

## What is Pools of Refreshing?

Pools of Refreshing is an opportunity for all women to come together and experience God's presence through worship, testimonies, and prayer. Here are first-hand testimonies of how God is working through this ministry.

Pools of Refreshing meeting dates for winter and spring 2010 are January 17 and April 18 from 6:00 to 8:00 pm in the Timothy Chapel. Contact: Claudia Dozier, (507)529-1406 or doz-r-us@juno.com

**"I** appreciate "Pools of Refreshing" for the focus on worship. The intimate and informal setting of the Timothy Chapel really contributes to a spirit of worship and contemplation. We're given the opportunity to be still before the Lord and allow Him to minister to us. Hearing what God has done in the lives of others is a reminder of what He can do in our own. For many of us, I believe this time of worship can be the "calm in the midst of the storm" of life!"

*Donna*

**"I** felt slightly apprehensive as I walked into the lovely chapel at Autumn Ridge, but there was a peace there that spoke to my heart. When worship started, whatever uncertain feelings were in me disappeared and a precious sense of God's presence filled me. This stayed with me through Claudia's talk, testimonies of what God is doing NOW in various lives, the prayers afterwards. When God's Spirit meets us in a gathering of ordinary women, we are blessed beyond measure and He is glorified!"

*Mazie*

**"C**laudia spoke of seeing a sheet gently blowing in the wind during prayer, before the Pools of

Refreshing meeting. I believe that is exactly the way the Holy Spirit showed up at the meeting on Sunday night. It was beautiful to see God move so loving and gentle in the hearts of those amazing women. Yea God!"

*Lisa*

**"P**ools of Refreshing was really awesome! At first, it almost felt a little awkward being in a room with a bunch of women from all different places in life and different churches. But that changed as we worshiped together and listened to testimonies of what God is doing in different women's lives, I could totally feel God's presence. It was exciting to see that even though we were all different ages and from different churches, we are pursuing the same God."

*Machell*

**"I** first met Claudia Dozier, the organizer of Pools of Refreshing, a few years ago in our Precept Bible Study Class. I was impressed by her beautiful heart for the Lord and her desire for women to have a more intimate walk with Him. Claudia articulated her vision for a service where women could worship for an extended period of time not tied to the time constraints of our typical weekly worship service. She also wanted to

give women the opportunity to be able to openly share what God is doing in their lives and to pray with other women for specific needs."

*Anonymous*

**"I**'ve only been able to attend three "Pools" events due to scheduling conflicts, but each one was unique and a beautiful time of worship. The format is relaxed and there is freedom to stay as long--or as short--a time as you like. The praise leaders have had exceptional musical talent and I have found the teaching and testimonies to be uplifting and inspiring. Come, be refreshed--and bring a friend!"

*Jonna*

**"P**ools of Refreshing' is a time for us as a community of women to come together to worship our great God. As we focus on who God is, we are able to lay aside our burdens and cares, connecting with God and each other. To accomplish this goal, we sing songs of worship, read Scripture, hear testimonies and teaching, observe art and drama, and have the opportunity to pray with others. Each meeting uniquely combines these elements to provide variety that meets the needs of women, refreshing us to serve others."

*Julie*

## We Want You to Share Your Thoughts With Us

**W**omen in Touch newsletter is created by and for the women of Autumn Ridge Church. It is your thoughtful and heart-felt contributions that make this newsletter what it is. We highly encourage you to submit your thoughts and testimonies of how the Lord is working in your life. All contributions, comments, or questions may be directed to Katherine O'Grady at (412) 720-8076 or kogrady007@gmail.com. The submission deadlines for 2010 are as follows: March 15 for the spring issue, June 15 for the summer issue, September 3 for the fall issue, and December 3 for the winter issue.

## Let Us Be the Hands and Feet of Christ

### **Volunteer and help serve the homeless in your neighborhood**

As snow falls this winter season, we are reminded of those without the comforts of a home. This winter season you, alongside other members of Autumn Ridge Church, can serve the homeless by volunteering with Interfaith Hospitality Network.

Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN) of greater Rochester provides shelter, meals and comprehensive assistance to homeless families in the Rochester area. Its mission is to help homeless families achieve and sustain their independence by providing them with food, shelter and a caring environment while they are in crisis.

In any way that you can serve, serve," says Tabitha Banker, Autumn Ridge

Church's Volunteer Coordinator for Interfaith Hospitality Network. "One woman asked if she could bake bread for the dinners and that is how she was able to serve."

The most important thing is to seek God and the opportunities where He may have for you to serve.

With Tabitha's help, Autumn Ridge Church (ARC) is organizing volunteers and providing training sessions for members interested in investing their time to serve the homeless. The first training session took place December 14-16, and will occur regularly for those interested.

Families are encouraged to volunteer as evening hosts to spend time with the

families and read with the children. Small groups can get involved by signing up for volunteer positions. At least two or three volunteers are needed in each service position per evening to: cook meals, spend time with the families, or stay the night. Van drivers are also needed in the evening and mornings to drive the women and children to and from the day center and the host site.

If you have a heart to serve and are not exactly sure how to get involved, please contact Tabitha Banker at [tabitha.banker@gmail.com](mailto:tabitha.banker@gmail.com) or (507)993-4080.

Let us reflect the attitude of Christ by serving those in need this winter season.

I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me.  
- Matthew 25:40

## God's Eternal Gift

By Katherine O'Grady

Sparkling tinsel, rich, green evergreens, and neatly wrapped gifts tucked under the tree, are all images of Christmas. This Christmas, I am reminded of the many gifts God has placed in my life. I am thankful for my strong Christian friendships, for my loving husband, and for the gift of salvation.

