gospel Coalition*, “4 Ways to Witness to Your Mormon Friend.” The writing and revision process helped me work through how readers would be served by what I had to say. As I wrote, the concept of serving the reader redirected and refocused me. After about twenty revisions, I finally had something I felt was true and worshipful. I believe the article points to Jesus and serves the audience.

My personal aesthetic has matured since being exposed to twentieth century poetry and to the fine handbook on poetry by Mary Oliver. My first thought about contemporary poetry was that I would not find it as enriching as the older poetry, but I do not have the same thoughts after reading through a century of the development of the American poem. I would agree with a statement I have heard repeated in various scenarios: there is a distinct struggle for the truly American poem. May the struggle continue! Because through the process of engaging in ideas, styles, and sounds, very many important things are being addressed and very many beautiful things about life are being expressed. I hope to add to the world of publishable contemporary poetry.

My critical paper is built on the premise that poetry provides a medium for preserving the integrity of memories, while my creative manuscript fleshes out the premise of the critical paper. The creative work includes both newly composed as well as previously composed poems. The older poems, even after revision, helped me to remember my emotions, the culture, and the

history of my life as a church planter's wife in Salt Lake City – just as I had hoped would happen after researching the intersection of poetry and autobiography in my critical paper.

As a Christian artist, I remember my ultimate calling, to glorify God by expressing my thoughts as truthfully and beautifully as possible, by serving the reader in what I write, and by giving my audience a platform for worshiping Jesus, the author of life himself.

Mini Memoirs: Poetry as a Medium for Memories

Introduction

In the hunt for biographical material, researchers do not often light upon the poets as a first resource. However, there is a case for poetry serving as both an ancient and modern medium for preserving biographical material. The Apostle Paul hints at this phenomenon when he persuades the philosophers at Athens about the nearness of God, “Yet he is actually not far from each one of us, for ‘In him we live and move and have our being’; as even some of your own poets have said, “‘For we are indeed his offspring’” (Act 17:27b-28 ESV). Paul quotes their own poets, referencing a work probably written by Epimenides of Crete in the first quote and Aratus’s poem “Phainomena” in the next (*ESV Study Bible* 2122). In quoting from these poems, Paul sets up a precedent for looking at how poets preserve the integrity of biographical material.

Poetry as memoir, or poetry presented within a historical narrative, not only preserves the emotional integrity of the persons involved, but also preserves the integrity of the historical details, and the integrity of the surrounding culture, and as well.

Even though debate exists in the world of autobiography as to the veracity of the work itself, most readers accept biographies and autobiographies as true because the genre demands it. The question regarding autobiographical material is this: Is the author biased in the retelling of his own story? The answer is of course. Bias is inescapable in the case of telling stories from one’s own vantage point.

But in the newer world of memoir, the point of the writing is not simply to render an account of all verifiable details, although all details included must necessarily be verifiable. Memoir is a re-telling of events, framed in such a way as to describe the emotional

journey of the author. In the framing, there is an acceptable creative flair, one that the reader understands immediately. In this creativity, poetry fits in perfectly as a method for memoirists.

Poets who write about historical events intuit memoir. They innately understand the connection between emotional beats and story lines. Thus, poets who write about their own personal life (or the lives of others) in poetry offer the genre of memoir a uniquely accessible rendering of said emotions. Memoir seems to be the new autobiographical genre of this century, freeing the authors from prior convention. If memoir is a new form of autobiography, then poetry could be viewed as both an old form of autobiography and part of the new form of memoir.

Before exploring the value of poetry as a medium for memoir, terms such as autobiography, memoir, and poetry itself require clearer definition, however difficult defining those terms may be.

Identifying terms: autobiography, memoir, and poetry

Mary Oliver, a contemporary American poet, reminds us that what poetry is to one generation may be foreign to the next. To those raised hearing and analyzing the metered poetry of Longfellow, Tennyson, Byron, or Bradstreet, metrical poetry is poetry. But to those not reared on Shakespeare, the most accessible poetry is that which mirrors familiar language patterns. Oliver herself admits that studying prosody feels unnatural to her. “We write our early poems imitation of the first poems we heard” (*A Poetry Handbook* 14-15). She worries that modern poets do not have enough exposure and therefore not enough “felt sensitivity to a poem as a structure of lines and rhythmic energy and repetitive sound” leaving them “forever less equipped, less deft than the poet who dreams of making a new thing can afford to be. Free verse, after all, developed from metrical verse. And they are not so very different” (15). So, Oliver, in her efforts to explain how one’s affinity for poetry style is shaped by early exposure to the genre, defines

poetry in a simple way that seems universally accepted. Poetry is “a structure of lines and rhythmic energy and repetitive sound” (15). Poetry differs from ordinary language in “intent and intensity” (16) implying that poetry is designed with purpose to state something by use of well-chosen sounds that allow the senses to enjoy a condensed version of story, scene, or sentiment.

For this paper, poetry is simply defined as a collection of words chosen for sound and impact. The words may be many or few, but their arrangement leaves the reader in a state of meditation, of reflection on the meaning of the poem or the feeling that the poem generated within them.

Poetry is more easily defined than memoir. Memoir, as a recognized genre, is relatively new. In 2001, Claire Armitstead, editor of *The Guardian*, wrote: “Why are memoirs so popular? What exactly is a memoir? These are questions that prompt some head-scratching. According to one publisher, the memoir boom started with St. Augustine and was given a new impetus in the 20th century by Freud's emphasis on self-revelation” (*The Guardian*). Memoirists describe memoir in a million creative ways but can scarcely come up with a universal definition. Laura Adair writes, “A memoir is an emotional journey. The events in the story are there not because they happened, but to show the shifts in emotion the narrator (you) goes through, event by event, over the course of the book” (*Writer's Digest*). If memoir is an emotional journey written without necessarily having to fit into pre-conceived autobiography-defined boxes, we can discover a handful written in the past, such as St. Augustine's *Confessions*, but we will find thousands written in the 21st century alone, partly because the term memoir can be attributed to any number of emerging styles of telling stories about the self. Armitstead calls memoir “a dizzyingly broad genre, ranging from ghosted autobiography to what might be called interpretative fiction . . . One of its few common denominators is that it shows a life refracted

through a particular experience - whether that be childhood, war or sleeping with a Rolling Stone” (*The Guardian*). Narrowing down memoir into a specific definition of a genre containing both parameters and expectations is impossible. The idea of memoir as being a truthful account of someone’s emotional journey is about as close to a universal definition as discoverable.

If memoir as a genre is particular to the twenty-first century, autobiography as a genre must be consulted for its past connection with poetry. In an article entitled “Poetry and Autobiography,” writers Jo Gill and Melodie Waters begin with this conundrum about autobiography: “It has become a commonplace of critical studies of autobiography to begin by establishing the difficulties of defining the object of scrutiny” (1). A key figure in addressing the concerns of defining autobiography is Paul de Man. Gill and Waters quote his assessment of the reason autobiography as a genre may be undefinable. According to de Man, he believes autobiography should possibly be considered “*not* a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts” (1). If de Man is correct, autobiography is an overarching figure, perhaps even a hermeneutic, leading readers in how they interpret any literature written about the self.

For this paper, autobiography (and biography) is not only a figure of reading but an older style of writing historical content, in contrast to the newer style of memoir. Memoirists today help us understand the definition of traditional autobiography as a genre. Writers and teachers of memoir, such as Beth Kephart, advise against writing in the older tradition of autobiography. The section “Memoir Is Not” in her book, *Handling the Truth*, presents Kephart’s opinion in no uncertain terms. Memoir is not a “chronological, thematically tone-deaf recitation of everything remembered. That’s autobiography, which should be left, in this twenty-first century, to politicians and celebrities. Oh, be honest: It should just be left” (Kephart 6). The stereotypical

autobiography (or biography) as the chronological spelling out of details, as they happened, with special attention to precision, seems to be the general understanding of traditional autobiography as a genre itself.

However, if we think about de Man's presentation that autobiography is a figure of understanding nonfiction, we can see how the term autobiography helps us interpret any sort of historical writing. If the term autobiography (or biography) does not simply mean chronological writing about self or other historical events, it can be viewed as a way to interpret nonfiction. Biographical material therefore is not limited to smelly old 1000-page robotic treatises, biographical material is part of reading any nonfiction genre, new or old.

Though today's memoirists may reject having their work called autobiography, they generally follow the unwritten rules of autobiography, for their work is most often presented as historically accurate, unless otherwise indicated. The unwritten rules of autobiography include accuracy, when including dates, locations, events, and persons; and transparency, when names or settings must be changed for privacy or protection, those changes are made clear to the reader.

Autobiography or biography, for this paper, is not limited to a genre but is expanded to a hermeneutic. When describing the new language of memoir (including poetic memoir), the interpreter will be our old friend, autobiography, because this paper is most interested in proving how the integrity of historical events is enhanced by poetry as a medium for memories.

Accepting that memoir is a new autobiographical genre is helpful when researching the intersection of creativity and veracity within the form. Understanding this allows us to see how memoir, poetry (about true events), and other creative nonfiction works should follow rules of truth telling because they are presented as autobiographical, yet these newer forms give liberty to both the author and the reader who recognize that in relaying emotional truths, certain portions of

the account need not be told (or can be told in a more creative, metaphorical way) to maintain the truthfulness of the narrative itself. In “Poetry and Autobiography,” Gill and Waters comment on the opinion of Lejeune on the veracity of autobiographical writings: “If for Lejeune, the hallmark of autobiography is the pact between author/narrator and reader—a bond of faith, obligation and mutual trust in the autobiographical reliability of the narrative, in lyric poetry the relationship seems to be built on a shared understanding that subject, text and reader are *not* bonded in this way” (Gill and Waters). The lyric “I” of the poem can be seen as autobiographical in presentation, but it is not required to be a detailed treatise of every truth within the narrated event.

The requirement of truth is that which is emotionally true from the viewpoint of the writer and is therefore accepted as truthful by the readers. The definitions of autobiography, memoir, and poetry discussed this far will prove helpful in the exploration of how poetry serves autobiographical integrity within memoir.

Theme: Poetry preserves the emotional, historical, and cultural integrity of memoir

Since poetry serves as both an ancient and modern medium for memoir, its value should be more thoroughly explored. Poetry as memoir, or poetry presented within a historical narrative, not only preserves the emotional integrity of the persons involved, but also preserves the integrity of the historical details, and the integrity of the surrounding culture, and as well.

Poetry in memoir preserves emotional integrity

Poetry within memoir or autobiography is one of the oldest ways of preserving the emotional integrity of authors who write about personal journeys. From the most ancient of

extant writings, the biblical text, poetry is used to portray not only events but also the emotions of the people in the moments recorded. Consider the Hebrew poem in the Genesis account which captures the emotions of Adam the moment he first gazed upon his newly created companion Eve: “This at last / is bone of my bones / and flesh of my flesh; / she shall be called Woman, / because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23 ESV). Commentator Gordon J. Wenham writes, “In ecstasy man bursts into poetry on meeting his perfect helpmeet. . . In these five short lines many of the standard techniques of Hebrew poetry are employed: parallelism. . . assonance and word play . . . chiasmus . . . and verbal repetitions” (Wenham 70). When Moses wrote the creation narrative down, he included Adam’s poem. Because of the emotional rendering, the poem functions as a verifier for the event.

Real events produce real emotions. Recorded emotions, such as Adam’s poem, act as a preservative for authorial integrity. Adam had expressed himself about a historical moment in this poetic way. Then Adam passed his own poem to his sons and grandsons. Adam preserved his own emotional journey by means of spoken poetry. Moses naturally included this poem in the biblical text. This primal mini memoir is hereafter considered autobiographical by readers who hold to a literal hermeneutic of scriptural interpretation.

Memoir employs emotional beats to create movement and structure. Poetry serves perfectly within memoir in this way. Adam’s poem presented his expression of awe and love in a way that serves as an emotional beat. In the beat prior, Moses describes how God created the woman from the man. After the poem, the narrative continues with a maxim for marriage, which provides a satisfying final beat in this ancient memoir. The way the beats play out remind us that memoir, as an emotional journey, is not a human construct of the 21st century but is a construct of the most ancient writers of biographical texts, such as Moses himself.

Poetry offers autobiographical writers a way to represent raw emotions difficult to share explicitly. In their journal article, “Self in Verse,” the writers Görbert, Hansen, and Wolf explain: “Poetry, as a means of expressing the self in verse, has constantly fascinated writers. Very early cases include Catullus and Ovid, whose Latin poems *Carmina* and *Tristia* treat questions of lives faced with controversy and exile” (*The European Journal of Life Writing*). In the case of Ovid, his autobiographical poem *Tristia* spoke of his banishment by the Roman Emperor Augustus. *Poetry Foundation* relays, “Although Ovid wrote about banishment in the poem *Tristia*, or *Sorrows*, the reasons for the exile remain uncertain. ‘Two offenses, a poem and a mistake, have destroyed me,’ was all that Ovid wrote in *Tristia*” (*Poetry Foundation*). Ovid’s autobiographical line in *Tristia* is enough to show the emotional impact of the banishment.

The integrity of the poet’s emotional experience is preserved while the details are left abiding in the poet’s chosen state of anonymity. This is the value of using poetry as a vehicle for emotional truth in historical narrative: one does not need to relay all the explicit details of the event to preserve the emotions caused by the event.

Newer examples of memoirists who maintain emotional integrity by means of poetry abound. Consider *Singing from the Darktime: A Childhood Memoir in Poetry and Prose* by S. Weilbach. In her preface to her book, she reveals that her memoir is an emotional truth telling versus a factual recording of events. She says, “I’ve not attempted a factual account, but have tried to revive my direct, in-the-moment experiences with all their original emotional impact” (Weilbach). Weilbach shows us the pact between authors of memoir and readers of the same. There is an innate understanding that the subject matter is so personal, the author will frame the account not by facts but by emotional responses to those facts. In this understanding, a sweet bond forms between the memoirist and the reader. The first lines of Weilbach’s work show us

the benefit of poetry as the medium for presenting hard emotions: “And was each pin I’d held / For the coil at the nape of your neck, / My Oma, / Seized for the Fuhrer’s use, / As you stood naked, trembling, praying / (if you still could pray, beloved Oma) / In a line of naked strangers / On your way to the gas-shower door? / . . . / The bird that sings in the mornings / Shall be devoured by the cat at night” (5). Through poetry, Weilbach shares the autobiographical details, allowing the emotions of the moment to surpass the horrors of the scene.

Emotions expressed in memoir are only perceived as true when the author has moved beyond a certain point of validation or vindication. Perhaps authors do not need to go so far as to “love” as Beth Kephart, teacher of memoir, suggests. In her chapter, “Do You Love?”, Kephart preaches the concept that love is a requirement for writers of memoir: “If we don’t know what we love—if we’re not yet capable of it; if we’re stuck in a stingy, fisted-up place; if we’re still too angry to name the color of the sun—it is probably too soon to start the sorting and stacking and shaping that is memoir” (58-59). Perhaps memoirists do not need to love perfectly to preserve emotional integrity, but they do need to move beyond simply a need for validation or vindication.

Even if the people written about do not deserve love, as in the case of the Nazis in Weilbach’s childhood, love was required for Weilbach to write. Perhaps the timing of her writing, when she was a grandmother, is the only time she could have produced a memoir about her own grandmother. She may not have been able to write about such painful events without the love she had for her own grandchildren bringing back memories of her own grandmother.

When writing about offenders in a memoir, authors cannot proceed without love, or at least healing, breaking through in some way. Otherwise, their words will not be life-giving. They might be tainted at best and dehumanizing at worst. In her groundbreaking novel, *Speak*, Laura

Halse Anderson, found her voice, her ability to write about trauma. Twenty years later, “she wields the full force of it [her voice] in *Shout*, a memoir told through a series of short poems” (New York Times). In the book, she writes about being raped at age thirteen, and “she also examines an adolescence and adulthood marked by her veteran father's PTSD and her mother's powerlessness over the situation, resulting in her parents' shared struggle with alcohol” (New York Times). She processes painful situations solidly in her memoir, showing how difficult emotions can be expressed and their integrity can be preserved by means of poetry.

Poetry in memoir preserves historical integrity

Used in memoir, poetry preserves emotional integrity, and it also preserves the historical integrity of the events recounted. Because of the unique power of a poem to retain a place in history, to save the emotion of that moment, it offers researchers (even the poet himself as a researcher) another witness to the moment. The moment is essentially doubly verified through the poem and the recorded happenings. Thus, the poem provides both emotional and historical integrity, allowing the memoirist to get to the heart of the narrative, without rewriting the narrative.

In his book, *The Art of Creative Research*, Philip Gerard encourages biographical researchers to consult poets for historical details. For example, when researching the history of unrest in El Salvador, Gerard suggests considering Carolyn Forché's book of poems, *The Country Between Us*, where she writes poetry to process what she experienced. She wrote the book “based on her experience on the ground during the time of the death squads and impending war in El Salvador, using poetry to try to understand the savagery she witnessed—and make it known to the world in a more powerful and lasting form than a daily news story” (Gerard 2). By

means of poetry, she provides valuable historical details, providing a verifiable source for researchers of that time in El Salvador's history.

Historian Kenneth Johnston, in trying to discern what happened during a difficult period in the history of English writers, researched the poetry of Wordsworth. As he researched, he discovered that Wordsworth himself had recorded some of the history in his book of poems called *The Excursion*, which he began shortly after completing *The Prelude*, another autobiographical book of poems. As a result of his research, Johnston wrote the article, "Unusual Suspects, Unlikely Heroes. Pitt's Reign of Alarm and the Lost Generation of the 1790s" (98). According to Johnston, what happened under British Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger, "was all very much like the McCarthy era in 1950's America" (98). He writes about his research in the article, "Wordsworth at Forty: Memoirs of a Lost Generation." Johnston discovered that roughly seventy-five artists suffered loss and banishment as the result of Pitt's sniffing out any hints of revolutionary thought. Johnston's project "considers the many young men and women writers whose careers were derailed, detoured or destroyed by their run-ins with the vast security apparatus devised in the 1790s by the Prime Minister, William Pitt the Younger, and his two Home Secretaries" (98). Where do historians look to research events such as these? They look to personal letters and journals, news articles, and interestingly, to the work of poets.

Poets do not have to follow a strict autobiographical setup to present historical details. In *The Excursion*, Wordsworth, by creating a framework, offers autobiographical content. Through a careful reading of Wordsworth's, *The Excursion*, Johnston discovered that in books II-IV, the "poem has a plot: it sets up the drama of the recuperation of a member of the 'lost generation' of the 1790s: The Solitary, the title-figure of Book II" (99). Johnston purported that if one read the two large poems "consecutively, as Wordsworth wrote them," they would see "how a

representative man of this activist generation fell into enthusiasm for the French revolution, as an escape from personal grief and despair (the deaths of his wife and children), then fell out of it, first into selfishness and dissipation, then to escapism (to America)” (99). Though Wordsworth took poetic liberties with descriptions, his typified characters leave readers with an account worth engaging as autobiographical during a time when telling the truth outright could be dangerous.

Because they recognize the intrinsic honesty required to write about personal experiences, readers of memoir can accept historicity within creative license. Memoirists who creatively veil the particulars on details, by using poetry, can usually expect the positive response of readers. In “Poetry and Autobiography,” James Olney, commenting on the truthfulness of autobiographical poetry declares: “Poetry, like psychology and philosophy, is about life, not about part of it but potentially about all of it. The truth that poetry embodies [...] is a whole truth” (2). Poets who write memoir have freedom to frame autobiographical content creatively because the readers recognize there is a reason for doing so.

If memoirists treat history respectfully, staying true to provable events while staying true to their own memory as well, the historical integrity of the work is likely to be accepted. Philip Gerard, author of *Art of Creative Research*, grapples with the imperfection of memory in discerning the historical authenticity of autobiographical material. “Memory will rarely match that other evidence very neatly, but this is a good thing for the writer. Discrepancy between memory and other evidence—like discrepancy between any researched ‘facts’—is not a problem. It’s the point. The reckoning, the true story, lives in the space between the contradictions” (Gerard 10). Memoirists should aim towards factual renderings, but they should not fret when memory does not quite match particular facts.

As an interesting example of reconciling the difficulties of memory and historical integrity, consider the minor discrepancies between the biblical accounts of Palm Sunday events. Did Jesus instruct his disciples to bring one or two donkeys for his triumphal ride into Jerusalem? Matthew says, “They brought the donkey and the colt and put on them their cloaks, and he sat on them” (Matthew 21:7 ESV). Mark says, “And they brought the colt to Jesus and threw their cloaks on it, and he sat on it” (Mark 11:7 ESV). If one gospel writer includes two donkeys, does that mean the other gospel writer is lying because he only included one of the donkeys? When we understand memory as the recollection of *relevant* details, not just *every* detail, we easily see that one account does not discredit the other. Indeed, the variation simply shows the importance one author placed on that detail.

Memoirists do not discredit themselves by refusing to present every detail in turn, they discredit themselves by presenting details (whether emotional or historical) that are provably false, that enhance their own exploits for obvious self-promotion, or that destroy another’s character unfairly. Poetry as memoir, follows suit with similar credibility criteria.

Poetry in memoir enhances historical veracity when poets put time and effort into research. Gerard in his *Art of Creative Research* mentions one student’s experience with writing a memoir. “Her memoir, like all true memoirs, turned out not to be simply a scrapbook of memories to brood over or cherish, not a highlight reel of her life, but a meaningful reckoning” (9). What her research produced was an actual reckoning of the events, not simply the recording of the events. But by research, accuracy is there, so the reckoning can be received.

Poet Rita Dove wanted to discover the history of her grandparents. As she researched their lives, she recognized the way to preserve their history was through poetry. Dove’s style of poetic memoir captured both historically important information and emotionally powerful

moments. Listening to *Thomas and Beulah* being read is a shaping experience, presumably almost as shaping as the experience of researching and writing itself. In Rita Dove's video where she reads her 1987 Pulitzer Prize winning book aloud, she comments, "I started writing to discover who my grandfather really was" (Dove). Though she changes her grandparents' real names, the history of their personal history is beautifully presented.

Other poets researched thoroughly to capture the history of their life-writing. Even as a recluse, Emily Dickinson researched as much as she could through letters and newspapers, following news about the Civil War. She was a commentator on the troubles of the day, the evidence of details more apparent in her letters than in poetry. She does not write explicitly patriotic poems, though her poem "It feels a shame to be Alive" appears to have been written as an emotional response to the Civil War. "It feels a shame to be Alive— / When Men so brave—are dead—" (lines 1-2) captures the history of the time in a captivating couplet.

Historical moments poetically rendered allow for some creative license. Memoirists who want to be accurate but not explicit or chronological should consider using poetry within their narratives, following the example of Wordsworth of old or Anderson of today.

Poetry in memoir preserves cultural integrity.

The consideration of poetry as a tool which preserves both the emotional and historical integrity of memoir, leads to a final thought. Poetry also preserves the cultural integrity of memoir. Poems that are not strictly biographical or autobiographical can still be offered as valuable to cultural studies. Consider the confessional poets, especially, the work of Sylvia Plath. Plath's work is interesting as a showcase for what was happening within the culture of women who felt oppressed by marriage and motherhood in the dawn of feminism. Gill and Waters, in

“Poetry and Autobiography” mention, “As Jacqueline Rose argues of the work of the putatively autobiographical poet Sylvia Plath, in reading her poetry we are confronted by a moment of ‘indecision which in turn generates anxiety—an anxiety that can be productive if we allow it to indicate how uncertain truth can be’ (xiv)” (4). Her work is worth reading, not for the moral compass, but for the cultural understanding of women who may see and feel what she was feeling in the early 20th century.

Gill and Waters in their article “Poetry and Autobiography” comment, “Confessional poetry is inexorably and misleadingly identified with the vexed concepts of truth and authenticity” (6). While readers cannot place absolute faith in the truthfulness of the angst displayed in the works of Plath, readers can see what angst like Plath’s does to oneself and one’s family. Another confessional poet whose work helps us understand the culture of the dawning feminist times is Anne Sexton. Gil and Waters continue their thought about the cultural value of confessional poetry: “Paying special attention to Sexton’s treatment of the mother-daughter relationship, Lucas draws on the theories of infantile development proposed by Melanie Klein to shed new light on the poet’s prevailing ambivalent constructions of maternity” (7). Though following the pattern of Plath or Sexton’s lives is not recommended, following the pattern in their poetry provides a construct for understanding the angst of women such as these, within a culture such as theirs.

Poetry as memoir opens windows into the culture of previously unknown people groups. At the age of eighty-five, writer Shi Zhecun (1905-2003) wrote a poetic memoir entitled, *Miscellaneous Poems of a Floating Life*. In this work of eighty poems, Shi recalls his difficult literary career, centering on the 1930s when he engaged in a literary battle with another writer named Lu Xun (1881-1936). In his article on Shi Zhecun, Kang-i Sun Chang addresses what Shi

was going through and how he dealt with Chinese culture at the time. Chang writes, “Indeed, one of the appeals of Shi’s poetic memoir lies in the author’s deliberate fusing of subtle/classical sentiments with public/modern concerns” (1). Shi was aware of the limitations of vindication within his culture, but at eighty-five years of age, he was ready to find some vindication through the medium of memoir. Poem number 68 sarcastically expresses his disgust for how things went down in his literary battle with Lu Xun:

Greasy powder, leftover rouge, I have seen enough of the world,
 What’s more, sick and tired, my mental strain is like warring armies. 2
 I awake, after dreaming ten years in literary circles,
 Known as a scumbag of the foreign concession. 4 (Chang 2)

According to Chang, “The self-commentary informs us that the background for this poem was the ‘battle’ between the young Shi Zhecun and the legendary writer Lu Xun (1881-1936)” (2). Shi effectively rewrites a common poem of the day, in lines 1-2, creating a parody for his ostracized state. Shi died before he could write his planned one hundred mini-memoirs, but his work remains a commentary on culture and his own disappointing literary career.

Poetry in memoir offers a unique medium to preserve the culture of cancer in modern history. Experience with cancer is visited in recent works such as *When Breath Becomes Air* by Paul Kalanithi and *One Hundred Autobiographies: A Memoir* by David Leman. Kalanithi’s memoir is so poetically written, sections could be considered prose poetry.

Leman’s memoir is prose poetry, his chosen method of expressing his personal journey through bladder cancer. His plan to write five hundred words a day resulted in a book of one hundred poems. Through his frank and creative daily prosody, Leman creates a portfolio of all the snapshots involved in the pain, the purpose, and the ultimate defeat of his cancer. On his

reason for writing, Leman says, “Mostly what I set out to write was a portrait of my mind and what it made of the experience of life and death” (Preface). Through his poetic memoir, Leman presents a unique perspective on the culture of the increasingly common battle with cancer in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

In conclusion, poetry, as a medium for memoir, preserves emotional, historical, and cultural integrity. Its power to preserve integrity in all three veins is seen in the entire book of Psalms in the Old Testament. David’s Songs of Ascents, Psalms 120 through 134, give us fifteen poems that demonstrate the value of poetry as a medium for memoir. Through the poems we learn about the emotions of the Hebrew people as they journeyed to Jerusalem for worship festivals. We learn about their fears, their sorrows, their hopes, and their purpose within the verifiable historical context of Israel. Eugene Peterson, in his commentary on these Psalms of Ascents, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*, writes, “The Hebrews were a people whose salvation had been accomplished in the exodus, whose identity had been defined at Sinai and whose preservation had been assured in the forty years of wilderness wandering” (Peterson 12-13). Through these poems, we understand the culture of a worshiping people, those who traveled three times a year on pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Feasts of Pentecost, Passover, and Tabernacles.

Readers walk upward with the Hebrew people in dusty mountainous pathways as they read, “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD, who made heaven and earth. . . The sun shall not strike you by day, nor the moon by night” (Psalm 121:1, 2, 6). David, as a poet memoirist, cannot be bested in his preservation of

historical, emotional, and cultural veracity. Readers can experience the emotions, the historical details, and the cultural community presented in the poetry of the Psalms of Ascents.

Poetry in memoir provides an opportunity for preserving integrity through veiled revelations of truths. As Diane Lockward writes in her book *The Practicing Poet*, “For the reader, the poet’s use of indirection produces the surprise discovery, which can become the revelation of truth” (133). She references a turn of lines by Emily Dickinson to illustrate the concept: “Tell all the Truth but tell it slant— / Success in Circuit lies / Too bright for our infirm Delight / The Truth’s superb surprise / As lightning to the children eased / With explanation kind / The Truth must dazzle gradually / Or every man be blind—” (poem #1129 Dickinson). Truth packaged beautifully is truth accepted more readily. Poetry gives the author the opportunity to offer truth in a “slant” way, leaving the reader time to think, to process, and to accept the truths presented.

The value of poetry as a medium for memoir is worth continual exploration. Because poetry enhances the emotional, historical, and cultural integrity of memoir, researchers should work to unearth the mini memoirs of the past, while writers should employ the power of poetry as emotional beats in memoirs today. While relatively new as a genre, memoir is here to stay, and poetry provides yet another way for memoir to blossom.

Contribution

After researching how poetry in memoir preserves integrity, I went back into my personal archives of poetry, including lyrics, from the period I desired to cover in my memoir. I discovered many examples of poems that did preserve the integrity of my emotions, history, and culture, a discovery which framed the entire creative manuscript to follow.

Through workshops in poetry and nonfiction, I wrote several scenes from my life as a church planter's wife in Salt Lake City. Blending narratives and poetry into chapters was not an easy task for me but it proved to be rewarding. As I worked through the important moments from 2012-2014, I revised older poetry and wrote new poetry to provide the emotional beats required in memoir.

The poems I wrote from 2012 - 2014 lean towards preserving my emotional integrity, pointing to the type of poet I was in those years. I processed my feelings and my spiritual thoughts through poetry. Those poems are valuable to me in understanding who I was at that time. They truly preserve the integrity of my feelings, good or bad, and help me to remember the surrounding events.

In the following manuscript, the poems that best represent how poetry preserves emotional integrity in memoir are "Lord, You Are Home," "Stepping out By Faith," "The Glory of God in Salt Lake City," "Reach out with Gospel Grace," "Grace the Scarlet Rope," and "Seek His Presence." Several of these were written as songs, and others were simply poetic expressions of how I felt at different points along our initial church planting journey.

As I was working through the narrative parts of my memoir, I remembered some historical details that developed into poems. "A Firefly Led our Temple Tour" includes some peculiarities about Mormon history at that time. "LDS Movie Premier with Anne Burrell's Double" does the same. "Turn on a Dime" was written right after the Sandy Hook Elementary shooting. "Song of the Fort Douglas Chapel" and "Four Young Bucks" preserves some of the history of Gospel Grace Church. "One Night in Wisconsin," "When Duty Calls," and "MRI" show my personal history.

As I reflect on the type of cultures that I am either a part of or that surround me, there are several cultural units that my poems represent: the culture of Salt Lake City, of church ministry, and of family. “Nameless” and “Sin Eaters” showcase ministry life. “Liberty Park, My Home” and “Utah People Potluck” give a window into Salt Lake City culture. “Wiggly Tooth” and “God Fills Empty Spaces” represent the culture of our family.

I hope my work encourages memoirists to write poetry or look to the poets for biographical material because poetry is an excellent medium for memories, preserving emotional, historical, and cultural integrity.

Until the Church Be Planted in My Heart: A Memoir in Poetry and Prose

Introduction:

After my husband Lukus asked me to write about the early years of our church planting experience to commemorate our 10-year anniversary at Gospel Grace Church in Salt Lake City, I sat with tears trickling down my cheeks. How would I write about something this life altering?

Uncertainty, resistance, and the need for validation outlined our transition from Texas to Salt Lake City in 2012. When I began this memoir in 2020, this same need for validation haunted every word I wrote. As Covid and several trials hit our church and family, I almost didn't want to celebrate a decade in Salt Lake City. I contemplated life in another city, another church, for the next season of life. But during this unsettling time, God did not call us to go, but to stay. Who knew that staying is another sort of transition?

This segment of my memoir begins with what it took to bring us to Salt Lake City in 2012 and continues through the early years of our church-planting endeavor. In remembering the why and how, I'm hoping to find the answers again, so I can re-commit to this ministry, this place, this everything. God is stirring me up, not to change my location, but to change me.

Though I am not an expert on the Latter-day Saints, I reference the religious system of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints quite often because Mormonism is the underpinning of Utah culture. As a born again Christian, my belief in the biblical gospel necessitates revealing differences between the religious systems. I do not mention our differences to create division or to insult anyone. My mission is to share the biblical gospel, glorify Jesus, and shine light into Salt Lake City, my home.

Chapter 1: Song of the Fort Douglas Historic Chapel

(where Gospel Grace Church gathered from 2012-2015)

The meeting place - a chapel old, cried out,
filled up, revived by light emanating
from within, from worshippers whose radiant
beams felt as real as her crown. She spoke,
responding with acoustic liturgy.

An historic play of yes and amen,
repentance and faith, of gospel and grace,
spanned the space between ancient times and now.

United body breathed out prayers in song,
the chapel sang along and slept once more
'til Sunday morning sun would rise again.

“Bless the Lord, O my soul, O my soul, I worship your holy name,” I sang along as I played the Yamaha keyboard in the rented chapel at the University of Utah. In just months of meeting together, Gospel Grace Church felt like an established church, and worshipping in the chapel was the highlight of my week.

Ours was a diverse church plant, where old and young believers, international and American students, native Utahns and transplants like my family joined their voices in sweet, loud harmony. The sound of joy filled every corner of that old chapel, from the back where students sat on the green carpet when space ran out on the wooden pews, to the front where our worship team led songs of the faith, and where my husband boldly preached the word of God.

On this Sunday, my 80-year-old hymn-loving dad, in his 1990’s green sport coat, sang out “Ten Thousand Reasons” in an excellent baritone voice. He sat near my mom and my elementary school-aged children, who also sang with gusto from the front pew.

A PhD student from India named Jotham worshipped with eyes closed and hands lifted above long curly hair that covered the shoulders of his iconic gray t-shirt.

Nothing could stop Brett from singing, even when he couldn’t stand, depleted from the treatments he was receiving at the Huntsman Cancer Institute. His sweet mother, Patricia, full of faith, sat next to him, praising the Lord.

In between chords, I looked up to find my friend Megan. There she was, with her reddish hair and long eyelashes. I chuckled about the puzzle tattoo circling her upper arm. She had confided, “Liesl, don’t ever get a tattoo in Liberty Park.”

Near Megan stood other young friends who had moved to Salt Lake City to help with church planting: Susannah and Emily. They sat by two African women, a mother in colorful garb and head wrap with her pretty daughter Ola, a new university student. The mother was a devout

Christian, and she was extremely disturbed that Ola had become a Latter-day Saint while living in England. When Ola sang out heartily in Christian worship, I could see that the mother had won.

Looking at all these faces lifted my weary heart. Church planting was an exhausting business but worshipping with these people made every sacrifice seem worth it. As we finished our song, Lukus stood up, Bible in hand, microphone pinned to his collar. His missing mass moved our pew like a seesaw, bringing a smile to our children's faces.

As I stepped away from the keys and walked to take his spot on our pew, my face went completely numb on the left side. I reached up to touch it, half expecting my left cheek to be gone. The children's eyes followed me as I sat down. They didn't seem alarmed by my face, so I knew my numbness I felt was not visible to others.

I didn't know what was happening, and I didn't know what to do. So, I did what all good pastor's wives do when it comes to personal comfort: nothing.

Chapter 2: Introducing Lukus and Liesl (One Night in Wisconsin)

(The summer of 1999)

A young man arrived at the appointed time, listening, and stargazing.

Simultaneously, the sabbath fell over my head, and instead of crushing me, hushed me,
made me rest wide awake while hearts pulsed and quaked.

The music played, and I was making it,

but somehow it wasn't me, it was the sky that sang,

that came melting over me, like chocolate on the custard girl

who did not think she was his flavor.

My cheeks pink, my skin cream, I couldn't get away from him.

He looked and wouldn't look away, the milk of his life in a glance, entranced.

Sabbath night, stars alight, fermata upon me, yes,

pointing, anointing, declaring by heavenly writ,

resting in predestined lines designed for each other

and only wisemen seek.

Graduating from the University of Maryland at nineteen, Lukus was accepted into dental school. To fill a gap year, he completed a Master of Arts in Biblical Counseling at Maranatha Baptist Bible College in Watertown, WI. During the summer, he became team leader at Northland Camp and Conference Center, where I also served. God used that summer to change his heart and his direction, from money to ministry.

I had been impressed when this gangly, olive-skinned, energetic guy gave a public testimony during that summer in 1999 at my church in Beecher, WI.

“God doesn’t just want me to be available, he wants me to be usable,” he said. “Abilities do not matter if I am not walking in the Spirit.”

My mom was in that service, and when she whispered – “So, who is Lukus Counterman?” – she was verbalizing what I was thinking.

This is the type of guy God has for me.

My mom started to pray for Lukus to marry me. When he showed an interest in me, I believed God was leading us together. While we dated, Lukus was considering a life of medical missions. He was counseled to go to seminary first and medical school second. So, after our wedding, we went to serve at his dad’s church in Millersville, Maryland, while he completed his Master of Divinity at Calvary Baptist Theological Seminary in Lansdale, Pennsylvania.

My life as a pastor’s wife began in June 2000, as Lukus and I joined Anchor Baptist Church. Anchor elected Lukus as the new assistant pastor, where he would focus on children’s and family ministries.

That first Sunday, I lost awareness of the Sunday School lesson as a buzz reached my ears. My eyes turned towards my new husband. His skin was tanned from our honeymoon in

Vail, Colorado. Mine was burnt from our white-water rapids ride, but his had a nice olive glow that contrasted his white starched shirt. I heard the buzz again, or rather, felt it again.

I loved Lukus, but the buzzing on my chest was not the twitterpation of a newlywed heart. I looked down at my sky-blue chiffon sheath dress and clutched the space where my necklace pendant hung.

Leaning close to Lukus' ear, I whispered, "I think there's a beetle in my dress."

He swung his knees to the side. I rushed into the women's bathroom. Before I could even get into a stall, I threw my dress over my head to stop the little feet pelting on my chest.

I imagined my mother-in-law coming in at that very moment, but I didn't care, I had to be free from the invader. As the hard-backed bug fell to the tiles, I shuddered, whipping my dress back over my head. I smashed the creature, disposed of him, and waltzed back to my place in the pew by my husband.

It was time to stand up on stage and join the church.

I took a deep breath, and looking out at all those people, I shared, "I was saved when I was very young, but I doubted my salvation in my early teen years. I was selfish and not walking with God. Terrified that I wasn't saved, I read my Bible constantly and began to pray every night for Jesus to save me (again and again and again)."

I paused as the church laughed, and looked up at Lukus to calm me before continuing, "After a message at summer camp on the proofs of the Christian faith, I realized I did have the Holy Spirit in my life. God had saved me by his grace, and I didn't need to keep asking him to do what he had already done. When I got home from camp, I apologized to all the people that I had sinned against. My life began to change, and at age thirteen, I was baptized as a believer."

No one would have guessed I had just had a battle with a beetle in the bathroom from the way I shared my faith in front of that church of three hundred fifty people. But I was next to Lukus. And when I was next to Lukus, I could do anything.

Chapter 3: The Making of a Ministry Couple (Nameless)

She holds no title, like deaconess.
 She's not the pastor, her husband is.
 She holds no power: she owns no fame.
 She serves the Lord without a name.
 She carries burdens and learns to cast
 them all on Christ who cares, who has
 a title, who has a name, who set aside
 His power, fame, to take on flesh and die.

She wakes and quakes when tragedy
 strikes in some parishioner's life. When he
 calls her dear husband, on duty at night,
 for he's ready to preach, pray, or die!
 While she lies in her bed. . . and she prays
 that her man will know what to say
 'til morning dawn shines, 'til new mercies speak
 rest into her soul, though she didn't sleep.

She tunes her heart, and in her act,
 tunes the household when troubles pass,
 when strings are taut, when harm
 is near, the household is ready and armed.
 Through songs of deliverance and hope,
 she has trained her family to cope
 with enemy threats, with unfair events.
 She sings with them until the storm ends.

She has a choice, whether to be bound by pain,
 when helping him means helping with no gain,
 when serving God means serving souls whose hurt
 interprets every thought, deed, and word,
 whose hurt defines them, so they look to blame
 the helper, who took the splinter out. When shame
 has framed the pastor as the enemy...
 she has a choice: to be bound or to be free.

She may not have a title. She may not have a list
 that qualifies her for service, that causes her to be picked
 from among other women as a leader in the church,
 but that will not stop this one who serves
 from out of a full heart in the shadows.
 She is trusting that her loving Savior knows.
 She is the pastor's wife, a nameless name
 that carries her to joy and sometimes pain.

Over the next 11 years, we were known as Pastor Lukus and Miss Liesl, living from Sunday to Sunday, year to year. God gave us four children, Elijah, Eden, Cana, and Lydia. After our years in Maryland, God sent us to Texas where Lukus served as pastor of Messiah Baptist Church (later renamed Wichita Falls Baptist Church) for seven years.

Lukus led the church in a renovation of the first floor of our downtown church, did his Doctor of Ministry classwork in Dallas, entered the United States Air Force as a Reserve Chaplain, and rode in a one-hundred-mile bike race dubbed the “Hotter than Hell One Hundred” (surely a metaphor for our fast-burn lifestyle). Some people questioned our pace, and there were moments I did too.

But to be honest, I was just as ambitious as he was. After giving birth to Cana Grace, I started homeschooling Eli and simultaneously writing a children’s discipleship program. I gave piano lessons and served actively in the church in the areas of women’s Bible studies, children’s ministry, and music. Even when I was desperately morning sick during pregnancies, I never gave up my activities as a pastor’s wife.

During my pregnancy with our last child, Lydia, my morning sickness (hyperemesis gravidarum) was so severe, I had to spend a week in the hospital receiving intravenous fluids and anti-nausea medications. My medium build of five foot three inches wasted away. The only thing that was healthy about me was my long brown hair; albeit at age thirty-five, my wiry gray strands needed to be brought back into the fold by means of a box of Clairol.

Lydia was just a few weeks old when I recognized my hopes for a “good baby” were pipe dreams. As I shook my head to clear the four a.m. fog to nurse her yet again, I couldn’t shake the self-pity: *Didn’t I deserve a good baby after all this suffering?*

While family life had become rather demanding, church life had become disheartening. A deacon had been living a double life. After Lukus took him to confess his atrocious behaviors to the police, our small Texas church body was left reeling. We counseled heavy hearts for months on end.

But who counsels people like Lukus and Liesl? We were hurt more deeply than anyone else (other than his family) by the betrayal, but there was no one to tell us what to do, no one who could help us heal.

This is the plight of every pastor and wife, and this is also the power. In desperate times, God speaks. The Wonderful Counselor comes to the Elijah in us and whispers in a still small voice. "It is I, do not be afraid, take courage, I will uphold you. I will not fail you. I will show you what to do."

He had not failed us yet. He would not forsake us now.

Some things had become clear to us over the past year. Lukus was a builder, and this church didn't need grand plans. It needed steady pastoral care. He and I had always envisioned ourselves as missionaries. As Lukus spent a month preaching on missions, both of us knew it was time. God was leading us away from Texas and into missions, though we were unsure of the direction to take.

After Lydia fell back asleep, I lay wide awake looking at her. She had two curls of hair on her forehead, and I remembered an old nursery rhyme: "There was a little girl who had a little curl, right on the center of her forehead, and when she was good, she was very, very good and when she was bad, she was horrid."

If that didn't describe my Lydia, I didn't know what did!

Lost in the typical incoherency of nighttime thoughts, I suddenly realized Lukus was still in bed. He was supposed to be driving to Dallas for a medical school interview.

“Why are you here?” I whispered, assuming he was awake since I was.

“I couldn’t sleep, so I’ve been praying. And I realized I’m not supposed to go to medical school. God must have something else for us.”

As he spoke, relief washed over me. Though I was willing to go anywhere and serve in any way with Lukus, I could not think of a more arduous next move than medical school with four children.

That fateful night in May 2011, Lukus couldn’t sleep the first half and I couldn’t sleep the second. Now that I knew medical missions was permanently off the radar for us, I wondered what God had for us instead.

“If it’s not medical missions, then what is it?” I asked quietly.

“It’s still missions. I just don’t know where or how,” Lukus replied before joining Lydia in dreamland.

Now that I was wide awake, I started walking through ideas for our next steps. Nothing much made sense to me other than one thing: visiting Northland Camp. By morning, I had hatched a plan to drive twenty hours north to Dunbar, Wisconsin. It was there I had received assurance of my salvation, gone to Bible college, met Lukus, and cemented our call to ministry life. It was there in those pine forests on pristine lakes that Lukus and I had first confessed our love.

“Lukus, I want to go to family camp at Northland,” I said, waking him up.

“What? With Lydia? She’s awful in the car...” he questioned, but I knew he would take us. We were adventurers and willing to do hard things, as long as we were together.

Chapter 4: The Call

Stepping out by Faith

(January 2012)

And if I am commended, let it be
for faith alone, a gift of God supreme,
obediently taken and fueled
by love, compelling me to hear, to view
Christ who walks before into the deep,
who calls against the crowd though they may weep.
"It is too risky. Turn around!" they shout.
The voice of God is louder than the doubt.
And eyes on One who walks on water first,
I come as infant surging through in birth.
So held by mother arms of Father God,
secure I feel though 'neath me is not sod.
Waves startle the initial phase of peace
and tempt a sudden thinker to release
the trusting gaze and learn to swim or float,
but faith itself will save. It is the boat.

Our by-faith journey to Salt Lake City began when Lydia was just over a month old. We packed our white suburban with our four kids and traveled from Texas to Northland Camp in Wisconsin. Memories of the girl I once had been greeted me everywhere as I walked that familiar campus. In the rec hall, I was a counselor, sharing truth with teens. In the chapel, I was a student, learning about biblical counseling. In the great outdoors, I was myself, communing with the One who made the incredible Northern Lights that danced above with stars.

Will and Christy Galkin, our long-time ministry friends, invited us over to their fifth wheel trailer where they lived with their five kids. Christy, with her short blonde hair, was even thinner than when she and I traveled together on the Pettit Evangelistic Team twelve years prior. Will, in his late thirties, still had the dark cowlicks that I remembered from our college days.

Will and I were cut from the same cloth of direct speech, sometimes abrupt, always awkward. He looked at Lukus, like he was sizing him up, before deciding to ask, "So do you want to plant a church in Salt Lake City, Utah?"

I had a suspicion that he was asking every able-bodied preacher the exact same question and was getting no takers. He seemed surprised when Lukus answered, "I would consider it."

As Lukus and I talked later, we discussed how Salt Lake City was indeed a mission field. The evangelical population ranked as low as parts of the Middle East because of the permeation of Mormonism. To us, the Salt Lake Valley sounded ripe for a church planting movement. With Hill Air Force Base nearby, Lukus could continue his reserve chaplaincy. The more we researched, the more excited we became.

Here was a mission greater than we could do on our own, and here was our chance to see God do the impossible. *This is it! I just know it!* I believed church planting was going to be

something different than church work in Texas, a way to broaden our ministry horizons. *Because after all these years of sacrifice, didn't we deserve something more?*

By October, four potential church planters met up in Salt Lake City to see if God would forge them into a team: Lukus, Will Galkin, Jonathan Albright, and Jon Kopp.

While Lukus was on the vision trip, Lydia kept me company until our land line phone rang late each night.

“Liesl, you won’t believe what happened today. It was like a confirmation from God for all of us,” his voice sounded as youthful as when we called each other during our long-distance engagement in 1999. “We’ve been meditating on Hebrews 11 together and talking about Abraham, about following God’s call though he didn’t know what was going to happen.”

My heart pulsed with nervousness, so I joked, “Does that mean I’m Sarah? Because I don’t want to have a baby when I’m eighty.”

“Well, I’m no Abraham, but I do feel that God is stirring us up to take a great leap of faith,” he replied with his own quirky laugh that broke the tension in conversations. “So anyways, we’ve been meeting with pastors around the Salt Lake Valley. Today we met an older pastor who is retiring from his church in downtown Salt Lake. He gathered us together and started praying over us. He prayed, ‘Lord, help these men to have Abraham-like faith. Help them to obey your call, though they don’t know where they’re going.’”

I could picture my husband with his circle of friends and the pastor, their four dark heads bowed with his gray one.

“When he prayed that we would be like Abraham, we looked up at each other, and it was like we all knew at that moment,” Lukus said with a tremor in his voice.

“Do you believe God is calling us to Salt Lake City?” I asked.

“I really do, Lee Lee, I really do,” he replied, sounding so settled and peaceful.

Teary-eyed church members looked either shocked or grieved when we announced our plans for church planting in Salt Lake City. After many sorrowful hugs and handshakes, I wondered if we were doing this the right way.

“Lukus, people don’t seem to be excited that God is calling us to do missions work in Salt Lake City.”

He helped my black-and-white soul accept the grays of people’s reactions, assuring me, “It’s ok that they don’t want us to leave. I think that’s probably a good thing.”

Unlike most women I knew, I had the ability (or curse) to disconnect emotionally. I’d always struggled in friendships, feeling almost trapped. I cried a lot during this season, which was not normal for me. I was discovering that change is painful, even when self-initiated.

Some people were terribly sad that we were moving away, while others in our lives expressed anger. People from our past intimated that we were foolish to leave our established ministry. When we asked an older church planter what he thought about our vision, he said, “Go ahead, beat your head against a wall.”

I believe his attitude towards church planting had more to do with him than us, but his words were disturbing, nonetheless.

One sarcastic old pastor didn’t even try to hide his disapproval. He joked after he heard about our team’s plans, “Do you guys walk on water too?”

I felt all these comments very deeply. I had never done very well with criticism. In my mind, we were taking a great leap of faith, one that our former mentors had trained us to take.

Why would they choose to discourage us, instead of supporting us?

Meanwhile, North Texas was in a stage four drought. Selling our home on ten acres of dust should have been difficult, but it sold in two months, bringing us even more confidence in our decision. Before I could really process leaving, the Penske was packed, and our friends came to say final goodbyes.

Goodbye, dear Wichita Falls friends, goodbye, beautiful house on ten acres, goodbye Texas!

In my front seat in the suburban, I looked back through the mirror at the picture-perfect house we had built together.

“Sometimes stepping out by faith makes sense, and sometimes it just hurts,” I whispered to Lukus through some tears.

“We’ll make it, Liesl, as long as we’re together.”

“But our jet tub...” I lamented, laughing a little.

He reached over, his long fingers clasping with mine. My husband’s loving assurance was what I needed. Like Abraham and Sarah, we did not know where we were going, but we were determined to move forward by faith.

Chapter 5: Ruffled Spirits

though spirits press
though men oppress
though thoughts possess
with doubts and fear
we heard His voice
we made a choice
we will rejoice
though trials are near
the cry from hell
its putrid smell
the haunting yell
from dying souls
is louder still
and sends a chill
we must fulfill
the gospel's goals
no guarantees
no warranties
no life of ease
is promised all
He understands
He wrote the plans
He holds our hands
we will not fall
to city dark
fresh churches start
and new life spark
by His blood paid.
our kids will grow
for they will know
He told us, "GO"
and we obeyed.

Ten-month-old Lydia screamed our way to Utah. The angle of the car seat always seemed to exacerbate her reflux. Barely over Oklahoma's border, I employed my traditional flex-style motherhood, instructing, "Elijah, she's not going to stop yelling. Pass her up to me."

The kids were engrossed in watching *Winnie the Pooh* on tiny TVs, but Eli quickly responded: "Ok, Mom, let me hit pause."

"Hello, this is Onstar. . ." said a strange robot voice, louder than Lydia's screeching. Lydia stopped yelling and grinned, showing off a checkerboard smile. The little imp had discovered the button that talked back.

Our plan was to spend six weeks in Utah at Hill Air Force Base before going out on a twenty-week fundraising trek called deputation. I had never been to Salt Lake City, and I couldn't wait to get there, even if only for a few weeks. After two days, we passed into Utah, a red-rocked, otherworldly, strange-historied land.

Once we said we were going to be church planters in Salt Lake City, people had begun telling me crazy things about Mormons that I wish I never knew, but now I *needed* to know.

"Did you know they wear holy underwear that they *never* take off? . . . Did you know Joseph Smith married girls as young as 14?! . . . Did you know Mormons believe Jesus and Lucifer were brothers? . . . Did you know the Mormons killed an entire group of pioneers in the 1800's?"

"By George, I did not know all that. Thank you," I replied to each one.

After trying to be nice to informants, I decided to read up on my own. *Understanding your Mormon Neighbor* by Ross Anderson taught me not to fear the Latter-day Saints, but I still had concerns.

“Lukus, do you think the Mormon kids will shun our kids?” I asked, seeing a building that looked like a southern Baptist church, but instead of a cross on top, there was a pointy spire. You will never find a cross inside or outside a Mormon church.

“I don’t know that shunning will happen as much in the city,” he said.

We were planning to start the church where the ratio of Mormons to non-Mormons was right at 50/50. However, I wasn’t expecting diversity to eliminate the spiritual opposition I had heard about.

After stopping for a day in southern Utah because of snow, we began the final leg of the journey. My 78-year-old dad was driving the Penske, dragging our pickup truck behind it. Following him in our suburban, I nervously watched that Ford Ranger weave behind all our worldly possessions. My mom drove their Buick LeSabre like a boss. Solid and steady, my mom at 67 was still a pillar of stability in my life.

Our motley caravan arrived exhausted at our temporary living facility on Hill Air Force Base. The kids ran up the stairs in the townhouse apartment, helping Lydia explore wherever they went. There was an odd smell in that house, and I wondered if the carpet had always been brown.

As I inwardly complained, Lukus commented on the joy of our children, “God gave us happy kids, Liesl.”

That night around 2:00 am, the happiness quotient shattered when loud cries jerked us both awake. Lukus found Elijah white-faced and shaking in his bed.

“I need to go to the bathroom, and I can’t fall asleep. There’s something or someone in my room,” he whimpered.

By the time I got to the room with Lydia in my arms, Lukus was doing the dad thing, looking for monsters in the closet and under the bed, trying to bring a smile to Eli's face.

"Dad, I saw a light moving. It's been dancing around the walls for hours. I'm so tired," whispered one very disturbed little 10-year-old boy. I could tell Lukus was thinking what I was thinking. *That sounds demonic.*

He sat down with him and prayed, "Lord, please help Eli. Take anything out of this room that doesn't belong here."

Prayer broke the spell, and soon Elijah slept peacefully.

The next morning, Lukus was reading his Bible in the living area when the TV turned on loudly. He looked for the remote control, wondering if he was sitting on it. The remote wasn't anywhere near him. The TV had just randomly turned on by itself.

I heard of the "spooks" in Utah but hadn't believed the stories – until now.

The heaviness in my spirit reminded me of an experience in my early twenties. When I was traveling from church to church on the East coast on a summer music team, we arrived early to a country church. No one was there to welcome us. Some of us had been waiting for hours to go to the bathroom, so we ran to the only other building around – a Mormon church.

Terrible oil paintings of a white Jesus with other white men from the 1800s lined the halls. Tinny piano music accompanied a thin-sounding choir, singing a hymn that I recognized, yet didn't. A shiver traveled through me as we rushed out of the church. I knew nothing of Mormonism at that time. But I did know this: my spirit did not resonate with whatever spirit was in there.

I felt the same way now in Utah. The unseen wrapped around my senses, dragging and pulling, provoking a general uneasiness. Yet I knew that another Spirit was stronger. I determined to be neither prey nor pawn to the powers fighting to maintain their territory.

But what a gorgeous territory it was! I was reminded of Utah's breathtaking landscape as I looked out the kitchen window there at Hill Air Force Base. With the Wasatch Front as a backdrop, F-16 fighter pilots played *Top Gun*. I thought they would crash into the crests, flying so close before swooping away from the snowy slate giants.

My first time driving alone in Utah, I followed the mountain range south to meet up with two of the other church planter wives in Salt Lake City. My heart dropped with the altitude, and my thoughts depressed with the valley. *What did my new teammates think about me? Were they as committed as I was to church planting?* I didn't know Beth or Sarah well, and chitchat was not my specialty. Going deep in Bible study was, and we had done that online together. But could we be friends, just eating junk food, not caring how fat, goofy, or old we were?

We met up with a retiring pastor's wife at Village Inn, Utah's version of Denny's. I suspected the older woman once had a vivid complexion and real blonde hair. Indeed, her dull eyes brightened with each story she told. I had never met someone who could one-up her own stories so expertly.

"Whenever we cross over the border into Utah, something bad always happens. Once, the tires fell off our car," she shared, leaning closely toward us while polishing off her lemon meringue pie.

Calculating whether she should tell all - after a dramatic pause - she went for it, "Worst was when one of our missionary friend's children died, right when they passed the state line!"

Shuddering, I looked at Beth and Sarah, wondering if they were terrified. All evening, I had listened to this woman with a grain of salt and a morsel of pity, but I wasn't anticipating this last story of absolute horror.

I tried to lighten the rest of the night with funny recollections, but I knew Beth and Sarah were bothered. My typical move was to disassociate, to resolve *not* to be like that lady, *not* to be ruffled by sensationalism. Through this experience, I learned the other pastor's wives needed more than just my cowboy-up stance. They needed the assurance that could only come from God, not me. All my life, I had been a leader, but I really couldn't lead them, at least not where I hadn't been before.

This strangely oppressive Utah life was indeed new. I was rattled, the team wives were rattled, and soon the entire team was rattled. Just a week later, Will Galkin's dad died of a massive heart attack right when we were scheduled to spend time bonding as a team. Instead, we bonded through suffering. The die was cast, the pattern cut for all our years ahead, that springtime of 2012 before we headed out on our deputation fund-raising travels.

I was tempted to run from church planting in Utah before we even started, but something stopped my fears. Was it the mission, my family's inimitable spirit, or a deep calling? Yes. But there was something yet greater, someone greater in me. And *Christ* was greater than anything that was in the world.

Chapter 6: Deputation

Lord, You Are Home

(meditation on Psalm 90)

LORD, you are home
to the generations,
the people of faith.

Though we must roam
as pilgrims journey
in yearnings for glory.

LORD, you are home.

Christ, you are God.

Before you created all
the theater of heaven
far above the sod,
from eternity to eternity,
you have been, you will be.

Christ, you are God.

Man, you are dust
blowing through years
with tears from sin,
naked before the Just,
pleading forgiveness
and significance.

Man, you are dust.

God, you are wise,
so teach us to number,
not slumber through days.

Give wisdom to minds
longing for more
this side of the shore.

God, you are wise.

“I hate selling myself,” Lukus declared after giving our first missionary presentation on deputation.

That sounds immoral, I thought with a smirk on my face.

I understood what he was saying, however. Deputation is not really selling yourself, but it feels like it is. Unfortunately, if you don’t like selling, people may not like buying. But that is what it takes to raise money as a missionary in independent Baptist churches. You must sell your field as a worthy mission, and you must sell your family as a strategic investment.

Some of the churches we visited loved the vision of church planting in Salt Lake City, and they loved our family. Those were sweet meetings. Many of them had Latter-day Saint friends or family members, or they had read about Mormonism and had a heart for Utah missions.

Other churches were a little more difficult to convince. We were not traditional missionaries. Traditional missionaries in our circles did not have an entire team of pastoral families seeking to raise support. Indeed, I hadn’t heard of the model myself. But here we were, attempting to raise money for *Plant for the Gospel*, our newly formed mission organization, and Gospel Grace Church, our newly named and not-yet existent church plant.

Our deputation schedule began in Arizona in March, not a bad time to head to the desert. After six weeks in Utah, we temporarily left my parents to live in a senior living apartment complex in Salt Lake City. Our stuff was neatly packed into a storage unit, and what we would need for the next twenty weeks was arranged in Old Bess, our 2002 white Chevy Suburban.

Faithful Old Bess took us from Texas to Utah, then Utah to Arizona, to Iowa, to Illinois, to Maryland, Pennsylvania, and surrounding states before heading to Michigan and over the Mackinaw Bridge before our final meeting in Marinette, Wisconsin.

One of our early Sundays, we arrived at a church located in a Mormon-influenced area. In Sunday School, piranhas waited to tear into Lukus' virgin flesh. They wanted to show they knew more about Mormonism than he did.

"Pastor Counterman, what is the gospel you are going to share with the Mormons since their gospel is so similar?"

Patiently, he gave a two-minute version of the biblical gospel while another hand shot up.

"I know our gospel is different, but how are you going to look different to a Mormon?"

Lukus scanned the crowd of suits and ties, skirts and dresses. "Well, we're not going to dress like you're dressed right now," he quipped.

After the collective gasp, he explained, "You know what the Mormons wear, don't you?"

He tried to cover for his insult of conservative Baptist dress by describing the white shirts, black suits, and black ties that the Mormon missionaries wore. Meanwhile, I imagined the pastor calling the next church on our schedule to warn him: "Don't support Lukus – he is going to be one of those liberal church planters, wearing jeans in the pulpit."

The next several weeks, Lukus' parents, Andy and JoEllen Counterman, welcomed us into their home in Maryland. We used their basement as our home base, traveling out on weekends to various churches. Their kindness was a respite in those difficult deputation days.

No words were said when we put plastic sheets on couches under the kids' blankets. When I needed to disappear with our very fussy baby or Lukus needed to study, they entertained

the older ones and made memories with them at the Amish Market, Anne Arundel Seafood, and Sight and Sound.

Lukus had grown up playing the spinet piano, and when he played an old favorite hymn, I sang along, “Day by day and with each passing moment, strength I find to meet my trials here.”

Traveling was difficult, but we had an end goal. Though I was more physically tired with each passing week, a spiritual strength came to me. At night, I looked over to see Lukus reading church planting manuals and practical books on evangelism, leadership, and city ministry, and I was thankful he was such a learner.

I was also thankful for my very first iPhone because I could read kindle books while I held baby Lydia. During those twenty weeks of deputation, Jerry Bridges disciplined me through his book *Transforming Grace*. And while Lukus had online meetings with the other pastors, I was strengthened by an online Bible study through the book of Acts with the other pastors’ wives.

We were not homeless nor were we uncomfortable, but I remembered our Lord who in his three years of intense ministry had “not a pillow to rest his head.” Christ paved the way for us, and he would complete the work he began.

By the end of deputation, we had raised 34% of our needed yearly support. That percentage represented wonderful supporters who would prayerfully give to us for at least five years. Without their prayer-filled financial support, we might have desperately failed.

Mid-August, after our last deputation service, after twenty weeks traveling, we hopped into Old Bess, and the kids calculated how many hours we had to drive to get to Salt Lake City.

“Only 22 hours, and we will be home!” Eli announced.

“We have a home?” questioned Cana. Our five-year-old rarely made noise, outside of contagious giggling.

“Yes, remember when Dad flew to Salt Lake City last month? He bought a duplex by a big park. Pops and Nana already moved in and are waiting for us,” Eli patiently explained, probably for the fourth time.

“We have a home!” with long brown hair, brown eyes, and a little round face, my mini-me was ecstatic.

At 11 pm, we planned to get a hotel. The kids were dead asleep, except for Eden. She said adamantly: “Please, Dad, keep going! I want to go home!”

Poor Lukus wanted to get home just as desperately. After a one-hour nap, he plugged in the intravenous coffee and continued driving.

At five am, Lukus chomped on corn nuts and peach rings to keep him awake. When he opened the beef jerky, Eden had all she could take after a sleepless night on mountainous roads.

Emptying the contents of her own stomach, she afterwards declared, “No one will ever eat beef jerky in this suburban ever again!”

Sure enough, no one ever has.

When we drove through the last mountain canyon into Salt Lake City, early on Monday morning, majestic green hills and red rocks infused strength into weary travelers.

Are the mountains always this glorious, even without their whited crowns?

I quoted from Psalm 121, “I lift up my eyes unto the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the LORD who made heaven and earth.”

Utah stole my breath and sent me worshipping. *Why would God stoop down to help someone as flawed as me?*

My thoughts of deserving something more died on deputation. Church planting was not going to be a move up those mountains. Church planting was most certainly a plunge into that valley below. But we were not alone.

As we descended into the city, I was thankful to be alive, to be loved, and to be home.

Chapter 7: Culture Shock

Within, without, attacks will come!
The child inside will want to run.
The Spirit overtakes your soul
while Satan fights to gain control.
The enemy fears victories,
as you prepare the soil and seeds.
The rain is coming, and in this,
you know the harvest will be bliss.
But now the snatcher comes with crows
to pick and throw what God bestows.
A thicker skin the farmer gets
while pulling weeds. Such tears he sheds!
Those tears will call the latter rain.
Keep on, pluck up, endure the pain.
O, this is part of God's design!
So never, farmer, never whine
against God the way his field prepares,
though you will have to deal with tares.
The wheat will come, so, persevere,
and kill the crows, despite your fears.
Refuse to let the heckler spite.
You're on God's side, behold his light.
No darkness hides your heart and works.
The farmer sows, no toil he shirks.
Come, wind and rain, come, crow and pest.
For God you labor and will be blessed!

“Caw, scarcccEEEEEEaaaaam, caw, scaaarrEEEEEEaaach!”

Unearthly sounds awakened me after our first night in our new house in Salt Lake City.

“Lukus, is that a screaming child or a cat being tortured?” I asked Lukus as Lydia crawled to us from her little makeshift bed that my mom had made up for her.

“I think it’s some kind of crazy bird at the aviary,” he whispered as he struggled to get his allergy-crusted eyes open.

“I can hardly believe that’s a bird! Also, there’s beeping, but I don’t think it’s a car,” I peeked out the blinds to the north and noticed nothing but the ginormous bungalow across Edith Ave.

“Streetlights?” he suggested.

I nodded my head in agreement, remembering, “In Texas, we hardly heard a sound but the wind and coyotes.”

“City life is going to be different for sure,” Lukus said with gladness. After all, he was a city boy at heart.

For six months, we had been traveling around the country, raising money, since we left our home in Texas. Now that we were finally home, I couldn’t wait to start our life as church planters in Salt Lake City.

Our three older kids bounded into our room, bringing in the smell of bacon and pancakes, the signature breakfast of my dear old parents, Pops and Karen Shingledecker.

“Can we go to the aviary?” asked Eden, her side ponytail from yesterday releasing stray blonde hairs. I grabbed a brush and started my daily wrestling match with her haystack head.

“Maybe after we get settled!” I feigned excitement for the kids’ sake, but I was tired from the trip and realized we had a lot of work to do moving into our side of the house.

Two months prior, Lukus bought our duplex. While I stayed with the children in Maryland, he flew into Salt Lake City for two days to find housing. I assumed buying a suitable place for our family, including my parents, would be impossible in such a short time, but Lukus had enough faith for both of us. He called me up after just a day of house hunting.

“Liesl, it’s what we’ve prayed for. I feel like it’s exactly where we need to be, but I want you to talk to the realtor first.”

“Hello Liesl! When Lukus asked me to find you guys a duplex in the city, I didn’t expect to find one worth living in. But one popped on the internet, and Lukus made the first offer on it, a miracle in and of itself. It really is a decent duplex,” she spoke positively, yet hesitantly.

“So, what does decent mean?” I questioned. “Would you live there?”

“If I didn’t have kids, I would jump at living here. But there is some crime, drug activity, and homelessness. And this duplex is literally across the street from Liberty Park.”

“Ok. Is the neighborhood diverse?” I continued.

“Oh yes, this area is known for diversity. Lots of different races, not everyone is LDS, the University of Utah is close, and the park has so many fun things to do,” her voice brightened as she talked.

“We’ve been praying for a place for our family to live where there were lots of different types of people. But you think this neighborhood isn’t safe?”

“I wouldn’t say that. The crime isn’t normally violent in Salt Lake City. Crime usually means theft,” she answered.

“If God opened the door for us to buy a duplex right where we want it, then I am willing to deal with potential dangers,” I spoke, feeling more confident as the conversation unfolded.

“As a realtor, I wanted to be honest with you about the safety factor,” she paused. “If you didn’t have a calling for ministry, I wouldn’t encourage you to buy this. But if that’s why you’re moving here, it seems like a God-thing to me!”

After the phone call, I felt such a peace about buying the duplex. Only God could time the purchase like this. Even after I looked up the house on Google Earth and saw a boring brown brick box with no back yard except for a strip behind the south side, I was convinced. Liberty Park compelled me with a pool, volleyball courts, a pond, an aviary, and a smooth trail for biking. *The kids will have an 80-acre playground just feet from our property!*

Now, as I stood in front of our new home, staring across the street at Liberty Park, I pondered the provision of God. *What a great place to raise kids!* If I squinted, I could see bird cages behind a fence in Tracy Aviary. *Who else can say they saw a flamingo wing from their front step?* Runners and roller-bladers whizzed by on the wide cement path bordering Liberty Park. Gigantic pines lined the trail, slicing my view of the western mountains.

Quite a few pedestrians walked by on the sidewalks bordering two sides of our property. I called the kids in closer. I had had a terrible fear of kidnapping since my parents let me watch *Adam* in 1983 when I was only eight. Even through my teen years, I couldn’t walk alone in a store, for fear of being snatched and brutally murdered like Adam. It was so natural to me to imagine the fast-walking man, the one wearing a winter hat in the ninety-degree heat, veering into our yard, and tucking Cana under his arm.

“When we can afford it, we are putting up a fence,” I vowed.

My conflicted feelings subsided when I saw Lukus driving up in the Penske. Soon we began unloading our things off the truck. My baby grand piano made her way down, girded on the strong backs of Lukus, the other church planting pastors, and some young people who were

part of the Galkin ministry team. Collective groans accompanied the sweating men as they trudged up the steps, laying the masterpiece on her side in the 200-foot-square front room.

“Our house is like a clown car,” I chuckled.

No matter how awkwardly ill-fitting our furniture was in this new place, having my things around me made me feel better.

Meanwhile our church planting team members moved into their own places. The Albrights with their four tiny children rented an apartment by Gateway Mall. The Galkins, itinerant evangelists, settled their fifth wheel into a trailer park by the State Fair grounds. And the Kopps moved into a nice little condo close to our place.

That first week, theft reports blew up our cell phones like we were some sort of police dispatch service.

“We were carrying boxes inside, and when we came back out, our mattresses were stolen off the moving truck!” the Kopps reported.

“Our GPS was stolen out of our car!” texted one of the Galkin evangelistic team members.

“Someone stole my purse,” another reported.

I was just thankful no one had stolen my children.

After living in various houses and hotels for twenty weeks, I had built up Salt Lake City as some sort of paradise. I was not alone in setting expectations high for our families.

The Kopp’s four-year-old had asked as they trekked from Tennessee to Utah, “Mommy, is there sickness in Salt Lake City?”

I suppose all the pastors' kids thought we were headed to the promised land, the way we talked about it. Indeed, I had exalted Salt Lake City, perhaps because the journey to get here seemed so difficult, and yet so obviously planned by God.

Now that we were finally here, experiencing not quite paradise but hints of threats and thefts, I was reminded of truths I had learned about ministry. If God was going to build a church in Salt Lake, the enemy would fight against it. I knew that we were engaging in a spiritual battle, moving to the center of a worldwide religion. I knew things would not be easy, but I had hoped I would at least like living in the city.

Now, looking around at Liberty Park, I wondered if I could withstand the trials that had only just begun. Falling asleep with birds cawing and crazy people yelling outside sparked a desperate thought: *Will this place ever feel like home?*

Chapter 8: A Church is Born

(August 19, 2012)

My dad rang the chapel bell,
the children ran up the hill,
students walked from nearby dorms,
friends from the valley came to wish us well.

Families dug up their roots
to aid in this endeavor –
never looked back east,
even though back east was better,
better for money, for family support...
these people didn't care.

They came to do what must be done
until a church was there.

As we sat in hard old pews,
partook in the Lord's supper,
our shared faith united us
with songs and hearty prayers.

Basking in the word of God,
the water broke,
she breathed a baby's breath,
our little Gospel Grace Church
had been born,
we're forever in her debt!

Planting a church is like having a baby. You feel fragile and awed by the new life. You sense the air coming in and out as you study the one in front of you. You count all the fingers and toes because they are each so precious. Every blemish is beautiful, every cry sublime. You feel unsure of yourself while very sure of your desire to invest in this new life.

Over the next months, we were in newborn phase, but it was a little like a honeymoon for Lukus and me. When Lukus was the sole pastor in Texas, we didn't even realize what we were missing, when it came to team leadership – co-laborers who bear the same load, care in the same measure, share the same calling. With four pastoral ministry couples committed to planting Gospel Grace Church, we stumbled into something special.

There was chemistry in this team of thirty-something pastors and wives. Lukus became the lead pastor for preaching, teaching, and vision. Will Galkin served as church planting and evangelism pastor with his wife Christy and five children. Jon Kopp was the administration and media pastor with his wife Beth and daughter Karis. Jonathan Albright headed up our worship and college ministry with Sarah and their four small children.

On that first Sunday, several Christians from Salt Lake City came to support us. Many of those people became our core members when we chartered a year later. Faithful believers from different parts of the country had also moved to serve as core members of the church. These people coming together formed the DNA of a new body. They were the originals, the seed that grew into a church plant, our wonderful Gospel Grace Church.

Chapter 9: Four Young Bucks

whinnying worrying wondering winning

braying bucking bristling bolting

controlling catapulting contemplating concealing

zipping zoning-out zinging zealous

hoping helping harping hushing.

When will these young bucks

learn to trust,

lean into the harness as one?

On Tuesday nights the pastors held meetings. Even before we arrived in Salt Lake City, the guys had a group phone call every Tuesday night. This Tuesday night it was getting quite late, and I was just about to give up on Lukus getting home before I fell asleep.

The door squeaked open, and Lukus came in, looking like he had eaten bad food.

“What’s wrong? Why are you so late?” I asked.

“Oh, well some of the guys didn’t agree with us starting the church right away,” he commented.

“What would we do if we didn’t start? There are like sixty people already committed to the church,” I responded.

“Yes, I know. I feel a responsibility to pastor these people,” he said, looking disturbed.

“What else?” I pressed.

He got his stern look going and said, “You know you can’t do that. Listen, Lee Lee, I want to be able to confide in you, but there are things here that I need to keep nebulous, for the good of the brothers.”

With his words, I remembered how young he really was. At just 34, he had a huge task set before him. To lead a team of talented and smart pastors in this brand-new church planting endeavor was not something I would want to do, but he was willing because he believed God had called him to do it.

A shadow fell over my optimism about church planting. The suggestion that the other pastors weren’t happy with Lukus’ leadership made me angry.

Ironically, my anger toward others came out as anger toward Lukus.

I spouted, “Maybe this wasn’t such a great idea, team church planting. We really didn’t know that much about anyone before coming, only things that other people said. Did you even research the other guys?”

“I did not make this decision by myself. We made it together,” he reminded.

“Well, sort of,” I said dishonestly.

“Sort of? You know you were behind this just as much as I was!” he exclaimed.

“Well, I was behind the church plant but not necessarily everyone involved,” I twisted my words back into some form of truth.

“Liesl, you want everything on your terms. It just doesn’t work that way with team. There is give and take, and sometimes there is disagreement. Disagreement doesn’t mean dislike,” he proceeded with his unbreakable logic.

I shut down.

“Liesl, we are going to have to deal with disfunctions if we are going to have team leadership. The blessing of team brings with it some baggage too.”

I let the tears soak my pillow and tried not to say anything more because I would say the wrong thing. But even in my silence and anger, I realized Lukus was right.

“Liesl, I’m sorry for not listening to your concerns,” said the humblest man in the universe.

He always, always apologized first. *Why did I have to be such a jerk?*

“Lukus, I’m sorry for getting mad. I’m not mad at you. But when I get angry, there is literally no one to talk to.”

“I want to hear what you think, I value what you have to say. But remember, we are on the same team. We are in this together.”

I finally was able to sleep after venting a little bit to God. The pastoral team was filled with maverick men, but I was a maverick woman. And though I tried to keep myself from expressing it, just as opinionated.

As days turned into weeks, I began to see that mavericks were exactly what Salt Lake City needed. No one who didn't have strong beliefs could handle the incredible force that surrounded the city. There was a stronghold, a fortress here, and we all were just bold enough (or dumb enough) to storm the gates by faith.

Chapter 10: Meet the Mormons (A Firefly Led Our Temple Tour)

“Welcome! You have reached modern day Zion.”

In Utah? I had been to Israel
where Jesus walked, so talk of biblical
places, races, and temples in the West
were odd, like Moab, Goshen, and Jordan.
The Great Salt Lake, a charlatan Dead Sea,
reminded me that similarity
could not replace God’s original truth.
I’d visited Jerusalem’s temple:
its western wall remained, a testament
to the past, a fragment for future days
when Jesus reigns. “Behold! Salt Lake Temple,”
the tour guide gloated, glowing transfigured,
a worthy, Melchizedekian priest,
he floated over our Protestant heads,
he shone, a firefly mustering belief
that a worthy source of light existed
separate from the sun, better than sun.
He bore his testimony with great pride:
he swore to Joseph Smith and Jesus Christ.
The last of luciferin that let loose
preserved his glow until his soul took in
our unimpressed group, our many questions.
“You’re Calvinists,” he spewed with sudden heat.
“I’ve heard your gospel, and it makes me ill.
I don’t believe a loving God would damn
the innocent to hell. Heaven’s levels
have a place for everyone, even you.”
His wilted wings beat wildly as the tour
continued, swiftly through church history,
from 1830 to the present day,
when Thomas Monson prophesied for God.

The tour through Temple Square reminded me once again of the intense level of spiritual opposition in our city. Though the tour guide seemed so very nice, when questioned, he responded like a viper. He was not who he presented himself to be. This “good, gentle” Mormon stuff seemed so fake; I could hardly stomach it.

As I went back to life in my neighborhood, I reminded myself, *But Mormons are just people, people who need Jesus, just like I do.*

Elisabeth, a skinny, long-haired neighbor in her sixties, came out at night to water her rocky landscape of unkempt fruit trees and desert plants. *Where did she find the soil to pound in those Obama/Biden 2012 signs in between all those stones?*

Her curly-haired, physically fit husband, Mark, joined her and motioned for us to cross the street. An open bay window revealed an art gallery inside their humongous bungalow.

“That’s some cool art on your wall,” Lukus said, pointing through the glass at the gigantic modern painting featuring floating pigs, trees growing out of the sky, and various misplaced items.

“Mark is an artist,” Elisabeth sounded swoony.

Putting his tan hands in his jean pockets like a teenager, Mark asked, “So what brings you to Salt Lake?”

“We moved here from Texas to be part of a church plant called Gospel Grace Church,” replied Lukus.

“Very cool. My relatives came to Utah in one of the original Mormon pioneer wagon trains. But I’m open to other religions. I don’t fit into the Mormon box,” Mark declared with a smile. I envied his white teeth.

“Elisabeth and I are both divorced and remarried.” He seemed to expect some sort of reaction.

“My Pops is remarried to my mom,” I continued nonplussed, “I’m sure Pops told you we are Christians.”

“Well, yes, we have met Pops, of course. He told me all about you and your church,” Mark rocked forward onto his toes. “He also told me to do something about this cherry tree.”

“That sounds like Pops!” Lukus chortled knowingly.

Elisabeth gazed, but not at anything in particular. She was the first of many Mormon women I would meet with the glassy eyes. It was like a cloud hung there. *What is the reason for Elisabeth’s glazed-over glance?* I felt sorry for her.

“What do you think of Utah?” Mark looked at me rather than Lukus.

“I like Utah, but there are lots of things I don’t understand,” I admitted. Seagulls were making noise, taking off and landing nearby. “Like those seagulls! Why are there so many seagulls this far from the Great Salt Lake?”

“Because of the Mormon crickets,” Mark answered immediately.

Oh wow, even the crickets are Mormon around here!

Lukus probably had the exact same thought because we looked at each other, eyes twinkling.

Mark continued, “My granddaddy told me about the great cricket infestation of the 1800s. The pioneers were about to lose all their crops when God sent the seagulls to eat up the crickets. Was it an answer to the prayers of the Saints? I don’t know, but that’s how the story goes.”

Elisabeth snapped back into reality. In a floating voice she asked, “Do you want to come to the community picnic on Friday night?”

No one had ever asked us to a community picnic when we lived in Texas. I thought it might be a good way to start building relationships with people in our neighborhood. So, after a day of painting our kitchen and living room, we walked a block to the north side of Liberty Park for a community picnic. As we gathered under the pavilion, people talked and laughed like they knew each other.

Leaning into Lukus, I whispered, “Do you think this is just a community picnic?”

He opened one of the coolers, pointing to the half dug-through mayonnaise-based salads and Jell-Os, commenting, “Seems more like a church picnic.”

Visibly grossed out, he continued, “Mormon potlucks don’t have any better food than Baptist ones.”

“Shh. We’ll eat at home. Let’s try to meet some people,” I encouraged.

A young couple with two blonde boys and a baby slowly came up to us, acting almost like they had been sent to meet us. With a newborn in her arms, the woman, younger than I, was beautiful. She wasn’t all dyed blonde hair and make-up like so many of the young Mormon women I’d seen. She had a cute short haircut, freckles, and a great smile.

“I’m Ethnie. This is my husband, Hunter,” she introduced. Immediately drawn in by her naturalness, I began to talk easily to her.

“What did you say your name was again?” Lukus asked her.

“Ethnie.”

Lukus unveiled his unconventional knowledge: “What a great name! I believe it means Gentile in Greek.”

Ethnie's smile widened as she lifted her face toward her tall, blonde husband.

"That's about right!" Hunter laughed, looking down at Ethnie with admiration.

Later we discovered that Latter-day Saints called people outside their religion Gentiles. It was funny to them that Ethnie's name meant Gentile in Greek and even funnier that Lukus would just come out and say it.

Despite Lukus' slight faux pas, we weren't uncomfortable with each other. In the end, they got the news that we were evangelical Christians planting a church on the campus of the University of Utah, and we understood they were born and bred Latter-day Saints.

They also were friends with Mark and Elisabeth and went to the same ward. I was glad to hear they lived on our side of the park. If we were LDS, we would have been assigned to their ward. Mormon churches are called wards, and the LDS go to the ward associated with their residence, kind of like school-boundaries or parishes.

Ethnie and I exchanged numbers, and I promised to go to their house for an ice cream social the following week. Something about that girl had grabbed my heart and soul, and I couldn't wait to see what God had in store for our relationship.

Chapter 11: Utah People Potluck

Syrupy sweet, dripping honey, verdant,
gelatinous women with melting words—
my neighbors are glazed-over green Jell-O.

Shredded tubers seasoned heavily with
so much cheese and that you choke—
my neighbors are funeral potatoes.

Churning, icy victims fixing on pasts
so distant, yet so close, the milk is curd—
my neighbors are custard scraped from barrels.

Dried up tiny offerings, puffed up grains
with every course, at morning, noon, and night—
my neighbors are sweet mango sticky rice.

Cold, caffeinated, sugar substitutes
for wake-up juice with half and half stir ins
my neighbors are a dirty diet coke.

Fifty-fifty ketchup with equal parts
mayonnaise hits like an atheist prays—
my neighbors are collectively fry sauce.

Everything Lukus and I read about church planting pointed to us intentionally becoming a part of our community. From the place where the church would be located to the streets where we lived, we bought into the philosophy of contextualization. We desired to become part of the community and then speak into it.

I wanted to meet everyone and figure out their lives. I couldn't wait to put the kids in sports and find my own mom rhythms here in the city. I had come to Salt Lake City friendly as a puppy dog and was willing to talk to anyone, especially about Jesus and about planting a church.

So, one evening with my brood of four around me, I tried to talk to a lady at the Smiths Grocery store on Fifth East about the gospel.

She nodded her head in boredom, as if to say, "Yes, been there, done that."

All the way home I had a conversation with myself.

"You thought you were going to win over all of Salt Lake City in a month, didn't you?"

Well, not exactly a month, but, hey, with only a two percent evangelical population, I thought people would at least think the biblical gospel was interesting.

"Interesting? Isn't the gospel an offense sometimes?"

Yes, but I thought things would be different here because people are sick of Mormonism.

"They might be sick of Mormonism, but that doesn't mean they are ripe for Christianity."

You are right, as always.

As I drove Old Bess south down fifth east toward my house, I decided to be a big girl and get gas at our corner 7 11.

"Mom's getting gas!" Eli yelled cheerfully, as though this was a monumentally fun event.

"Yay! The 7 11!" shouted Cana, happy until her next words betrayed her sister's pinch, "Ouch! Eden!"

Changing her facial expression from pit bull to poodle, Eden dared to ask me, “Mama, can we get a Slurpee, pretty please?”

I looked in the mirror to see Lydia clapping her hands, her chubby cheeks lifting to reveal gigantic front teeth.

As I sat in the left turn lane, the streetlights were beeping, and it was getting a little dusky. I noticed a neighbor’s El Camino in the parking lot.

“Mom, look there’s the car with tattoo head guy in it!” Eden yelled.

I had my hackles up about him – he wasn’t a safe person.

“Yep, there’s tattoo head,” I said while thinking about taking the left turn to get into the parking lot.

As Old Bess followed my lead, she bucked like she could see what I couldn’t see: a pedestrian walking from the corner of the park to the 7 II. I slammed on the brakes, stopping just inches from this person who glared at me while straightening his leather skirt.

“Mama!”

“You almost hit that—”

“Man? Or—”

“Is that a woman with a beard?”

“Or a man with a dress on?”

Good heavens, I almost killed a transvestite a hundred feet from my house.

“Can we still get a Slurpee?” asked Eden.

“Not today, dear, not today,” I said, while driving back out onto the road, “I’m not going to pump gas either.”

In my dreams that night, I saw the headlines in the *Salt Lake Tribune*: “Pastor’s Wife Kills Transgender Man.”

“Mom, Dad! Some lady was yelling at us and throwing things over the fence!” Elijah ran inside with the girls trailing.

“Yeah, she said we were wild dogs!” Eden yelled out excitedly. Cana’s big brown eyes teared up.

Lukus went marching. That’s what my military husband does when anyone threatens our family. He goes marching. That’s when I hide behind fences or babies or anything and watch. Sometimes I get popcorn. No one wins against Lukus when he goes marching. I must remind him he is a *chaplain*, and he is a *pastor*.

I strained to hear but could only make out – “They’re just kids...the man has to use a saw, he’s cutting tile...” Lukus came back quickly from his confrontation. His mouth was set with corners downward, and his eyelids were reddish and squinty, but not from the usual allergy reason.

“What happened?” I questioned, wanting the full story.

“The mother of the homeowner was so angry at the noise coming from our side of the fence that she grabbed dirt clods and pitched them over the top,” he said, shaking his head.

“So, she doesn’t live there? Well, that’s a relief,” I commented.

The kids listened closely, as pastor’s kids often do.

“Not really. I met the homeowner. And she was even more unhinged than her mother,” Lukus picked up five-year old Cana whose only loudness was giggling, remarking, “Said we had obnoxious, loud kids.”

I was ticked. When this happens, my nose flares and then contracts into a beak-like thing, while my words get faster and louder. “What does she expect? There’s only a small spot to play, and we have four kids! If she is so concerned about noise, why is she living in the city across the street from an insanely loud bird zoo?”

In my heart, I had this dream of winning the neighborhood to Christ. But how do you do that when your neighbors hate your kids?

Late summer must have been the month for LDS ice cream socials because Mark and Elisabeth were hosting one as well. They owned Dolceti gelato shop, making this gathering a hit. My kids were deeply enjoying the gelato, and I was deeply investigating every neighbor.

Emily really is my doppelgänger!

My mom had told me about Emily before we arrived, saying, “I think you will be friends. She looks like you.”

Her brown hair, dark skin, flashing dark eyes, and spunky personality made me want to know her. She asked why we moved to Salt Lake City.

“We came to plant a church,” I replied.

“What does that mean?”

She had a legit question. A church doesn’t grow when you throw a magic bean into the ground, but the phrase does make it sound that way.

“We are starting a church from scratch. We have four pastors and several families who are joining together to form Gospel Grace Church,” I said, wondering if that made any more sense.

“What denomination are you?” she asked. I was impressed with the question, but I was not impressed with my answer.

“We are historic Baptists.”

Her puzzled look made me contemplate what I had just said. *She must think we are prehistoric dinosaurs.*

“There’s a big Baptist church up the street,” Emily commented.

I knew that church was an American Baptist pro-gay church. It was one of the reasons we didn’t put Baptist in the name of our church, so I tried to explain, “Well, there are lots of different types of Baptists. We are different from that one. We believe that the Bible is true. We believe that we must be saved by grace through faith, not through baptism or good works. We have pastors and deacons, not popes and bishops. We—” as words from my Baptist history class plopped out of my mouth, she glanced away. I felt like I had blown my one chance. I *was* a prehistoric dinosaur, and I had no idea how to relate to her.

I turned towards two women enjoying gelato a few steps away and struck up a conversation.

“What are your names?” I asked, smiling uncertainly.

“I’m Sandy, and—” she paused to look intensely at me before touching the woman beside her, “this is my wife, Shelby.”

“Nice to meet you. I’m Liesl,” I responded without dropping my eyes. “So, do you both work in the city?”

I have no idea what they said after that. I was busy looking for Elijah and Eden, hoping they were out of earshot.

Salt Lake City had recently been dubbed the gayest city in America. In 2012, it had more gays per capita than San Francisco. I realized I needed to educate my kids, but I wasn't yet ready to explain to my Texas-God-and-apple-pie children why these two women called each other "wife."

After corralling the kids for a gelato refill, a dark-haired girl with a raspy voice came close, whispering, "So I noticed the Gospel Grace Church sticker on your car, and I gotta ask, are you guys Christians?"

My eyes brightened. "Yes, we are! Are you?"

"Yes. Most people around here are LDS or atheist, so I had to see if you guys were real believers."

After we learned each other's names (her name was Emily) and exchanged cell numbers, we talked about what it feels like to meet another Christian in Salt Lake City.

Emily described it well, "When you meet a real Christian here, you feel an instant connection."

I agreed, "There is such an oppressive lostness everywhere you turn that you begin to feel lost as well... until you talk with a believer."

I was so glad this believer was my neighbor.

With Lydia in my arms and my three others trailing behind me, I braved going to Ethnie's ice cream party alone while Lukus was in a pastors meeting.

Ethnie, wearing her tiny baby boy in a linen wrap, opened her front door and warmly welcomed us. White walls were sparsely decorated with pictures of a Renaissance-period Jesus and framed wedding photos in front of the iconic Salt Lake City Mormon Temple.

We followed her into their backyard filled with smiling folks. Her husband, Hunter, pulled paddles out of an old-timey ice cream machine and filled bowls for us. Thick vanilla deliciousness coated my children's chubby cheeks. As the kids ate and played with other children, I talked to Hunter's mother. She told me about her nine children, one of whom was a special needs adult. As she described her life of caring for her children, I was impressed.

What a model of motherhood! Though I admired her devotion to her family, I felt strangely unsettled as we talked. She was a religious powerhouse, exuding a spirituality I didn't recognize. When she invited me to an upcoming event, I nodded my head, but did not pursue the details.

Something inside me whispered, "You don't want to go there."

The unseen speaks loudly in Salt Lake City.

A tall, muscled, and outdoorsy man joined our conversation, asking, "What brought you to move here?"

"My husband and I came to be part of a new church forming on the campus of the University of Utah, Gospel Grace Church."

"Oh, that's wonderful, we need more good churches in Salt Lake City," he responded congenially.

"What church do you go to?" I asked.

"I'm in Hunter and Ethnie's ward," he said, glancing toward them, and I figured he had already heard about Lukus and me.

"So, tell me about your children," he commanded.

"We are about to start homeschooling again with our older three kids, and I hope I can handle it!"

“I’ve thought about homeschooling our sons. Tell me, why did you choose to homeschool?”

“We wanted to teach our children about Jesus and give them a biblical world view,” I answered while he leaned nearer.

“It is so refreshing to hear that,” he commented, looking at me almost reverently. He had to be a good foot taller than my 5’3” frame.

“Well, it’s nothing more than what most Christian parents want for their children,” I responded.

“But the way you are bringing the principles of the gospel into daily situations is just fantastic,” he gushed.

I began looking around for his wife while hugging Lydia tightly.

Knowing that original sin was not part of their belief system, I dared to preach, “Well, it’s not always easy. To bring the gospel into daily situations, I have to handle my children’s sin.”

In their view, Eve did humanity a favor by taking the forbidden fruit. LDS children were treated like angels who sometimes needed redirection, not like sinners who needed redemption.

“But you are so filled with grace in your parenting, I can tell!” This man was a professional flatterer. I felt confused. *Grace? Gospel principles?* His words sounded Christian while his spirit screamed to my spirit that he was not.

Leaving Hunter and Ethnie’s house, I was disappointed. Instead of getting closer to Ethnie, I felt less confident of my own ability to handle the extremely strong overtones of Mormonism in her life. Still, we planned to get together soon, and I hoped for a better visit.

Chapter 12: The Glory of God in Salt Lake City

Roger's kind eyes spoke, while words of truth
broke through my thoughts that were confused.

In this new culture, who was I?
What was my motive, could it be seen?
How different was I from these folks,
so sweet and friendly,
sharing wealth,
who love their families,
and serve the needy?

I'd struggled with the "same" approach,
the "gospel" term seemed like reproach
for we both used it
frequently
to reach the "lost" -

 Their "lost" is me!

Encounters with the LDS
left me wondering,

 Do I sound self-righteous,
 even perfect,
 like they do when sharing
 habits, dreams
 their list of doings,
 neighboring?

The wise words
of a gentle, single,
older man who came to church
reminded me of why I was there.
"God be glorified in this place! This is my prayer."
My muddied thoughts cleared.

 No matter if false religions
 Hijacked the definitions
 I must still declare the gospel of grace
 And pray that His glory fills this place!

Talking with Roger, a man who attended GGC, refocused me after my confusing encounter with good LDS neighbors. By all measurable accounts, they were better than me, and that fact gave me a new plan –show them what it means to be a sinner saved by grace. What could be more glorifying to God than sharing that?

Texas had prepared for me for summer in the Salt Lake Valley, but my Wisconsin upbringing had whetted my appetite for a snowy winter. I hoped to ski the famed Wasatch Front where the 2002 Winter Olympics were held.

On this September day, however, I couldn't imagine how any snow could fall from the moisture-less sky.

“Am I getting sweat stains?” I asked Eli. He grimaced as he looked at my wet underarms. I quickly left to put on a sleeveless shirt before heading out for a stiflingly hot soccer game.

Sleeveless shirts were a daring fashion choice for ladies my age in Salt Lake City, as Beth Kopp informed me. We were raised in the independent Baptist tradition, growing up with strict codes of modesty. But the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints had modesty codes that put ours to shame.

Beth had a keen eye for observation in this new world of Utah, and she asked me, “Have you noticed that Mormon women don't wear sleeveless shirts? It's because of their holy undergarments.”

“My undergarments are a different kind of holy – more like hole-y,” I joked.

From then on, I started noticing the capped-sleeve underwear line under the LDS women's sleeves. Their extreme modesty emboldened me to bare my arms, like the rebel I *wasn't*.

With several little children in tow and a clean-cut husband by my side, only a mugful of steaming coffee and a sleeveless shirt set me apart, or so I hoped. In Utah, if you weren't LDS, you tried to look as non-LDS as possible. The irreligious Salt Lakers went several steps further in their visible rebellion against Mormonism.

We had been eating with the ministry team, when Laura, with her impish smile and sparkling eyes, recounted, "I was downtown near the temple and looked over to see tons of people running a race in nothing but their underwear!"

I glanced at Beth, then down at my sleeveless shirt, as if to say, "And we thought we were rebels!"

"You must have seen the 'Undie Run,'" Lukus declared after an internet search. "Looks like the counterculture's one-finger salute to Mormons and their holy underwear."

"I've never heard a pastor say one-finger salute before," Laura sounded a bit in awe of his verbiage.

From the comfort of my camp chair, I looked around at the soccer moms while Eli and Eden played alongside their pastor-kid teammates, the Galkins. Their mother Christy, my fellow soccer mom and pastor's wife, was busy making friends, and I was busy making observations.

In Utah, religion went all the way to underwear (temple-worthy garments), to replacement swearwords (Oh my heck!), to drinking habits (no coffee, no alcohol), to going to church every Sunday morning, to marrying young and having many children.

A passing glance at my family might produce the assumption: they look Mormon. But trying to appear non-Mormon was not my way to share the gospel. And as I thought on Roger's words, it was not the way to glorify God either.

Chapter 13: For the Children (Turn on a Dime)

"Do it your way!" and "Have it now!" they said,
unaware those thoughts are the way to death.
A child cannot understand the emptiness
of doing just as his own heart says.
Feelings explode at every turn.
"I" is at the center of what they learn.
While all the cameras are facing self,
they perfect a smile and play with wealth.
The steady building of children
by a mother's care and a father's hand
is given over to someone else
who cannot care and will not help
like a parent who sees beyond the years,
beyond the stages, beyond the tears,
beyond the hard and grinding bind
of rearing a child, of training the mind,
of loving that little person through
the pain he sees and feels when bloom
of life's seemingly rosy path
is crushed beneath a bully's laugh.
The twenty years of "What's a parent?"
is suddenly, starkly, very apparent.
And now we see, like the end of time,
a generation who can turn on a dime.
A moment of anger, a bad hair day,
whatever the problem, not getting my way:
the delusion of such a me-centric crew,
the danger of ideas so centered on *you*
is that we simply can't anticipate
how deeply a self-loved person can hate,
and how a culture without moral strength
can destroy a country, at any length.
Greater love has no man than this
but to lay down his life in exchange for his kids.
Would we give up our lives to shepherd a child's heart?
We may not change the world, but at least, it's a start.

Written after the 2012 Sandy Hook Elementary School shooting in Connecticut

“Well, good for you! I was raised here, and I never heard of anything besides Mormonism until I was eighteen,” one soccer dad said when I told him about our church.

His words sent my mind trailing into one of my main passions – children’s ministry. I had spent the last six years in Texas writing and implementing curriculum and devotions for a children’s discipleship program. Hearing his words set my heart firmly on ministering to children here in Salt Lake City as well.

“Just think of it, Lukus, someone our age had never heard of another religion besides Mormonism until they were eighteen,” I mentioned after our tired band of victors went to bed.

“What does that mean to you, Liesl? I can hear your wheels turning,” he responded.

“I want to tell children in Salt Lake City the gospel. I want them to hear there is something other than Mormonism before they are eighteen,” I said.

When community groups began, so did Truth Trackers, a children’s discipleship program, in my basement. My first club consisted of pastors’ kids and a couple other church kids. My neighbors came sometimes, little Ice, Patty, and Sea. They knew nothing about Jesus, being raised by Buddhist family members.

When the Sandy Hook massacre happened, I was even more convinced of my mission to share the gospel with children. My hope that children could be saved was founded in Jesus’ words, “Suffer the little children to come unto me and forbid them not, for of such is the kingdom of heaven.” It was also my own personal experience that gave me courage. If God could save me at a young age, he could save children in Salt Lake as well.

Chapter 14: Face the Music

God doesn't reveal his music preferences

God doesn't check your references

God doesn't frown at syncopation

Coming from the white bread nation

In fact, our cacophony might please him

If offered in spirit and truth

No matter the songs of your youth

It's time to change your tune

“Mommy is this rock music?” asked Eli, as we sang along with Seeds Family Worship. Eden and Cana wiggled in playful dance until I shook my head at them.

In Texas, I had made them turn off rock music when it came on the television or radio. My upbringing as a pianist in the world of conservative music had no room for the two and four beat emphasis. I was schooled in the art of removing the rock style from church music, but at Gospel Grace, we were singing and playing music in the contemporary Christian music style (CCM). I wasn't used to the style, but I realized I needed to expand my palate for the sake of the unity of the church.

In my youth, it wasn't uncommon to hear of people refusing to sing certain songs because they were unbiblical or ungodly. I read an article by one professor who advocated for church members to oppose the music minister's ungodly music styles by remaining seated and silent during worship services. I wasn't convinced by these arguments against CCM any longer. Instead, this way of thinking seemed to promote disrespect and disunity.

It wasn't only unity that drove my change in embracing the new music; it was need. I loved singing the gospel-rich lyrics. When a girl at the church, Annie Reid, led us in “Your Great Name,” I was profoundly moved. Afterwards I listened to several popular artists. Instead of assessing everything, I let the worshipful music work in my heart. I began to understand how the songs were put together, and how I could play piano to better serve the congregation.

Nearly every Saturday morning, the worship team practiced at one of the team members houses for Sundays. As the sun poured through my corner bay windows surrounding my baby grand during one practice, I felt panicky. It was a song I had never heard nor played called “Sovereign Over Us.” I tried to pluck out the melody line, while both Jonathans, also pianists, (Jarrett from Galkin team and Albright) tried to help me understand how to play it.

“Just play the chords, and don’t worry about the melody. Ever,” they said.

For some reason, that simple instruction helped me out, and I was playing the newer music styles soon enough. Rather than feeling panicky I couldn’t play them right or perplexed that I was perhaps playing something ungodly, I felt worshipful.

During this season, I wrote song lyrics and poetry quite often, and I was ecstatic when Jonathan Albright wrote the music for “Seek His Presence.”

Seek His Presence

(1 Chron. 16:8-13, 23-34)

O children, O chosen, give thanks to the Lord
In prayer be emboldened and call on His name
Among all the nations make known every deed
By singing His praises the peoples will heed

Chorus:

Seek the LORD and his strength
Seek His presence and his face
Seek the Lord, every hour
Seek His presence, His power

O offspring, O servants, come revel in God
So, from the heart seek Him
Rejoice and be glad
Remember His wonders, the works He has done
His miracles, judgments
Give thanks, chosen one

O remnant, O families, salvation declare
He's glorious and fearsome: idolatrous, beware
Ascribe to the Holy, the glories deserved
Tremble before Him, the Maker of earth

When we sang it at church, my heart soared. I never thought of myself as a real song writer, but God was using my gifts in combination with others for the building up of the church, and I was thankful.

As Salt Lake City continued dropping spiritual oppression into my life, I was busy writing music, playing piano, and singing with my children. I didn't know how important the practice of worship was until passing through the most oppressive month in Salt Lake City: October.

Chapter 15: Death Dressed Up

Wake up, O glassy-eyed dreamers:
heaven and hell are real.
Life's not the ribbons and streamers
that you parade so well.
Eternal life can't be insured
by someone lighting candles,
or whatever method preferred,
when waters for the dead be stirred.
Before you turn away your head,
hear the truth that you suppress.
Death inside you reigns, while princess,
prince, and sorcerer's dress
attempt to cover up the stench.

Wake up, O Disney-lovers,
for sin has touched us all.
Courage and kindness hover
but cannot change the Fall.
The scarlet letter, how it burns,
burns hot, the common brand
that shows our common father's hand.
No "Duggar" clan or "Sister-wife"
on glossy-cam shows their real life.
Doctor Jekyll may preside
but cannot quell his Mr. Hyde.

“Hey, what is up with Halloween around here?” I asked Odette, one of my LDS neighbors, as we walked. I pointed toward the houses that lined the park, with ghosts hanging from trees or strings of orange lights on the gables.

“I don’t know. I don’t much like it,” Odette said as I tried to catch up with her long stride.

“Well, it seems like everyone else likes it a whole lot. There are more decorations up than at Christmas!” I exclaimed, “Does it seem like people around here are fascinated with death and the afterlife?”

“I suppose, maybe, I’m not into Halloween though,” she responded adamantly.

“Were you raised celebrating Halloween? Are your parents here in Utah?”

She slowed her gait before answering in hushed tones, “Well, I believe my mother is dead.”

“You don’t know if she is?” I asked, hushing as well.

“Well, my adoptive parents are still living up in Canada, but my birth mother is dead, I assume, because I’ve seen her,” she whispered, her eyes looking down at mine, her fringed hair head turning so far to the side, she looked like an owl.

I repeated her statement to understand her words: “You’ve seen her?”

“Yes, I’ve seen her spirit, so she must be dead,” she finished.

“I’m sorry to hear that, Odette,” I answered quietly and quickly changed the subject, “We aren’t into Halloween either, we but we do celebrate Reformation Day,” I said, picking up my speed and volume.

“Oh, what is that?” she asked, as she caught up with me and quickly outpaced me.

“It’s when Martin Luther nailed his 95 Theses on the door of the Catholic church in Wittenberg, Germany in 1517. Look it up! It’s a fascinating story,” I finished and veered off Liberty’s path to cross 500 East and head into my yard.

“I’m going to look that up. Reformation Day. Goodbye, Lies!” she barely got off rhythm from her pace and was around the south corner before I could get into my front door.

I shivered, to shake off the spooky feeling, praying, “God you are more powerful than death itself. Please save Odette.”

Halloween week loomed, and I couldn’t wait for November first. I decided to get candy and Christian gospel tracts to pass out to those who braved the spooky streets. Late afternoon, the doorbell rang, but we weren’t ready for the trick or treaters yet. We rushed to get our candy out, but when we opened the door, there was no one there.

Lukus ran outside and found Ethnie’s husband Hunter and his oldest boy, Will, hiding behind their car.

“You’ve been booed!” little Will shouted happily.

“You’re not supposed to try to find the people who boo you,” Hunter said with a red face before hopping in his car and buzzing away.

“I thought someone was playing Ding Dong Ditch-it, but we’ve been booed, whatever that means!” Lukus told us.

I googled, “What does it mean to be booed in Utah on Halloween?”

“Turns out, being booed is a good thing – there should be a gift from them out there!”

“Yummy, Ethnie made us homemade bread!”

It had been dark for quite a while when the doorbell rang again.

“Grab the candy bowl!” I yelled, opening the door with Lydia in my arms.

A big man with a leather kilt and curly brown leg hair stood towering in front of us.

“Trick or Treat!” he said with a garish smile and a gravelly voice.

I saw the kids’ faces turn from joy to fear as I put a handful of candy and a gospel tract into his Walmart shopping bag.

As quickly as possible, I closed the door and locked it. When I turned out the front porch light and said, “Halloween’s over, kids!” – no one argued with me.

We’d been booed and spooked by a man in a dress. That was enough for our first Halloween. We went downstairs to watch *Winnie the Pooh* and eat candy. Then we read the Bible and sang some Scripture songs before heading off to bed, hoping never to see that hairy trick or treater again, especially in our dreams.

Chapter 16: The Onion

Aching, flaking, peeling, tearing

She is not aware

She shows no life

Lifting off the epidermis

Squirming as I do this

She is not prepared

She sees the knife

No one dared alert her

From danger to avert her

Leprous skin removes her

From confrontation's strife

Like layers of an onion

Crying while I cut in

Wound her and fillet her

From the lies that slay her

No one's dared to say to her:

"Mormonism's not true"

The morning Ethnie came to my house, I felt like I had been hit by a truck. Why did I always feel terrible when I was going to share Christ with LDS friends?

As I read my Bible before she arrived, I pondered this verse: “‘You are my witnesses,’ declares the LORD, ‘and my servant whom I have chosen, that you may know and believe me and understand that I am he. Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me’” (Isaiah 43:10). I knew that Mormonism taught a succession of gods. I was struck by how clearly God said, there was no god before him, nor would there be gods after him.

We sat at my kitchen table while Eli, Eden, and Cana watched their homeschooling videos.

“When your kids were my kids ages, were you homeschooling them already?” she asked.

“Well, I started Elijah at age four, but if I were to go back, I would wait until he was five,” I answered.

“So, how do you get your kids to stay in their rooms and do their homework?” she asked while her little boys played with Lydia. The boys maneuvered the alphabet magnets on my fridge before throwing them on the floor and using them as hockey pucks. Her baby boy sat in her lap while I got out a bin with more toys.

“I’ve thought about just locking them in their rooms,” I joked, “But no, really, they know there will be consequences if they don’t obey,” I answered her, wondering what she would say next.

“Do you spank them?”

Yep. She went there.

Instead of viewing her question as dangerous, I determined view the question as an opportunity to share what the Bible said.

I quoted scriptures about parenting and obedience, and she stared at me for a while before saying, “You know all those verses in your head?”

“Well, I grew up memorizing scripture, and I still do try to memorize, but my brain isn’t as good. I also try to read my Bible every day,” I answered.

“We read the Book of Mormon one year, then the New Testament one year, then the Old Testament, and then the Doctrines and Covenants,” she said.

“I’ve heard that,” I said before directing the conversation back to the Bible, “This morning I was reading in Isaiah. Isaiah is a beautiful book.”

“Yes, it is. What did you read?” she seemed genuinely interested.

I pulled out my Bible and read Isaiah 43:10. She looked all glazed over in her eyes, so I pointedly asked, “What do you think the verse means?”

“Um, well, I’m not sure,” she answered, getting a little wiggly in my kitchen chair.

“It is God speaking, saying there is no god before him and there will never be a god after him. He is the one true God,” I answered and dared to continue, “Doesn’t Mormonism teach that there were gods before the one they call Heavenly Father?”

“Well, yes, I guess so,” she said.

The boys were being so good playing with Lydia, so I continued sharing God’s truth, “But this verse says that can’t be true. There is only one God, not a succession of gods.”

“That’s interesting,” she responded.

“Did you know that Jesus claimed to be God?”

She nodded her head while insisting, “We believe Jesus is the Son of God, just like you.”

I felt like I had just a minute or two left before everyone got antsy, so I flipped to John 10 where Jesus said, “I and the Father are one.”

“You see, Ethnie, Jesus was one with the Father, making him equal with God. He wasn’t just claiming to be a son of God, he was claiming to be God. The Pharisees got so mad at him, they tried to kill him for it.”

“Why is that important?” her eyes said, while her mouth didn’t.

At my kitchen table, with the calming hue of robin’s egg blue emanating from my walls, I felt the hand of God leading me to share the gospel, “Jesus is the only one who could take our sins away because he was fully God, meaning perfectly sinless, and he was fully man, able to take our place,” I explained. “Because we sinned, we needed a sacrifice for our sins. God loved us so much, he sent his only Son to be the sacrifice for our sins on the cross.”

“So, we believe the atonement happened in the Garden of Gethsemane,” she commented.

“But the Bible says that we needed a sacrifice for sins, not just drops of blood,” I countered. “That’s why the cross is important.”

She looked all glassy eyed again. It was like a layer fell over her eyes, reminding me of verses I memorized in 2 Corinthians 4, “And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”

“So, Ethnie, I know that Mormonism teaches you need to be baptized into Mormonism to go to heaven,” I boldly continued. “So, I’m not a baptized Mormon, will I go to hell?”

She showed more emotion at that one moment than at any other time we had talked, “Oh, no, Liesl, you’re so good. You’ll go to heaven for sure.”

“But I’m not good. I’m sinful.”

“Oh no, look at all the things you are doing with your church and in the community. We believe you will go to heaven, but if you want to be with Heavenly Father, you will have to become a Mormon,” she said.

“I think that’s why Mormons baptize for the dead, right?” I asked.

She said, “We believe everyone has a chance in the afterlife.”

“But the Bible says that when a believer is ‘absent from the body’ they are present with the Lord.’ So, because I’ve believed on Jesus, when I die, I will be with the Lord. I will be with Jesus and there will be no separation from Jesus and the Father – they are one!”

“Don’t you see, Ethnie, how much God loves us! We don’t need a church or baptism – we just need to trust in Jesus. He will forgive us, and He will take us to heaven when we die.”

Ethnie said, “I’m going to try harder to do that.”

“Oh Ethnie, don’t try harder – trust in Jesus!”

Visibly shaken, she left my kitchen table. She didn’t seem angry with me.

When she left, I realized I had only peeled off the first layer of the onion of Mormonism. I was emotionally exhausted. Peeling onions was not easy, but I knew God had called me to do it, and I wasn’t going to give up, no matter the tears involved.

Chapter 17: Work Ethic

Get a job, go to work

Never rest, never shirk

My man was raised by Boomers, but not the typical sort

They weren't money people, they never spoiled their boys

Though technically a Millennial, he never lived like one

He never waited for others to get his own work done

Get a job, go to work

Never rest, never shirk

Will and Christy left with their team and family and wouldn't return until June. We missed them, but we were thankful for their ministry of traveling the country, preaching the gospel, and promoting church planting in Salt Lake City.

In the winter months, I turned my basement into a playground for the church kids. We even played Forward-Middle-Aft down there on Wednesday nights. PKs were banished to my basement for the Sunday nights that we hosted pastoral team dinners and worship nights.

During those times, we packed into my front room to play instruments and sing. When it got stuffy, we opened the windows, sending a message to Liberty Park: "Lost are saved, find their way, at the sound of your great name!"

During one conversation, Lukus mentioned, "On deputation, we raised only 34 percent of needed funds, so it's time for me to start applying for jobs."

The Kopps and Albrights had raised more money than we did, but they were not at 100 percent support either. They were already functioning as bi-vocational pastors, with Jon contracting graphic design projects and Jonathan teaching violin and piano.

Sarah Albright, who was always concerned about others, asked, "But, Lukus, doesn't your military job help with your income?"

He nodded, "Yes, I get paid for 24 days a year as a reservist. And I also buy into the military health insurance at a great monthly rate. But I need another job to cover the rest of our family's needs."

The next week, Lukus donned his old suit, trimmed his beard, and headed to a face-to-face interview for hospital chaplaincy. When he returned, I could tell he would not be getting that job.

“Well, that was a wash,” he said dejectedly. “I have all sorts of military chaplaincy training certificates, but the one I need is called CPE, and I don’t want to go to school for a year to get that. The only reason I’d go back to school is for a PhD in counseling or theology.”

“PhD!? Why would you need that, you are already a doctor!” I exclaimed.

“That’s a Doctor of Ministry. It’s a practical degree. If we ever want to start a seminary here in Salt Lake City, I need a PhD,” he replied.

“So that’s actually on your radar?” I questioned.

“Well, the guys said I would be the one more inclined for PhD work, so they would support me doing it when it is time,” he answered.

I didn’t want to say anything disparaging because I was starting to get tired of the phrase, “Well, the guys said...”

By Thanksgiving, Lukus conceded, “Maybe I need to just get a job at Lowes or Home Depot.”

I wished he didn’t have to get any job at all, because his hours were maxed out with ministry already. When it came to preaching, Lukus did 20-30 hours studying and manuscripting for Sundays. When he wasn’t studying, he was counseling – many people came to him during crisis, not only at Hill Air Force Base but also here at home. As a pastor, he felt a great responsibility to take on the ministry opportunities that came his way. He rarely, if ever, said no.

“Um, honey, maybe I need to start up teaching piano lessons sooner than later. We need some Christmas money. Or maybe we could sell that Christmas song I wrote,” I offered.

His look reminded me of why artists starve.

Chapter 18: When Duty Calls

It was just another phone call
Another beeping interruption
But, of course, my husband answered
*Oh no, I hope he doesn't have
To run and help some one
Shameful of my thoughts
I listened shamelessly
"A cluster of suicides?"
I didn't dare ask,
Oh no, what is that?
I googled instead
At least five people died in
A cluster of suicides.
"On base? The civilians?"
Oh Utah, why are you so sad?
"Yes sir, I am available.
Yes sir, I have that training."
"Be in uniform Monday morning."
Oh God, I wasn't expecting
An answer in uniform
Where duty and danger
Require all his working hours.
He ended the call
Nearly fell on his knees
"I'm the only reserve chaplain in Utah
Who is able and has the training.
I'll be an industrial chaplain
To serve the population
Of government service workers
I'll be serving God and nation."
Oh God, why do I doubt you
I know you have a reason
I know you answered prayer
And I know you will be with us.*

Utahns often talk about being blessed. But as we got to know more people, we realized the opposite was true. At my kitchen table, I was processing a plethora of difficulties from women. With his work on base, Lukus was dealing with the dark side.

Because of the cluster of suicides, he was immediately sent to the departments where people had committed suicide. He briefed on suicide prevention as well as grief support. Engineers, mechanics, secretaries, computer scientists, data analysts – all these people were affected by the many suicides that had just occurred in the civilian sector on the Air Force Base. Counseling appointments filled his daily schedule.

Serving as an active-duty chaplain to the civilians was an unheard-of position, but it struck a nerve of need. Day after day, hour after hour, Lukus got to know the depths of Utah's impoverished soul.

Some blamed the suicidality on the unmeetable perfections of Mormon culture. Others saw a connection between altitude and depression. To be sure, mountain towns all over the world did have higher suicide rates. However, Utah's rates were off the charts in 2012. It had to be more than altitude starving the brain from oxygen.

“Lukus, do you think that Utah is suicidal because of Mormonism or because of altitude, or what is it?”

“It really is probably a combination of both. But what they really need is God, they need the word,” he answered.

“Dying from a lack of God's word” was a phrase that the guys repeated in reference to the Salt Lake Valley. Living here for several months, I agreed with the assessment. People were starving, dying, from the absence of God.

It's not that people weren't religious. In fact, I had never been around so many religious people in my life, not even in the Bible belt. But it was a different type of religiosity. It was more like slavery.

Several gods held the whole state captive. Religion, money, fitness, nature –these were not evil in themselves, but Utah added a little twist to each one. Mormonism molded religion into an organization, a system insisting on behavioral control, a system missing the point of religion and that is God himself. They were God-makers – not God-worshippers, and they were mostly unaware of their manipulations and deceptions.

Money, fitness, nature – these were things that Utahns, whether Mormon or not – pursued without boundaries. These pursuits seemed benign, but behind them, a dark power prevailed. Was it wrong to go camping, to exercise, to work hard to make money? No, but these things seemed like Band-Aids for people who needed blood transfusions. Their pursuits brought only more and more emptiness. Idols owned them, and only the truth would set them free.

“Liesl, I figured out how to get God's word into my counselees,” Lukus commented one snowy winter day. “I have them memorize truth statements as part of their homework. I don't put the references there unless the people are religious. One lady has come for six weeks in a row, and she can recite six truth statements in succession on anxiety and depression.”

“Is she less anxious?” I asked.

“Yes, she is doing much better. The word of God works even in unbelievers,” he shared. His confidence in the word strengthened me, especially as the Lord brought women into my life who needed to be set free by truth.

Of all the women who needed to think on truth, however, it was me.

Chapter 19: Thinking Truth

Are you trusting feelings,
Are you chained by fears?
There is no grace or healing
For that which is not real.

Take your worries swiftly
To the Throne of Grace.
There you'll find Him praying
And pleading in your place.

Don't live in tomorrow.
Don't attempt to know
Every suffering, sorrow:
Before you He will go!

Do you trust your Savior?
Does He do what's best?
Will He make a way
For your soul to rest?

With the waves He wakes
And whispers, "Peace be still."
Faith will calm the fears,
The waves of heart and will.

As a child, being alone was the worst feeling. I used to hide in the crevices between my bed and the wall, tucking the blankets over my head. I was so afraid of getting kidnapped, even in the safety and comfort of my own room!

Hypervigilance and an overactive imagination ultimately drove me to the Lord. From the moment I comprehended its meaning, Hebrews 13:5 became my life verse, “For he has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you.” As I grew older, the verse became my mantra.

Now as a 36-year-old wife and mother of four, in the middle of a new city, a new life, my old fears returned. I was that seven-year-old again, trembling, hiding in my bedroom, never safe anywhere.

Loud, raucous, ridiculous creatures of the night, silly drunken men in the 7 11, stealing booze to broaden red noses and close out another useless day, landed behind our duplex. Who knows why (or how) they even ran at all? When the cops came, they made more noise than the thieves they arrested behind our long brown saltbox house where shadows offered shade to the shady.

Quoting verses was not going to take care of boozers hiding behind my house. It was time for action.

“Lukus, we need a fence!” I demanded.

“Josh Longoria will come up from Texas to help us build a fence in the spring. I’m sorry you don’t feel safe here.”

On this third Monday of January, dubbed Blue Monday by an airline company, no sunshine could pass through the thick smoking smog of the Salt Lake Valley inversion. The dank air was heavy and cold, and particles of pollution penetrated every pore.

I was familiar with the Monday blues common to ministry families but today was worse. Perhaps because it was so near my birthday, Blue Monday seemed especially depressing.

“How do you breathe in this smog?” I called out to my neighbor Mark.

“You don’t – get inside as quickly as you can,” he said as he rushed toward his car, and I opened the door to mine. “They are doing all sorts of research on the inversion. It affects us in so many ways. Even our athletes are at a disadvantage because of the air quality.”

Thoughts spun into speculations. Possibilities piqued into paranoias.

I forecast, *Eden is so athletic, but she will probably have black lungs and never be able to play sports after living in Salt Lake.*

As I drove by the dirty snow, I contemplated what Lukus told me about a counselee on base. “This poor woman had DNR tattooed on her chest,” he confided.

I couldn’t believe someone would be that desperate for death. But it seemed like everyone had mental health battles here, and many succumbed to self-harm, several to the point of suicide.

As I looked left and right, I noticed garish faces on the homeless people filling up some jugs at the Liberty Well.

Why do we even bother with homeless ministry? They just take your food and trade it for drugs and alcohol.

I went with the kids to the downtown library. As we walked across the concrete corridor, gazing up at the five-story glass-window structure, we halted. Caution tape stopped our entrance while a policeman whispered to me, “Someone jumped. The library is closed for the day.”

My mind's eye saw this floating man with regret written across his face, swimming in the air, plunging to his death, smashing into a concrete hell, right in front of the children's wing of the library.

Who doesn't end up killing themselves around here? We live on fumes, we can't see the sun for weeks on end, half of the people are duped by a false religion, and half of the people can't figure out who to trust after realizing they have been duped. Seriously we already live in hell, or Sheol at least.

This conversation with myself did not escape my lips, but it did scathe my soul.

Why do we have to raise kids in this place? I can't even walk outside without seeing someone out of their mind!

Though yesterday had been a sweet and bonding day for Gospel Grace Church, I realized not everyone felt as happy with our little church plant as I was.

"The pastors are so busy, it's impossible to just get to know them unless you're about to jump off a cliff," the rumor went.

And that old shadow, the feeling that some of the women did not like me, crossed my mind frequently. I normally dismissed that shadow as quickly as it came in, but maybe there was something to it. Maybe I was doing something wrong as a pastor's wife.

Down, down in the depths, I plummeted, from the top of the library where God was good to the ground floor where everything was bad.

How many mornings must I wake up and feel like I never even went to bed at all? Why go to bed even when Lydia wakes me up the moment I fall asleep?

Lukus got up early, working so hard to support us with his chaplaincy, and stayed up late, to fulfill his pastorate. He didn't sleep much either, but at least his sleep was uninterrupted. *No one cares about me. Seriously. No one cares about Lukus either.*

I ran my errands, holding my breath as I went from my car into Smiths Marketplace (called "Stabby Smiths" by the University students because of the reputation there). *I am not going to get stabbed here. I WILL get stabbed if I go to the Walmart.*

As I went to sleep, my brain cycled these words almost like a song: *Something's gotta change or something's going to break.*

Chapter 20: LDS Movie Premier with Anne Burrell's Double

The unholy hush held me motionless, while programmed emotions, dubbed through countless sessions of indoctrination, produced a groupthink unity robotic, but not in me. I was not expecting this at a movie theater with my new friend, who looked a lot like Food Network star Anne Burrell, to watch an LDS premier show. It's all about who you know. And I knew no one, not even really her.

I could touch the mood the front man made almost as easily as the ripped pleather beneath me. I did not want to breathe the air the crowd inhaled and expelled in unison. In, out, in, out, in, out, faith came in, doubt breathed out. *Don't breathe in, only out*, my divergent senses shouted. Breathing and nodding, the faithful needed prodding.

"I served the Church, but almost lost my faith until this happened. Miracles still happen, my brothers and my sisters, Amen?" The man on the stage was a missionary boy, whose faith depended on the peoples' amen. They must all say amen by breathing in and out at the front man's command 'til groupthink traveled like germs to the back where we sat.

The approach of two missionaries to their kidnapping in Saratov moved the viewers to tears. My jolly friend, with her wild whitish hair and flair for baking and blogging, whom I thought was Jack Mormon, sniffled with the infected crowd. I remained immune, sad that Anne still believed in the church of her youth where emotions redefined truth.

Too much for me to handle, this sentimental reason the boys chose not to escape when they had the chance to cast off their bonds and run off into the woods, was the call to Mormon missions. "Let's follow the example of the man Jesus Christ." Their constant imitation of this man was obviously all about *them*.

As surely as the woman next to me was not Anne Burrell, the man they called Jesus was not God the Son, one with the Father. He was an idol whose power, whose only holding sway over the Saints of Latter-days, was to convince a doubting crowd to stick around. As everyone cried and clapped, I left Anne and "Jesus," without a sound.

I happened to be pushing Lydia in a stroller next to a tall lady who was pushing a stroller full of Gerber baby twins. In just a few minutes, I had made a new friend, Catherine. We walked together over the next weeks several times, and I realized she was a Mormon of sorts. She appeared to be what people referred to as Jack Mormon, one who did not reject Mormon teachings but did not exactly accept them either.

“Mom, she looks exactly like Anne Burrell,” Eden said.

“Who is that?”

“You know, the chef on Food Network,” she reminded me. I smiled because she was right - the fluffy blond hair and the eccentric way of speaking was just like Chef Anne.

In the center of the park, the city had built a little system of creeks where kids could play. Our kids loved pulling pods off the sycamores and floating them.

“Hey mom, we squeezed the pods, and they turned the water yellow!” Eli was proud of his scientific discovery.

I heard some squealing as one of the children yelled, “Ew, yucky, someone peed in the creek, Mommy!”

We got a good laugh out of that, and I noticed a stray mom laughing with our family.

In hardly any time, Autumn had spilled her soul, “I’m a Christian, but I just have to end my marriage.”

I agreed to meet with her “for the gospel.” I tried to biblically counsel her, but after many weeks, I realized, “This lady is not interested in listening to what God has to say.”

Before long, I was walking with neighborhood moms a couple times a week. In all those walks, God was teaching me more about Utah women and their needs, vastly more than I was teaching the Utah women about God.

One wise Utah pastor had said, “Don’t assume you understand what Salt Lakers think, ask them.”

This pattern of asking questions produced very good conversations and friendly relationships. Repeated phrases came up in various conversations: “I don’t fit in at my LDS ward. I feel judged by people at church. I don’t know how to be a good wife and mother, but everyone expects me to be that.”

When they followed up with, “What do you think?” - I was so excited to share with them what the Bible said about acceptance, identity, marriage, and family. Sometimes I invited these women to church, but more often, I just invited them on another walk around Liberty Park “for the gospel.”

When Catherine asked me to the new movie, *The Saratov Approach*, I thought it would be a good opportunity to discuss spiritual things with her. But during the show, she became one with the Mormon crowd, and I just wanted to get out of there. It was a reminder of my own need for Christian community and my inability to handle the groupthink by myself.

Chapter 21: Selah

(for Lukus)

If I could give you anything
It simply would be time
Time to just enjoy the souls
That you have by your side
Time to stop and time to sit
Time to listen with closed lips
Nothing due, no one needy
All things slow, nothing speedy
Time to feel and time to hope
Remembering the grace we've known
Time to trace the laughter lines
Tear-stains too and why they're kind
Because we've lived and loved and lost
It's time we've spent, such simple cost
Yet we've received such gifts, you know
The gifts of love our children show
If I could give you anything,
It simply would be time
Time to breathe and time to laugh
Time to catch up with our past
Time to know each other's dreams
Pondering the things unseen
Remembering the time we've sown
That has brought the love we know
If I could give you anything
It simply would be time

“Dad is speaking at a military family retreat, and we get to go!” I shouted, piling our kids into Old Bess to raid Deseret Industries, the Mormon version of Goodwill, to hunt for ski gear.

We filled the carts with bad-smelling, ill-fitting hats, gloves, and snow pants before rushing through the line to get home and pack Old Bess.

Driving north to Eden Valley for the first time was like discovering that long ago hidden garden for which the Utahns named it. The canyon glistened with fresh snow, looking like it had come from earth to heaven. The frozen waterfalls were strong ice men, holding up the red rocks that jutted into the clouds.

Our donated retreat quarters were fit for a rich man’s family, and we tiptoed in like Orphan Annie, eyes agog with all the splendors.

“Mom, there is a huge theater in the basement.”

“And a hot tub,” I said.

“And we can all get our own bedrooms!”

“And a hot tub,” I said.

“What a winter!” I exclaimed as I gazed up at snowy peaks and clear blue skies. The inversion in the Salt Lake Valley, basically a smog blanket, had been extreme. The kids had been sick with every single bug that existed in Utah. Lydia still did not sleep well. And Lukus worked 80 plus (plus, plus) hours a week. My workload was also heavy and solitary. But as I sank into that hot tub underneath a smog-less sky, I praised God.

That weekend, I enjoyed my God, my kids, and my husband like I hadn’t been able to in a long time. My parents came up to watch Lydia when we went to Wolf Mountain to ski with the

military families. Mom and Pop, those die-hard Midwesterners, weren't stopped by some snow on the ground when we needed them up in the Eden Valley.

Lukus spoke on resilience and communication to airmen and their spouses. He was able to use scripture, sort of like he used truth statements. What an amazing opportunity he had to serve these military members and to speak truth into their lives!

“When you go through deployments, you endure a measure of stress as a family,” he explained. “After the deployment, you normally come down from the energy required to work in a dangerous place, but your spouse also has to come down from the high of caring for family needs alone.”

Sounds an awful lot like how I feel while you are working at the base or with church!

“If you don't come down from the levels of stress, you will struggle with many things. Your relationships and health may suffer as a result. But if you take care to find the new normals, your life can be good after high stress events.”

The weekend was designed to help families reintegrate, and I found the design of the weekend to be helpful for our family as well. Our children enjoyed recording messages on their new Build-a-Bears, laughing at the funny DJ while trying to do the hokey pokey, but the skiing was the huge highlight for all of us.

I hadn't been on a pair of skis since we were first married in Iron Mountain, Michigan. It didn't take long for me to get my ski legs, and for Lukus to become a ski instructor.

“Pizza! French Fries, Pizza!” my military man shouted, and the kids obeyed.

“We're ready to get off this bunny hill!” he declared. I wasn't so sure, but the kids were.

Riding up and skiing down that mountainside, I could breathe like I hadn't since the inversion set in. The cold air enhanced my intake of oxygen, and I filled my lungs as deeply as I

possibly could before exhaling. Skiing became a favorite family activity in one afternoon, one we would repeat whenever possible in the years ahead.

The entire weekend was learning how lovely it was to breathe again. No time constraints, other than following the retreat schedule. No people expecting anything from us. No people disapproving. No smog-filled air polluting us.

I wished we could just get away for a few days without Lukus having to work, and yet it was his work that allowed us to come to Eden Valley. He learned how to rest when he could and enjoy the moments with the children and me. His ability to box things up into work, rest, and family was a gift from God, but I still wished I could take some of his pressures, to give him the gift of time.

Chapter 22: At My Kitchen Table

She came, she cried, she wanted to die, she opened up, she sucked it up, she spilled the beans,
she let it go, she reached a point of no return, she made a choice. And love broke through.

No longer full of despair,

No longer bound by secret shame,

No longer a slave to the ball and chain.

She left my kitchen table with an identity.

She sat, she spoke her mind, she knew it was time to admit her addiction, her screwed up
tradition, her gospel addition, her faulty submission to abuse, like a tattoo that must be removed.

No longer controlled by boyfriends

No longer held like an addict

No longer a slave to a habit.

She left my kitchen table with hope.

She followed him, her husband: while he let go of confusion, she let go of holding it all together
so he could be alright. She broke up with works-based religions and fell in love with grace.

No longer appalled by the thought of church

No longer needing to appear strong

No longer a slave to other people's wrongs.

She left my kitchen table with a Savior.

No longer a tiny marked-up buffet

but a lighthouse, a beacon, a cable

never sharing the details,

my wise old kitchen table.

The number of people God brought to our kitchen table astounded me. Sometimes I got to tag team with Lukus, sharing the gospel or counseling, and sometimes it was me with the women God brought into my life. I was so thankful for my parents' ability to take the children on a moment's notice.

Three special ladies came into my life about the same time. Kaye was a long-time Christian who needed some encouragement and good counsel. At the end of our journey together, she was the one encouraging me.

"You know, I got me, uh, one of those study Bibles," she told me one morning while we were meeting.

"Which one? I dunno. Well, you know, the huge one," she said, her Pennsylvania accent lacing her straightforward speech.

"Oh, the ESV Study Bible," I realized, since it was really the biggest study Bible, almost as big as the quad that the Mormons carried around.

"I've been reading it every day, and I can really tell that it's doing me a lot of good," she said, smiling. That smile had been very hard to come by. That smile was a reminder that God could meet anyone where they were, break through any barriers, and show himself to be a loving God.

Another of my kitchen table disciples was Megan. Megan was the first person outside my family to give me a Mother's Day card. My eyes filled with tears reading her words. She really was like a daughter. Almost immediately after we met, God bound her to my heart. A pastor had told her about GGC on a flight to SLC. She had decided to move back home after spending a couple years in Tennessee. While in the South, she heard the gospel and she received Christ. An

older man, Dr. Steve, began the discipleship process with her, and God allowed me to continue it. We met nearly weekly for two years.

That summer, Megan kept visiting a “Christian” boyfriend. Pretty soon, I wondered where she was staying on those visits.

“Well, I stay with him, of course,” she said matter of factly.

“But if you aren’t married, you should really not stay with him, because you might be sexually tempted,” I advised.

“But what’s wrong with sex? I like sex,” she responded, throwing me off guard.

“Nothing is wrong with sex in marriage, Megan, but before marriage, God says it is wrong,” I showed her some verses, but she looked hesitant and dejected upon leaving.

I emailed her a bible study and said, “When you are done with this, I want to talk with you.”

After a couple weeks, we took a walk around Liberty. I felt like the conversation was going in as many circles as we were taking around the park. Exhausted, I stopped her and made her look me in the eyes.

“Tell me you don’t understand what God says about sexual immorality,” I challenged.

“I do understand. I just don’t want to stop having sex with my boyfriend,” she countered.

“Well, if you don’t obey God, you will prove yourself to be an unbeliever,” I said as strongly as I could while feeling trembly inside.

That did it. She looked trembly on the outside.

“You’re telling me I’m not a Christian?” she questioned, but she wasn’t rebellious against me.

“No, I’m saying, now that you know what the Bible says, you are going to have to make a decision that proves whether or not you have the Spirit of God. If you choose to disregard the clear teaching of God regarding sexual immorality, you will show that your heart does not belong to Christ,” I repeated, holding my ground.

She walked off, again somewhat dejected.

She called me later, contrite and convinced. “You are right. I broke up with him. I want to please Jesus, and I want to show others that I am a Christian.”

I felt like I had won the greatest battle of my lifetime, and indeed, maybe I had.

Mary was another woman who sat at my kitchen table. Her husband worked at Hill Air Force Base and came to know Lukus there. He brought his wife and two kids one day to church. Afterwards, they stayed to talk, and while Jason helped Lukus fix the pump for our swamp cooler, I got to talk to Mary about grace.

“I was raised Catholic. But then I tried Mormonism. I’m not really anything right now,” she said. With her long brown hair and tanned skin, she looked a little bit like me, only darker shades. I could tell she was an intelligent woman, the way she logically went from question to question about what the Bible had to say about salvation.

“It’s by grace, through faith, and not of ourselves,” I quoted.

“So, you mean we can’t earn it?” she followed.

“No, we can’t earn it. God says that salvation is a gift,” I continued.

“That’s exactly opposite of both Mormonism and Catholicism. You must be good and follow certain rules to be in good standing with God and the church,” she concluded.

“That’s the beauty of grace. We don’t deserve it, we don’t do anything to merit it, but we do have to reach out and receive it by faith.”

I pulled something off the table and demonstrated.

“I’m going to give this to you, Mary. See, it’s in my hands, and all you need to do to get a gift is what?” I held the object in my open hand.

“Take it?” she asked, and then she took it from me.

“Yes. Now what if you insisted on paying for it, would it still be a gift?” I watched the light go on in her dark brown eyes.

“No, then I would have earned it and paid for it myself,” she said. “So, I just need to have to receive this gift by faith?”

“Yes, you can receive Jesus if you believe that he died on the cross and rose again for you. Then you ask God to forgive you and save you from your sins!”

She seemed so fully content with what I said, especially when I showed her the verses from the Bible.

From that Sunday forward, she was at church, driving the 35 minutes to get there from Roy. She came to community group and church faithfully, devouring the teaching of God’s word, and processing it in such unbelievably mature ways. I may have introduced her to grace, but she taught me about it every time we spent time together.

Chapter 23: Pre-Easter (Wiggly Tooth)

“But why can’t I have a wiggly tooth?”
 The dangling molar swung in triumph
 leaving gums of older sister, always first.
 Such disadvantaged birth –
 a trial she did not verbalize in youth.

She cannot see my plague,
 my pendulum ‘tween one, plus one, plus one –
 while getting little done.
 Enamel on the floss I swing, controlling nothing.
 So torn, a toothless smile we have become.

So why can’t she have a wiggly tooth?
 Her brother, sister did.
 I couldn’t handle it:
 her always missing out, her third-born eyes of doubt,
 the way she judged my soul and knew the truth.

I did forget her, and I did compare
 what she did or didn’t do
 with my other two.
 In her I see my weakness, looking at my likeness,
 but she is not my mirror, I’m aware.

“But why can’t I have a wiggly tooth?”
 The question reappears in wondering words
 through years of hand-me downs.
 “Why can’t I – play a different sport?”
 She sighs, ill-fitting in her elder sister’s shoes.

Today I glance at her, just once
 before I answer one and two, as if to give a clue:
 You are supreme in beauty.
 You are not just a duty.
 Your wiggly tooth is coming! Weep no more.

In a pastor's home, Easter is a huge event, a prayer endeavor, an outreach, and a big chance to share the gospel. It seemed to be the time the enemy would uniquely oppress us. In Texas, nearly every Easter, someone left the church, or the children got sick. In Utah, how could I expect any less?

"Mom, I keep thinking bad thoughts about you," my thirdborn confessed.

"Like what?" I asked.

"I don't know, just things like how much I hate you," she said quietly, her big brown eyes filling with tears.

"Did I do something that bothered you?" I questioned, pulling her towards me. I wouldn't have been surprised if I had done something to bother her. I struggled to make time for the quietest of my litter.

"No, I don't really hate you. I just keep thinking, 'I hate you,' and I don't know why!"

I hugged her before saying, "It's ok, sometimes we don't know why we think bad thoughts. We just need to put good thoughts in their place."

Over the next couple weeks, Cana confessed her thoughts to me, and seemed more tormented as we got closer to Easter. She also started walking in her sleep.

Easter Sunday was my favorite day of the year, even with the pre-season difficulties. I had worked with the children on Wednesday nights, preparing them to sing for the service. Our friends Hunter and Ethnie promised to come, along with her parents. We had planned an Easter luncheon with the Albright family and our Thai neighbors following.

On Easter Eve, I startled awake and turned my head to see Cana next to my bed, her little face troubled, her long hair tousled.

As I looked at her, I asked, "What's wrong, honey?"

While I waited for her to answer, pieces of her disappeared, until she wasn't there any longer. I sat up and reached out my hand, but my phantom little one wasn't present.

I ran upstairs, where her head was nestled in between a teddy bear and a pillow.

Had she ever been standing by the side of my bed? I lay there for a long time wondering. Why was Cana so tormented this Easter season? Why was I the object of Cana's negative thoughts? Was it because she was my mini-me that the enemy was after us both?

My heart pounded heavily, and I could not sleep until its rhythm fell back into normalcy. I prayed while the stars traded places with the sun, "God help me. God take care of Cana. Help us both to make it through Easter Sunday!"

Chapter 24: Easter Sunday: Humble, Homely, Homeless Jesus

(from Isaiah 53)

I would have rejected Jesus
I am a wandering sheep
I would have been the disciple
To take the coins, to turn and flee.

Humble, homely, homeless Jesus
Like a plant in desert sand
I was looking for a warrior
not a beaten and dying, nail-pierced man.

I would have mocked the Servant
I would have struck his face
I would have torn his beard, his garment
Swung the whip, scorned his grace.

Humble, homely, homeless Jesus
Words wouldn't matter to me now
I was looking for justice
Not a preacher with a thorny crown.

I would have laughed at Jesus,
Cried, "Save yourself if you're the Christ"
Interpreted his words through anger-
"Father, forgive them" before he died.

Humble, homely, homeless Savior
See his lifeless, beaten form
I was looking for a king
Not a dead man sealed up in the tomb.

I would not have believed the news
He is alive! The women said
I would not have seen until he showed me
The wounds in his side, the nail-scarred hands.

Humble, homely homeless Savior
I believe in you, I repent
You have won my rebel heart
For you have risen from the dead!

Easter Sunday dawned sunny, while I felt foggy from the sleepless night. Nonetheless, the children sang like angels, my husband preached like Spurgeon, and the chapel was filled with guests including our LDS friends.

“Would you have seen Jesus for who he is? Would you have understood why he must be crucified?” Lukus asked in his sermon from Isaiah 53. “No, you would not have, and neither would I, because we are willful, wandering sheep as the prophet Isaiah declared: ‘All we like sheep have gone astray, we have turned everyone to our own way, and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all.’”

I thrilled to the gospel words. Surely, I would have run away from the homeless and crucified teacher; I would not have understood. But Jesus came after me, opened my eyes, to understand his true identity, to see my sin upon the cross, and he saved me.

I glanced to my right where the row of my LDS friends sat on a parallel pew. Nearly everything about them was parallel to us. Ethnie sat with her beloved parents and children, as I sat with mine. She supported her husband Hunter who had just taken on the role of bishop at their ward, and I supported my husband who led our church as pastor.

But there was one thing that was not parallel, and that was the gospel we embraced.

Immediately after the closing prayer, our friends left to attend their LDS service. I was disappointed that we couldn't really talk, but I was thankful they had heard the gospel that day in our loving Gospel Grace Church.

After the church-in-the-box trailer was packed and hooked up to Old Bess, we drove home to eat Easter dinner at tables behind my house in the narrow stretch of land by my mean neighbors.

Suwanee, the cook for her family's Thai restaurant, Tasty Thai, made mango sticky rice for our Easter dessert, and we devoured it.

"My mother is coming to live with us," she shared.

I wondered where they would fit all those people in their small bungalow. College students from Thailand, along with her nieces and brother, were living there already.

"My mother has cancer. My brother is getting a divorce," Suwanee said.

I didn't quite know how to answer. I knew I should have deep feelings of gratefulness that she was sharing with me, and I knew I should be elated that Easter Sunday had been such a wonderful gospel success, but I was so fatigued, I had no feelings whatsoever!

That night, I slept like I hadn't in a few weeks and so did Cana. We had made it through our first Easter in Salt Lake City. Even though I hated the pre-Easter show down, I thanked God for counting us worthy to suffer for Jesus.

Chapter 25: God Fills Empty Spaces

Void and darkness on the face of the deep
ablaze with light, the earthen eyes awake
from sleep to see expanses, open spaces
but God delights in filling empty places.

One by one the voids are filled by words
crafted for design, creative power's unleashed
to break the tension, deafening silence,
and God builds bridges to the islands.

Man feels his loneliness as he observes
sky filled with moon and stars and sun and birds,
seas teeming with fish, teeming pairs on land--
so God initiates with outstretched hand

And gives woman. Voided souls unite,
self-awareness lost to the other,
and two in one, a marriage under heaven
begins the pattern all mankind is given.

“You need to have something left to give to me, Liesl. Not everything can go into the children or the church,” Lukus spoke truth into my life late one night.

“But I don’t know how to stop doing what I’m doing. I still need to homeschool. Lydia still wakes me up. All these women want to meet with me. And someone must teach the church kids and serve in nursery. And you are not here all day and often studying, counseling, or in meetings at night,” I replied, my eyes red, my words halting.

The tension in our relationship reminded me of the early years when we first got married and went into the ministry. We had to learn how to communicate and handle so many new pressures back then. We needed to relearn each other to communicate and survive here in Salt Lake as well.

But I was simply exhausted. And so was Lukus.

One sermon from the Genesis series Lukus preached came to mind. God created empty spaces like land, sea, and air, but he didn’t leave them empty. He filled them.

In all my busyness, I thought I was filling the empty spaces, but instead I was emptying them out. Masquerading as fullness, vacancies crept in that threatened my spiritual, emotional, relational, and even physical health.

But God is still faithful to fill empty spaces, and he orchestrated several changes in our lives to do just that.

“I finally got approval to go on 4-10s!” Lukus rejoiced.

I didn’t know what a difference that four-day schedule would make for us until the first open Friday came.

“You don’t need your uniform! You don’t have to drive all the way up to base today! You can study all day for Sunday! We can go out for lunch together!” I was ecstatic.

Weekly dates had not been a possibility, and now, in the busiest time of our lives, we were able to begin spending regular time on Fridays together.

Then we had the brilliant idea of asking Eden to do something for us.

“Eden, Lydia just won’t stay in her bed, so she keeps waking Mama up. Do you think she could sleep with you?” Lukus asked.

“Sure, I don’t know why not. She’s a living teddy bear!”

Lydia started sleeping through the night when our third grader took over as night nanny. Eden saved my sanity, while providing a second mother influence in her baby sister’s life that provided a unique and lasting bond.

Another lifegiving thing was memorizing 2 Corinthians 4 with the pastors’ wives. As we hid the chapter in our hearts, we were strengthened. The chapter is filled with wisdom about suffering for the sake of the gospel. One concept that resounded with each of us was this: we had received this ministry by the mercy of God.

Ministry was evidence of the mercy of God on our lives. Though we felt like we were dying sometimes, this death was producing life in others for the glory of God. Our shared sufferings produced a bond that we desperately needed at that time. No one was living a life of ease in Salt Lake City, we all had our own set of tailor-made troubles, but knowing that we each were suffering for the greatest reason imaginable helped us not to lose heart and to love each other more.

“I think you need to stop homeschooling,” Lukus told me one night after I confessed that I hadn’t graded a paper in a month.

Instead of being offended at his suggestion, I googled for schools and curriculums that I liked. When I searched for “Saxon math,” a very simple school website popped up, Capitol Hill Academy.

“Hm... looks like classical education, one-room-schoolhouse style, and kinda looks Mormon too... but worth a look.”

The school was located just ten minutes from home. I decided to visit, and GPS led me to a long brown brick building with black paint and a tiny parking lot. The only welcoming feature was the view of the Capitol nearby.

This place looks more like a storage warehouse than a school.

I almost left, but then some kids with uniforms started coming out. They jumped rope on the strip of land in front of the windows.

The receptionist walked me around the school until the principal finished instructing a class. Down the galley hall, classroom doors remained open. The walls and floors were ancient, the bathroom doors looked like they were about to fall off. I was not sure why everything seemed so decrepit, until I heard that the monthly tuition rate was only \$135.

From each room, I could hear students answering questions, reciting, or chanting math facts. My interest in the school grew.

I took a risk and asked the lady, “Are you all Mormon?”

She said, “Well, no, not everyone.”

I looked into her eyes, “So, you don’t teach Mormonism in this school?”

She looked nervously left to right, like she wasn’t sure how to answer.

“You don’t have classes about Mormonism or religion?” I pressed.

“No, we don’t, but we do pray and ask the students to pray at the beginning of each school day,” she said.

I pressed again, “So my kids will not be taught Mormonism here, right? Because I don’t believe it. I’m a born again Christian.”

She did what all the LDS do when confronted, they concede or they agree, and normally in a gushy way, “No, of course not, ma’am, we don’t teach Mormonism, of course not.”

Mrs. Millard, a sharp woman in her late fifties, clipped down the hallway in her pumps and swaying polyester skirt.

“Who are you? How did you hear of our school?” she asked directly.

“I’m Liesl Counterman. We moved from Texas to be church planters, and our church is called Gospel Grace Church. My husband is also a protestant chaplain. I have homeschooled the past six years. I found your school on the internet,” I responded, just as directly.

She looked strangely pleased, “Well, that website is good for something. And a pastor, a chaplain? How wonderful!”

“Is this school Mormon?” I asked again, but this time I felt nervous, like I was face-to-face with Joan of Arc. She had such a commanding quality about her, but I suppose I did too.

“No, but we do want the children to be free to express their religious opinions. We are a school after the Hillsdale tradition. A classical education includes Christianity at its core,” she explained.

I was happy with her answer and even happier when I shut down the homeschool videos forever as we finished our first schoolyear in Salt Lake City.

The last reprieve was a second wave of families and singles who came to help with the church plant. The first to come was Nic Higgins, GGC's first pastoral intern, and he stayed in Eli's room until he found a place to live. No job, no money, only a burden for church planting – but he wasn't in Salt Lake for anything other than serving the new church.

As more began to arrive in spring and early summer, drooping heads and arms of our front-line soldiers perked up. Paul and Courtney Howell moved in, along with Josh and Bobbi Kopp. These young couples encouraged me so much: they were entrepreneurs who loved the city and Gospel Grace Church.

The Galkins returned with their team. Several of those team members moved permanently to Salt Lake that summer, including Laura Kennedy and Jonathan Jarrett. New team members began to show interest in church planting and moving to Salt Lake in the future – John Moon, Jessica Garrison, Aaron Boyce.

Sean and Ruth Ann Lawley contacted us that they were moving from Duke University to the University of Utah. They had been praying for us that entire year before they moved to the city. Lukus and I experienced personal relief as fresh servants of the Lord arrived.

Those empty spaces in my life, God filled up, pouring out his grace in my time of need. Because of this, I was ready for our first full summer of Plant Camps, Church in the Park, and Backyard Bible Club.

Chapter 26: Reach out with Gospel Grace

Christ in you, the hope of glory
by your hands His work is done
through your eyes I see His story
life and death and victories won
Counted as a sister, brother
love that comes because of Christ
like a father or a mother
a friend like this does not have price

Godly love, living godly
holding up another's arms
loving truth, in truth loving
holy worship with its charms
this the church age brings a blessing
Christians more than neighbors are
together running toward the finish
second miles are not so far

Lost will know that we're authentic
by this true and holy love
ours is the earth and all things in it
as we mimic life above
fleeing sinful traps and habits
following righteousness and faith
with the others, pure in heart-cry
we reach out with gospel grace

As we advertised for Backyard Bible Club and prepared for four days of gospel ministry to the children in my yard, I was excited... until a green-faced Eden came up to me.

“Mama, I don’t feel good,” she whispered.

Pretty soon she was in the bathroom. Then a few hours later, Cana made a run for the bathroom as well. Eli was in there next, and then Lydia barfed on me.

“Lukus, how are we going to have Backyard Bible Club with everyone ralphing all over!” I mourned.

Fortunately, the stomach bug seemed rather mild, and the kids all felt better a few hours later. Later that evening, my dad was out watering things in the garden with Eli.

Eli came running in to the house, yelling, “Pops puked in the wheelbarrow!”

My dad *never* caught stomach bugs. I thought the world was surely ending.

All that evening, one of the kids would say, “Pops puked in the wheelbarrow!” until it finally got funny to all of us.

During the night, I got sick. Lukus never succumbed. Military men have no time for the nonsense of stomach bugs.

By 10 am, the start time for Backyard Bible Club, no one was sick, and our yard started filling up with children. Thankfully, the summer interns Jonathan Jarrett and Erin Ijames were there to help. My dear mom miraculously escaped the bug and was able to serve the children snacks and water. Some of the church ladies ran games.

My Thai neighbors came: Ice, Patti, and Sea. They were the cutest things, and I loved watching them listen to the stories the interns were telling from the *Jesus Storybook Bible*.

The morning no more bugs visited the household, but we did have an unwelcome visitor. As a police car stopped by the side of my house and an officer walked up to the fence, I went to him. About 50 little eyes were on us.

“A neighbor has issued a complaint. Do you have a license for daycare?” he asked.

“Day care? This is not a day care. It is a Bible club, and believe me, no one makes any money doing this.”

“Ok, well, I just had to follow up on the call. You can continue to run your Bible club.”

I darted my eyes toward my nasty neighbor’s front porch, mouthing, “How ridiculous!”

I chalked it up to the opposition that seemed to accompany every spiritual endeavor we attempted. The enemy could bother us with a stomach bug, a bitter neighbor, or a stodgy cop, but he could not stop the gospel from going out in Salt Lake City.

Church in the Park began with a handful of church families worshipping on Wednesday nights and very soon became a monumental outreach.

At first, we met across the street from my house, where babies and little ones could be safe inside my fence or house. Susannah Fraser and Jenni Griggs served up meals to be gobbled up by church people when we realized homeless and parkies were stopping by our food lines.

“Lies!, I don’t know if we made enough chili for all these people,” Susannah worried.

After that, those wonder women began making enough to serve armies. Greg Buhr and Pops grilled meats every week as well. By late summer, GGC was serving many people and getting a name in the area for it.

“Are you the ones who feed the homeless in Liberty Park?” people asked when they received flyers for Gospel Grace Church.

With the numbers of unchurched coming, the pastors began preaching gospel messages.

“I don’t know why you came to Liberty Park tonight, but I know God brought you to hear about Jesus. He loves you and He proved it by dying on the cross for your sins!” one of our pastors declared week by week.

Set-up needs grew with the crowd, but we never seemed to falter for willing hands to work. GGC was in love with gospel ministry, and that love was not limited to pastors and wives. God gave many sacrificial servants to our church, and many crowns await them in glory.

A line of fresh-faced teens sat in the front pew. I was playing the piano when they started to sing. And by sing, I mean, shout. I wanted to cry, these kids from a youth group in California were so beautiful and so worshipful.

“Plant Campers are amazing!” I exclaimed at one of our pastors’ family gatherings. “What a fantastic idea to put a mission trip and a week of camp into one thing!”

That summer GGC hosted four Plant Camp weeks. Members of the Galkin Evangelistic Team served as summer interns, helping to run these camps with Will Galkin.

Because we didn’t have a building, we rented places for preaching sessions. One of the buildings was a huge church in the downtown on 400 South.

“Wouldn’t this be a great church for GGC?” Lukus asked me.

“Are we ready to buy a building yet?” I wondered.

“Well, not financially, although we do have some donors who would like to help us get a building,” Lukus said, “And we are starting to really pack out the chapel.”

The thought of moving out of the chapel was horrible to me, but having a building was the point of a church plant, wasn’t it?

“Lukus, are we technically not a church plant when we have our own building?”

“I wouldn’t say that, but having a building gives us an identity in the community, I guess.”

“But aren’t we already getting an identity in the community, simply by being in it – people already know we are the church that does church in the park and canvasses all over town!”

“That is true. God has been so good to give us so many community-minded people at GGC.”

“Yes, so many amazing people who reach out with ‘gospel grace!’”

Chapter 27: Sin Eaters

I see the need
I feel the call
I answer you
both one and all
I hear your sin
I feel your pain
We conquer it
in Jesus name
but still you must
appropriate
obedience
by grace
through faith
just telling me
won't purge the wrong
just releasing
is not how
you'll overcome

Accountable
to God alone
the true
Sin Eater
bears it all
and takes the sin
upon Himself
He only saves
He only helps.
so why take sin
back on yourself
so why put sin
on me instead
it's for us both
Christ came and bled

You can tell
me all your sins
but can you look
at me again?
Gospel power
breaks the shame
so don't fear me
and run away
I do not judge

For there is One
and judge He must
for He is the Son
the only God
and only Savior
who takes our sins,
transforms behavior

Don't be deceived
that you will be
free just because
you told me!
Come face to face
with Jesus Christ
the only One
who changes lives
because He cares
because He's kind
temptation faced
one thousand times
stronger than any
I have seen
He didn't sin
He fought for me
because you see
I must resist
the sins you speak
with inner fist
It isn't easy
eating sins
for you hate me
when Satan wins
next time you see me
look in my eyes
let's take your sins
to One who's wise
where in the light
sin dissipates
and leaving sins
take up our cross
obeying Jesus
not counting loss
not holding dear
our guilt and shame
but letting go
in Jesus' name.

As summer suns burnished our grass, summer ministry burned out our team, though we didn't realize it. Four weeks of Plant Camp meant hosting a lot of people and pastors, which meant a lot of talking and problem solving. Everyone did their part, but by the end, we fell into silence.

And eating sins.

Lots of sins. The team ate each other's sins as well as those from church and city.

How we got to be sin eaters is not even a question that can be answered. It just happened. Somehow, we got to be everyone's savior, including our own selves.

I'm not sure any church planters (at least from our background) set out to be saviors, but every church planter will one day recognize the Messiah Complex within themselves.

Some of us had it worse than others. I probably had it the worst of all.

My mom saw it, and in her quiet way, confronted me, "There's too much on you and Lukas."

What was the answer? I have no earthly idea.

But God was faithful. He didn't let me sit in his seat very long.

"Liesl, you aren't the lead wife, you know," one of the other pastor's wives said.

She was right. I wasn't but I acted that way.

Then there were some girls who shared difficulties with me, and after they shared, they acted like I was a leper.

It was at this point I saw what a sin eater was and how people responded to them.

Sin eaters are hated – because when people dump on them, they want to remember their sins no longer, and the sin eater has become attached to those sins.

That's why we need Jesus. He is the only one who can handle that kind of sin-bearing. He is the only one who can bear the weight, become the sacrifice, pay for those sins, and rise from the dead, remembering our sins no longer.

When I saw what sin eating was doing to me (and to others), it helped me to have compassion on my fellow teammates and to learn how to lead others to the cross instead of into my confessional.

Chapter 28: Grace the Scarlet Thread

Grace that reigns
Grace that trains
Grace that courses
Through our veins:
The scarlet thread
Held out in hope
By faith we've taken
Christ the rope.
Grace and truth
Full and free
Given out
To you to me
Drawing nearer
Every day
To God who
Washed our sins away

“A girl from the seventh grade asked me to do a Book of Mormon study with her,” Eli said one September afternoon.

His words alarmed me because I had grilled the school about whether my children would be taught Mormonism there.

“For real? What did you say?” I asked.

“I said I couldn’t study the book of Mormon, but I could study a book of the Bible.”

Sixth-grade Elijah had blonde hair, blue-gray eyes, and tanned skin from playing soccer. He was just hitting his growth spurt and beginning to look like a teenager.

“Do you think she likes you?” I dared to ask.

“I dunno, maybe,” he said, with a bit of a blush spreading across his dimpled cheeks.

“Well, if she is willing to do just a Bible study, I guess that’s ok,” I said, wondering if we would struggle with missionary dating in the years ahead.

Soon, we saw how the LDS teen culture worked. Girls were taught that the “worthiest” thing they could be was a wife and mother. LDS marriage had a different purpose than Christian marriage. LDS marriage was a pathway to exaltation in the afterlife, while Christian marriage was a picture of Christ and the church. This girl was on the fast track to exaltation!

Eden had the girl’s mother as a teacher’s aide in her class.

“She’s always talking about love and romance - ‘who likes who’ and all that junk,” Eden said with a sour face that accentuated her side ponytail.

“How’s that Bible study going?” I asked Eli.

“Oh, we just talked a little bit about the book of John. She doesn’t believe the same thing about Jesus that we do. And she always brings up Joseph Smith or some Mormon teaching...” he trailed off.

When the girl asked Eli to a party at a friend's place, I said to Lukus, "It's just a bunch of Mormon kids. They're pretty harmless."

Lukus eyes narrowed, and he reminded me, "Just because they're Mormon doesn't mean they're moral."

He was right. A moralistic religious system was absolutely no guarantee to right behaviors. In fact, moralism often feeds the desire to do the things we are told not to do. The apostle Paul understood this: "I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet'" (Rom. 7:7). Simply being taught right and wrong was not going to keep anyone from doing wrong things.

Legalism slays, but grace gives life. The indwelling Holy Spirit and his empowering grace was the answer, not a list of do's and don'ts. The Mormons attempted to follow the commandments and teachings of their prophets, and in their self-empowered attempts, they fell short.

"Mom, some of the kids have bracelets with 'CTR' on them," Eli informed me.

"What is that? Chase the Romance?" I teased.

"Choose the Right," he said, rolling his eyes. "Some Mormon thing, I guess."

"We used to have bracelets that said WWJD. What Would Jesus Do?" I recalled.

"That doesn't sound much different," he said.

"I suppose you're right, Eli. None of us can measure up to Jesus' standard of righteousness. That's why we need grace! We can't choose the right or do what Jesus did unless Christ is in our hearts."

"I'm glad I'm not Mormon," declared Eden.

"Yeah, you wouldn't be very good at choosing the right," Eli said frankly.

“Well, you wouldn’t either!” she said, starting to get riled up.

Meanwhile, Cana just listened, as she usually did, with her big brown eyes taking in everything. Now at seven, she was at the age when her classmates began talking about being baptized.

“Why do Mormons baptize everyone when they’re eight years old?” she asked.

“They think that’s when kids have to be washed from their sin and join the Mormon church,” I told her.

“But baptism doesn’t wash our sins away!” she seemed indignant.

“You’re right, Cana, ‘What can wash away my sin?’” I asked, singing the first line of the old hymn.

“Nothing but the blood of Jesus!” she answered in turn, and in tune.

Though I was uncomfortable with the LDS influence in my children’s lives, I was thankful for the opportunity to talk about the differences in our beliefs. My desperate cry to the Lord was that my children would know the true gospel and the amazing power of God’s grace.

Chapter 29: The War on the Word

A full-force attack from the air and ground,
infiltration from within, the prince ruled
over the Superintending force - or
so, he thought. He gloated when the seed fell
on ground that he had claimed. His enemy
held the best ground. He coveted that soil,
but once the seed made contact, the fertile
ground would win. His only hope: distraction,
a blast of air, a wind, that kept the seed
from touching ground, where his fowl fiends flew.
The prince's land was stony, filled with weeds
and tares where ravens and vultures nested,
never resting, snatching the landing seeds.
As the Sower, the landowner, spilled words
from heaven, He directed his warrior-
angels to speed the seed to his good ground
where lovely gardens grew up to the sky.

Our missionary friend Tim Chapman visited Gospel Grace Church and spoke about the parable of the Sower and seeds. “If the enemy attempts to snatch the seed of the word from the hearts of unbelievers, what do you think he tries to do to stop believers from taking in his word?”

Tim’s rhetorical question relieved me of a secret burden.

The word of God was not as sweet to me as it always been. Since coming to Salt Lake, it was hard to read the word and feel like I had communed with God. It was difficult to retain what I heard in sermons. And sometimes, it was hard for me to believe the word!

Me – the girl with the gift of faith! Sometimes people called me a “prophet” – meaning, someone who speaks the truth. *How could someone like me experience such doubt?*

After Tim left, I was refreshed by the word and by the way he helped me to understand the enemy’s tactic. It wasn’t only in unbelievers that the serpent implanted this thought: “Hath God said?” Slithering, sneaking, writhing in hate, the snake came after believers too, attempting to confuse and snatch truth from taking root and bearing fruit.

The knowledge that the enemy operated in this way helped me to arm myself and take to heart more intentionally God’s truths. I refused to acknowledge the strange feelings and disciplined myself to engage with the Word. As God promised, the word lit up my path and continued to help me fight on the battlefield for Salt Lake City souls.

Chapter 30: Swirling Vortex

Oh Utah, swirling vortex of ideals
for health, for beauty, and religion too,
why do you torment the trusting children?
Breeding vulnerabilities, vexing
adolescents with perfectionism,
masking the underworld with medicines?

Andi, Eden's basketball coach, was an Ob-Gyn who described herself as a "recovering Catholic."

"I just watched that documentary on the Bible. Did you see that?" she asked.

"No, I haven't."

"It was interesting. I do think there is something to the Bible," she said.

"Me too," I answered, feeling excited to get to know her. Her daughters were both on Eden's team, and so we planned a get-together.

As we hung out around Liberty Park and ate at our house, Andi told me about the Mormon women who came to her.

"The girls who come before their wedding are typically virgins who have breast implants," she told me.

Wide-eyed, I asked why.

"Oh, you know, Mormon men want the perfect woman, and the girls are brought up thinking that's a good thing," she said.

"So, what do you think?"

"I think it's terrible. So many of these women are on narcotics because they can't handle the demands," she continued. "I can't take them off when they come in pregnant. It's really a hard thing for me as a doctor."

"Andi, do you think there's a connection with high depression rate and the high porn consumption?" I questioned.

"I never thought about that. Is the porn rate that high?" she asked.

"Highest paid porn online consumption in the nation. And antidepressant use among women is highest as well," I said.

Neither one of us said what we were thinking, but the look of solidarity in our eyes said it all.

By this time, I had met a few Christians, besides my neighbor Emily, from other churches in the valley. One woman did not soften her distaste for Mormonism, “It’s hard to not get jaded. The Mormons are such fakes. They’re all about money, sex, and power. I can hardly stand working with them.”

I didn’t want to get jaded. But it was kind of gross, hearing the extent of the patriarchy, politics, and perversions. I had heard several stories of child abuse and of course the sordid history of polygamy. Unfortunately, I was developing a distrust and disgust for some of the LDS men. I even started one poem with, “Men are swine.”

Having real LDS women as my neighbors and friends protected me from continual disgust and stereotyping. I was thankful for them, and I did care for them deeply.

“When will God rescue more people around here?” I wondered.

The answer came in December, but not in the way I expected.

Chapter 31: Simple Faith

Verse One:

It takes the faith of a child
to worship a Baby,
to see His glory, Divinity
to look with human eyes
and see our Sacrifice—

It takes the faith of a child
with eyes to see.

Chorus:

Simple faith in the plan of God
simple trust in Emmanuel
simple hearts to receive the Word
simple grace, understanding gifts
simple prayer from sinful lips
simple hope: There's no way, but this!

Verse Two:

It takes the trust of a child
to go to Bethlehem,
a city humble, no majesty
to look for Jesus
the promised Savior
It takes the trust of a child
with eyes to see.

Tag:

It takes the faith of a child
to worship a Baby.
It takes the trust of a child
with eyes to see.

Gospel Grace children were especially good at singing. I invited a few neighbors and school friends to participate in our children's Christmas choir, which practiced before our Wednesday children's ministry, Truth Trackers. My basement was packed out with about twenty-five children coming each week.

From Halloween to Christmas, I worked like crazy, driving to pick up neighbors and friends, heading next door to remind the dear little Thai girls to come practice. Finally, we were all ready with several Christmas songs to perform, including "Simple Faith" which I had written and had practiced a billion times with my own children.

As I heard my neighbor kids or LDS kids singing gospel truths, I was overwhelmed with praise to God for the opportunity to share Jesus with them. I hoped some of these children would someday receive Christ, and thrilled that they were putting truth in their hearts forever by means of music.

Early Sunday afternoon before the Christmas Singalong at the Salt Lake Roasting Company, Lukus got a call from the base. I dreaded weekend phone calls from his work because they usually meant someone had committed suicide.

This time, it was an even worse scenario. An airman and his wife had been off-roading when their Jeep flipped, plunging them off a cliff. Their children were left orphans, and a chaplain needed to come talk to them and to their grandparents at the University hospital.

When Lukus got there, the little kids were white-faced and in shock, and an LDS patriarch, one of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, was offering condolences.

Lukus briefed me in the minutes after he returned. "Liesl, he just had nothing to say to them. Only stuff like, 'Your parents were good LDS folks and are in heaven' and 'God doesn't give us more than we can handle.'"

We didn't have much time to talk before loading up Old Bess to head to the GGC Christmas Singalong at the Salt Lake Roasting Company. My friend Ethnie and her family were there as well as Eden's basketball coach and daughters.

The kids blew us away with their amazing singing. The voices of the children meant more to Lukus and me than before, considering the orphans he just had seen.

When Lukus gave the gospel, a hint of reality and sadness that hit the crowd as he mentioned his afternoon experience.

"Life is short – this Christmas, won't you receive God's most precious gift? Accept Christ as your Savior while you still can," he implored.

After the concert, one little person seemed especially touched by the news of the orphans, our little Cana Grace. Eli and Eden talked about how to help the orphans. They gave their dad the idea to give iPads to the kids so they could play games or look at pictures of the family.

As Christmas day approached, Cana stopped me before bedtime, tears in her eyes.

"Mama, I'm not saved. I'm afraid I'm not a Christian and I'm not going to heaven!"

I sat with her on our pleather couch and shared the gospel story, one that she could have shared with me herself.

"Are you ready to receive God's gift of salvation?" I asked.

She bowed her little head and prayed a heart-felt prayer of faith and repentance. She lifted her head and a smile spread across her pretty little face.

"Thank you, Mom, now I can sleep because I'm saved!" she said.

All I could think were the words of my song, "It takes the faith of a child..." My work with the neighborhood kids in mind had produced something of far more personal importance, the salvation of my own little girl.

Chapter 32: Jesus Prays

When I don't know what to say, and I don't know how to pray
I can trust this precious truth: Jesus prays for you
In affliction and despair, I can trust the God who's there
In my sorrow and my need, Jesus prays for me

We are kept in Jesus' name
Through the dark, through the storm, through the pain
He has been there, and he cares
Jesus prays
Jesus prays for us

In the garden where He weeps
He will wake the ones who sleep
He will strengthen all the weak
Jesus prays for me
Father, let your will be done
Through the prayers of your Son
Til the enemy is crushed
Jesus prays for us

When temptation comes and knocks
And the tempter stands and mocks
We can hold on to the cross
Jesus prays for us
When I get down on my knees
There is One who intercedes
He has never lost his own
Jesus prays and knows

We are kept in Jesus' name
Through the dark, through the storm, through the pain
He has been there, and he cares
Jesus prays
Jesus prays for us

“Lukas, doesn’t it seem like new believers have a target on their back?”

“Yes. We need to pray for and support them.”

I thought the battle for Megan, one of my kitchen table disciples, was over that summer day we had walked around Liberty Park. But when her LDS grandpa died, she tanked spiritually.

“Liesl, is my grandpa in hell?”

When she asked this, she looked like a different person. For some reason, she had dyed her strawberry blonde hair gothic black. The hue accentuated circles under her eyes.

“Megan, we don’t determine where people go when they die. God does. We just keep sharing his message of grace and leave the results to him.”

Seeing loved ones hanging over the pit of hell drove me to share the gospel in my youth. Now, as a long-time believer, I had a more solid trust in God’s sovereign hand in salvation, but I was not untouched by the devastating thought of people going to hell.

She started disappearing from church again and called me late one night.

“Can you come get me? Can you find me a ride? My boyfriend left me here in Wyoming.”

I called the one friend I knew in Wyoming, but before she could do anything, Megan had found a ride home to Salt Lake City.

That night I prayed for her but the words – “I don’t know what to pray” came out repeatedly. As I processed my thoughts through poetry, I penned “Jesus Prays” and peace came over me, for I knew that Jesus was praying for her and for me too.

When she returned to SLC, she also returned to the Lord, and her questions and fears were placed where they needed to be, at the foot of the cross.

Chapter 33: The Mystery, the Church

Mysterious is the kingdom
that only God could think of.
Starts as tiny mustard seed,
sown by souls who speak the truth,
sown by simple, sown by youth
who turning, awe to see

The mighty tree! No one knew,
no man planned and yet it grew.
What a God, we sowers serve,
who takes the seed we scatter,
who makes the gospel matter,
and grows the mystery, his church!

“I baptize you, my sister, in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit,”
Lukus declared, standing in the pool of the Northwest Rec Center.

Cana’s long brown hair floated as Lukus put her under the water and brought her back up, declaring: “Buried in the likeness of his death, raised in the likeness of his resurrection!”

Her smile lit up the crowd as we clapped, her tiny form walked out of the pool, soaking wet and so happy.

Since Megan was like a daughter to me, her baptism moved me in an unusual way. From atheism and addiction to faith and freedom in Christ, Megan’s testimony was a reminder that God was in the business of rescuing desperate people. As she described growing up in Salt Lake City, my burden for Utah youth grew even more.

Ola testified about leaving her Christian upbringing in Nigeria and converting to Mormonism when she went off to University. What a miracle of God that she had come back to orthodox Christianity! At the time of her baptism, she also turned in her resignation to the Mormon church. In the LDS world, her act was apostasy, the only guaranteed way to secure her spot in outer darkness. But Ola’s confidence in Christ surpassed the fearful LDS teachings.

As she rose up out of the water, her beautiful smile and glistening skin sent a message to Salt Lake City: “Grace Wins!”

Chapter 34: MRI

Fifteen more years, I asked, time traveling,
tunneling like a prairie dog, away, away
Frightened. I was Hezekiah, bereft of health,
stealthily sneaking down, down
Face down, palms up, fearful but faithful,
childlike, unstable, underground
Forecasting my own demise, riveted
to one recurring dream of falling, falling.

Fifteen more years, I asked, trembling,
unfeeling, numb like Novocain, insane
Frantic episodic tingling, never in the dentist's chair,
certainly, I had been there, where
Fated numbness surprises not, where
foolish children sneaking sweets are ratted out
Flailing, absolutely still, moving not a muscle,
claustrophobic in Hezekiah's tunnel.

When my face went suddenly and completely numb on the left side, I thought maybe I was crazy or maybe I had Bels Palsy without facial drooping. The numbness subsided, but following that episode, my face and sometimes my hand tingled. This periodic numbness always occurred on the left side of my body. As weeks passed, I still didn't do anything about it, though I did mention it to Lukus.

"Go to the doctor," he said in his direct manner before moving on to the next item of business. It was not that he didn't care, it was that he didn't have time to speculate, nor was he of the inclination to do so.

During a walk in the park, while admiring the towering pines, I couldn't see well from my left eye. *Blink. Blink. Blink again. Why won't those spots go away?* My eyelids were useless, like bad windshield wipers. Miniscule droplets floated but never fell away.

"Lukas, I do need to go to the doctor. I don't know why these weird things are happening on the left side of my body. When I read about symptoms on WebMD, I get freaked out that I have MS."

In a run-down office building, I told my new doctor what had been happening.

"Episodes," I said knowingly. My brains were loaded from my google search research.

"Multiple Sclerosis is a serious condition requiring an MRI to search for lesions on the brain," my doctor continued, not insulted by my self-diagnosis, though she could have been.

"Do you think it sounds like MS?" I asked with trepidation.

"I can't say, not until you have the MRI," she wisely responded.

I scheduled the MRI for a day that Lukus could take off work. Waiting for the day of the scan was terrible. I couldn't stop the feelings of death that came in the middle of the night. I bargained with God like King Hezekiah.

“God, I've served you faithfully. Please don't take my health. Please don't take my life. Please give me fifteen more years like you gave Hezekiah.”

Most of my midnight wrestlings were morbid and irrational. In the day, I could handle the waiting better. I could realign my thoughts to think on truth. But the nights were awful.

Finally, MRI day came, the machine clanked but I held still, and I was strangely calm. The phenomenon wasn't new to me. Worrying had always been worse than the dreaded moment. Corrie Ten Boom's words were true: “Worrying about tomorrow robs you of today's strength.”

But I wasn't just worrying, I was being tormented, though I didn't realize it at the time.

When I visited my doctor to hear the results, she said, “Your brain scan looked normal. I couldn't see any lesions there. That doesn't mean they aren't there. I just can't see them. So, if you have any more episodes, we will have to pursue more testing.”

I left under a cloud of dirty Salt Lake air mixed with confusion.

I know I didn't make all this up. I'm glad I probably do not have MS, but if it isn't MS, what is it?

When I described my symptoms and the results of the MRI to a ministry mentor of mine, Terry Pettit, she counseled, “Liesl, that sounds like oppression. If doctors can't find a reason for your symptoms, you are probably under the enemy's attack.”

Being targeted by Satan was not comforting, but her words were. If the enemy thought I was worth tormenting, maybe I was doing something of spiritual value in Salt Lake City.

After the MRI, the intensity of oppression lessened for me. Maybe it was little Cana's conversion bolstering my own faith. Maybe it was Gospel Grace experiencing a public victory through baptism over the stronghold of Mormonism. Maybe it was praying hard like Hezekiah. Maybe it was the counsel of my mentor. Whatever the reason, from that day forward, I was more settled in my spirit and the episodes disappeared.

Chapter 35: Liberty Park, My Home

A town within a city, the isle of misfit toys—
it's ugly while it's pretty, quiet when filled with noise.
A park that has a bird zoo? Exotic squeaks and squawks
excite the rollerbladers and old folks walking dogs.

A park where no one sees you unless you go against
the counterclockwise traffic. That sin—it is immense
while no one judges druggies who drum on Sunday eve
and no one dares to stop you from peddling your weed.

My park holds several icons we locals recognize--
the woman Michael Jackson, the man called High Five Guy,
the lady running barefoot ("So daring," we all laugh)
where homie dropped a needle and homeless took a nap.

Run away from Gandalf! His dark trench coat and beard
may someday teem with brightness—until then he is feared.
Has anybody seen him: the man with baby doll?
He grips his bundle tightly. He loves his child so small.

I wonder if they see me: if they have named me too?

Across the street they'd find me, out staring in plain view,
my husband with the good book and Air Force uniform,
my children playing soccer, my parents seeking warmth.

And then there's Father Christmas who hoards upon his trunk,
a trumpet among other things . . . not saying he is drunk,
but then you have to wonder if half the park is soused
when even mommy-Mormons hide flasks inside their blouse.

Painstakingly I process the polarizing scene:

Religion and its Rejects. Oh Lord, what does it mean?

Sometimes I do protest you, sometimes I pitch a fit,
yet Salt Lake will accept me if I will accept it.

So, when my wrath has faded about some petty theft,

I sense my life is fated: without you I'm bereft,

for I have found my spot here in my front yard on Fifth.

I'd rather take than leave you—the place where misfits fit.

Epilogue

In the fall of 2021, Eli, a lanky University of Utah student, walked by our peach tree on his way to his car. He picked a late summer peach, biting deeply and dripping the juices down his arm and into his Dunder Mifflin t-shirt.

I couldn't believe he was old enough to be studying for his medical school entrance exam, and I couldn't believe we had lived long enough at the duplex by Liberty Park to have a peach tree burgeoning with fruit.

In the early years, Pops had grafted a branch to that peach tree. There were seasons where we wondered if that branch would bear fruit. But now you had to look closely to see which branch had been grafted in. They were all heavy with peaches.

It occurred to me that my family was like that branch in Salt Lake City. We looked like a foreign limb at first and often felt like it. The elements seemed against us, until one day, the seam nearly disappeared, and we were part of it all, grafted in, and at home.

My family is doing well in 2022. My dad, Pops, has had four replacements since coming to Salt Lake City: shoulder, knee, heart valve, and hip. He jokes about being bionic. My mom has had radiation on an acoustic neuroma, and she struggles with balance, but she keeps on serving like nothing is wrong! I am so thankful to have my parents' prayer and influence in my family's life.

Lukus continues to serve as a reserve Air Force chaplain and is now a Lieutenant Colonel. He just finished bivocational work as a counselor at Hill Air Force Base in April 2022. His opportunities could fill another book that should be written, but probably not by me. I'll

leave that for him now that he has so much spare time (not)! He loves preaching and teaching and is able to handle so much pressure! He is the rock in my life, staying in the shadow of the great Rock, Jesus Christ.

Elijah is twenty and is serving on a medical mission trip with Medical Missions Outreach. He plans to go to medical school in 2023. He has a heart for Utah, and we hope he will be able to attend the University of Utah's fine medical school, but we know God has written the story, so we wait on him.

Eden is eighteen and will attend the University of Utah in the fall. She is majoring in cello performance. She wants to keep up her swimming and prolific reading, so she is figuring out how to join clubs and pursue more education in the classics. She witnesses to her friends and has a mind for apologetics and a heart for ministry. She would make a fine missionary in my opinion.

Cana is fifteen and takes her thirdborn role in stride. She did great on her first AP courses. She wants to be a nurse. She has a farmer's heart like Pops and tends the gardens and fruit trees, along with caring for the dogs. She does not (usually) complain when asked to work, and she likes to organize our lives. She has a tender heart for the things of the Lord.

Lydia is eleven. She makes us smile every day with her grand plans. She loves crafting and baking. She has an entrepreneurial mind. Lydia is a great leader with her friends: they all love her because she is SO fun! Lydia made a profession of faith with her dear Nana. She spends quite a bit of time making messes and telling stories on my parents' side of the duplex. She lights up their lives, as she does ours.

As for the neighbors and friends that are mentioned in this segment of my memoir, their stories deserve to be told. I hope to continue writing more about life in Salt Lake City once I get

a chance to catch my breath. One quick story that warms my heart has to do with my Thai neighbor girls. When they moved away, the oldest of the sisters came to tell me, “You know, since I heard about Jesus, I’m not afraid anymore. I pray to him and I’m not afraid!”

What a testament! The name of Jesus chases our fears away!

Gospel Grace Church Timeline

When the church chartered in September 2013, we packed out the Fort Douglas Post Chapel located on the campus of the University of Utah.

Winter – Spring of 2015 - GGC pursues purchasing the old church on Fourth South, but God prevents the purchase. GGC outgrows the Post Chapel and moves next door into the Ballroom at the University Guest House.

Fall - Winter 2016 - Fundraising begins to purchase the church on the corner of 7th East and 13th South (next to Liberty Park-by my house - I can walk to church! I would love to write about how this all happened because it is a miracle!). Through generous giving by GGC and outside supporters, we purchased the church for \$1.3 million. Someone offered 2 million, and the sellers rejected the offer. We move in to our first non-rented building in 2016.

Easter 2018 - Gospel Hope Church (a revitalization in Riverton) launches, with Danny Brooks, Kevin Inafuku, Matt Parker, and Daniel Kaminsky as the pastoral team.

April 2019 - Galkin Twenty Year Evangelistic Ministry Celebration. Galkins move full-time to SLC.

May 2019 - Josh MacAvoy and Jotham Manoranjan are ordained and join the GGC pastoral team.

December 2019 - Lukus completes his PhD in systematic theology from Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.

March 2020-2021 - The world ends. Covid19. Several families move away from SLC including charter members, the Albrights, Reids, J. Kopps, and M. Kopps.

Summer 2021 - GGC commissions and sends Bre to SE Asia.

August 2021 - Salt Lake School of Theology begins with three PhDs from Utah, Lukus Counterman, Matthew Emadi, and Jared Jenkins. The classes include sixteen local students.

September 2021 - Gospel Peace Church (a daughter church in Logan) launches. The pastoral team includes Paul Campbell, Jonathan Jarrett, John Moon, and Jared Mitchell.

Easter 2022 – Gospel Grace Church has 823 in attendance at two services.

Annotated Bibliography

Adair, Lara. *Writers Digest*. “The Key Elements of Writing a Good Memoir.”

<https://www.writersdigest.com/improve-my-writing/elements-of-an-effective-arc>.

October 14, 2010.

Writers Digest is an excellent resource available online. The toolbar clearly lays out the purpose of the site: write better fiction, write better poetry, write better nonfiction, get published, be inspired, and WD competitions. Adair writes helpful articles on writing at *Writers Digest*. In this article, she gives tools to memoirists, detailing how to write a good memoir, including planning an effective arc.

Armitstead, Claire. “My Life as a Story.” *The Guardian*.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2001/jan/27/biography>. January 27, 2001.

Boasting award-winning journalism, the *Guardian* is a newspaper, now available online. Many articles are accessible without a subscription; however, the site offers far more to subscribers and the paper is funded by subscriptions.

Armitstead was the editor of the *Guardian* in 2001 and writes a history of memoir in this helpful article.

Chang, Kang-i Sun. “Poetry as Memoir: Shi Zhecun’s Miscellaneous Poems of a Floating Life.”

Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture 3.2 (2016): 289–311. Web. <https://web-s-ebscohost-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=0&sid=ea860310-a754-46ac-8b03-893e8ba95bdf%40redis>.

The Journal of Chinese Literature and Culture provided an excellent resource by Kang-I Sun detailing the concept of poetry as memoir from the famed Shi Zhecun’s work, *Miscellaneous Poems of a Floating Life*. The title was an exact fit

for my search on the Jerry Fallwell Library's search engine. The journal article provided me an example of an author who used poetry to preserve the integrity of his emotional journey in memoir.

Dickinson, Emily. "It Feels a Shame to Be Alive."

<https://www.clarabartonmuseum.org/dickinson>. 1863.

The website of the Clara Barton Missing Soldiers Office Museum provides interesting material regarding Civil War history. In my search for poets who used poetry to preserve the history of their time, I discovered Emily Dickinson's poem, "It Feels a Shame to Be Alive." The poem is her attempt to describe her feelings while the Civil War raged, when soldiers were dying while she remained in safety.

David Lehman. *One Hundred Autobiographies: A Memoir*. Cornell University Press, 2019.

EBSCOhost,

<https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=nlebk&AN=2232931&site=ehost-live>.

Lehman's memoir is a daily journal of his cancer discovery and treatments. He was afforded the opportunity to complete his goal of one hundred autobiographies of approximately five hundred words each. His short, encapsulated entries read like prose poetry. Lehman's memoir aided my critical research on the topic of how memoirists use poetry to preserve a culture, in this case, how Lehman used prose poetry to preserve the integrity of the cancer culture of his day.

Desiring God [@desiringgod]. "All of life is worship. Whether we worship God or something else, our lives advertise what we value most." *Twitter*, 27 December 2018, 8:02 a.m.

https://twitter.com/desiringgod/status/900395463039479808?s=10&t=A_x8QwX8Q9MD4CFLeSLfzw.

After reading *Desiring God*, by John Piper, back in the late nineties, I have had thoughts regarding worship. When I tried to find the clearest quote on the topic – “all of life is worship” – the best one to be found was a new quote of Piper’s older material tweeted on the *Desiring God* account. Though it may seem unorthodox to quote from Twitter, the quote was the most concise one I could find, expressing John Piper’s original ideas.

Dove, Rita. *Thomas and Beulah*. Carnegie-Melon University Press. 1986.

From 1993 – 1995, Rita Dove served as Poet Laureate Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress. Her work as an advocate is the outflow of her poetic musings and polemics. *Thomas and Beulah* is Dove’s account of the history of her grandparents. Through poetry she reveals their emotional journey and cultural context.

Dove, Rita. *Thomas and Beulah*. Video Press. <https://youtu.be/7duHFUjieME>. 1988.

The cinematically illustrated video of Rita Dove reading her work includes several helpful insights by the producers. The video was aired on public television in 1988. Anyone who would like to get an immersive experience of poetic memoir at its finest should listen to Rita Dove reading her account of her grandparents lives in the forty-four poems comprising *Thomas and Beulah*.

ESV: Study Bible: English Standard Version. Wheaton, Ill: Crossway Bibles, 2007. Print.

The English Standard Version is an excellent translation of the of the Holy Bible, following a formal translation theory. The *ESV Study Bible* is a particularly

helpful student resource for anyone seeking to discover context, history, doctrines, cross references, and how we got our Bible.

Gerard, Philip. *The Art of Creative Research: A Field Guide for Writers*, University of Chicago Press, 2017. *ProQuest Ebook Central*, <https://ebookcentral-proquest-com.ezproxy.liberty.edu/lib/liberty/detail.action?docID=4780601>.

Gerard's book was required reading for Liberty University's course, Thesis Proposal WRIT 689. The book provided several ideas for other sources to consult in the creative and critical writing required for the Master of Fine Arts. Gerard referenced poets as sources to consult for autobiographical content. His suggestion sent me on a productive search for poets who preserved the integrity of their surrounding culture.

Gill, Jo and Melanie Waters. "Poetry and Autobiography." *Life Writing*, Volume 6 Number 1. April 2009. DOI: [10.1080/14484520802550262](https://doi.org/10.1080/14484520802550262).

Life Writing is a scholarly journal providing resources on the writing of autobiography and biography. The article referenced is an editorial aimed at the discussion of various researchers views on the intersection of poetry and autobiography. For my paper, I found the article helpful in introducing key ideas about autobiography or biography found in the works of poets. It also informed me about the key players in the debate on autobiographical poetry and about poetry's place in biographical research.

Görbert, Johannes, Marie Lindskov Hansen, and Jeffrey Charles Wolf. "The Self in Verse. Exploring Autobiographical Poetry." Editorial. *The European Journal of Life Writing*. Volume X (2021) SV1-SV12. <https://doi.org/10.21827/ejlw.10.37636>. 2021.

Life writing is a term that encompasses the genres of autobiography, biography, and the newer form of memoir. In this editorial in the *European Journal of Life Writing*, the authors Görbert, Hansen, and Wolf introduce several concepts valuable in the study of poetry in memoir or poetry as autobiography. They reference the earliest of Latin poets, Ovid and Catullus, showing how their poetic works preserve the veracity of the historical time periods in which they wrote.

Johnston, Kenneth. "Wordsworth at Forty: Memoirs of a Lost Generation." *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 42, no. 2, Marilyn Gaull, 2011, pp. 98–105, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24045844>.

Historian Kenneth Johnston, researched the time in English history when William Pitt the Elder targeted writers who may exhibit leanings or interest in the French Revolution, leading to their removal from positions and to some of them ultimately fleeing England. As Johnston studied, he discovered that Wordsworth was affected in this historical scenario and, even more interestingly, wrote about this history in his two books of poetry entitled *The Excursion* and *The Prelude*. Following his research, Johnston wrote a journal article for the scholarly periodical, *The Wordsworth Circle*.

Kephart, Beth. *Handling the Truth*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2013.

Kephart was required reading for Liberty University's course, WRIT 612 Creative Nonfiction. The book clarifies a teacher's approach to teaching memoir. There are several suggestions worth pursuing in the writing of memoir. The most helpful portion of the book in relation to my critical research paper was Kephart's approach to handling the truth in memoir, making her title more than apropos.

Lockward, Diane, ed. *The Practicing Poet: Writing Beyond the Basics*. Terrapin Books, 2018.

Lockward's book was required reading for Liberty University's Poetry Workshop WRIT 651. The book is a conglomeration of ideas on writing poetry, along with manifold examples. A helpful section on the poet's ability to write about true events in a way that does not overtly reveal all the details led me to an Emily Dickinson's poem about how to tell the truth.

Oliver, Mary. *A Poetry Handbook*. New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1994.

By far, my favorite poetry resource is this handbook on poetry by the fine American poet, Mary Oliver. The book details how a poet's first exposure to poetry becomes part of her vocabulary, her sense of sound formed by those early recitations and readings. I found her definition of poetry to be the simplest and best to use in my critical paper.

"Ovid." *Poetry Foundation*. <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/ovid>.

Poetry Foundation is a helpful online resource highlighting various poems over various periods in history. When looking for an example of a poet who preserved emotional integrity of autobiographical material, I stumbled on the entry for Ovid. His poem *Tristia* was the example I needed with the commentary that proved useful to my research.

Peterson, Eugene. *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Eugene Peterson, the author of the *Message*, a creative rendering of the Bible, writes a helpful commentary on the Psalms of Ascents in the book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction*. His research of Hebrew culture allowed him a fresh insight into the poetry of the Hebrew people who traveled to Jerusalem.

Their psalms were micro memoirs, a fact which helped my research on how poetry preserves the integrity of the culture of a group of people.

Summers, Courtney. "In a Memoir, Laurie Halse Anderson Gets Personal About Rape."

The New York Times, March 10, 2019.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/01/books/review/laurie-halse-anderson-shout.html>.

The New York Times includes book reviews. Courtney Summers book review on Laurie Halse Anderson's poetic memoir entitled *Shout*. Without the book review I would not have explored the book itself, which would have been a mistake. The book is an expose, showcasing how difficult and traumatic autobiographical material can be beautified through the medium of poetry.

Wenham, Gordon J. *Word Biblical Commentary: Volume 1, Genesis 1-15*. Thomas Nelson, 1987.

To gain an understanding of a Hebrew poem, I consulted Gordon Wenham's Genesis commentary from the excellent *Word Biblical Commentary* series. I had understood Adam's first words describing Eve to be poetry, and when I researched it, that is exactly what the commentators say about it as well.

Wenham's writing helped me to prove that the words are indeed poetry, according to the Hebrew style.