God has always surrounded me with strong sisters in Christ to sharpen my faith and provide the comfort of friendship, even when my family did not. Growing up in a house absent of Christ, I should have gone down a different path. Instead, God reached down to me as I reached up

to Him at the age of 12; and, it was in that moment that I realized my depravity and a need for a savior.

Since then, God has surrounded and provided me with strong Christian friendships. Many of these strong Christian women I went to college with and are still a solid network of support in my life.

The Lord placed in my life a God-fearing leader whom I now call my husband. I am blessed by this incredible gift. I once struggled with relationships, and I was convinced that I did not deserve such a strong Christian man to lead my marriage, and yet, God gave me Jason.

I once struggled with a void in my life so deep, that I thought nothing could fill it, and yet, God gave me His Son. He humbled Himself so that we may know Him. This gift is by far the best gift of all. It is a gift that I can never lose. It will never fade away; for I am forever God's child.

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



## The Gift of Steadfastness

By Gretchen Steer

I've been struck this December by Joseph's role in the Christmas story. The spotlight is on Jesus (as it should be) and often on Mary as well, but Joseph? He was the one who had to accept with grace what God had given him – accept that the beautiful virgin he was marrying would bear a Son to another Father before he could ever consummate their marriage, accept not being able to provide a bed for his pregnant wife, accept the forced journey that neither of them wanted to make. Joseph had to accept a life on the run to Egypt and back in order to save the life of his newborn. Joseph was a steadfast man who had to accept that life wasn't turning out as he'd planned.

Even though Joseph is never quoted in the New Testament, we are told that "The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him." (Luke 2:33) Joseph, who seems stolid and uncomplaining, is actually a spiritually responsive man who is, above all, steadfast. Responsive to God's messengers, willing to forgo his own needs, Joseph gave his family the gift of steadfastness when everything else was in flux.

I, too, had a steadfast father. It's been sixteen years since I have been able to wish him a Merry Christmas; he died when he was just 68 years old, after receiving a 20 year reprieve from a massive heart attack at 48. But my memories of him are sweet.

My dad was father to five

children and for many years was the sole wage earner. After flying transport in WWII, he returned to Minnesota to finish college, get married and enter business. He ended up in the credit department, an occupation which could not have been less suited to his nature. Credit managers should be hardnosed and tough, to make the customers pay on time. I suspect that my father was good at what he did simply because he was too nice for people to say "No" to. But as a father, he was no pushover.

From a child's perspective, what is most needed from a dad is steadfastness. This old-fashioned word denotes consistency and reliability. My father went to work every day and came home every night. In his few leisure hours he washed the family cars or worked painstakingly on his dichondra lawn. He was friends with every dog in the neighborhood. Daddy was consistently mild tempered...I once heard a single swear word escape his lips when I dropped the garage door across the hood of his newly repainted station wagon, but that was it. He weathered kidney stones, heart disease, and prostate cancer stoically, not giving into despair or anger. He just kept providing for the family by doing a mundane, repetitive, boring job, taking delight in a sunny day or his two weeks of vacation a year.

Women often comment to me that they wish their husbands were more of a spiritual leader in the home.



But how many men, like my father, prefer to lead by example more than words? Through the years he showed us that steadfastness and commitment, literally at the expense of one's own life, was more important to him than pursuit of his own pleasure. And by taking joy in reliability he also showed me that God elevates obedience to something truly beautiful over the long haul. I was fortunate to have my father. And Jesus was fortunate to have steadfast Joseph as his earthly father. Both of them reflected God's faithful, consistent character to their children.

I was rehearsing for a production of Handel's Messiah when I received news of my father's death. I returned home on Good Friday after the funeral, grateful to sit in the back of the church awash in tears as I thought about Handel's words "But thanks, but thanks be to God...who giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." Thanks be to God indeed, who gave me a gentle man for a father, and by his example convinced me that men are courteous, steadfast and even tempered. Our earthly fathers are a picture to us of our heavenly Father. Jesus learned of God's character from steadfast Joseph. And my father gave me, by example, the highest possible view of God.

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- Gretchen Steer

# Hope: An Incredible Gift From God

By Teresa Rinker

I was once driving along in my car and I pulled up behind a truck that had seen better days. It was the kind of truck that, by its very appearance, caused you to want to know the driver because you just know there is a story there.

As I was musing about this, I noticed a worn out and almost unreadable bumper sticker on the back of the truck, placed at eye level for all to see. It read, "I am fine...now that I have lost all hope." WOW. Let me tell you, I couldn't get that bumper sticker off of my mind for months. It even lead me to pray for the person who had placed it on that truck.

Now, there is a sad bit of truth on that truck, isn't there? For those who don't know "The Hope Giver," the only way to survive life on earth is to give up all hope. How sad.

Hope: Webster's describes it as to want or expect something or as having confident desire. I like that one: confident desire. Confidence because of whom our hope is placed in... God Almighty, the creator of heaven and earth, who the Bible tells us is completely trustworthy. The Bible also tells us in the book of Luke, "That *nothing* is impossible with God." Are we convinced of this very thing...that *nothing* is

impossible with our God! We often have moments of forgetfulness about this, don't we? Those menopausal moments (hopefully fleeting) no matter what our age.

Our hope is to be placed in a God who knows no limits: a God of love, a God of compassion, and a God of miracles. We are to hold on to this truth for ourselves. Romans 14:13 says, "May the God of all hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." The key to having overflowing hope is trusting in God Almighty!

In the book of 1 Peter, Peter talks about "our living hope." What does this mean to you? To me, it means that we have a living hope because Jesus is our Living Lord!

Our God is alive and is actively concerned about all that is weighing on our minds and our hearts. During times of trial, our trust in God can be shaken and we often need others to remind us of God's character and of His great and steadfast love. As we hold on to hope for ourselves, we are also to hold out this hope to others. One scripture that clearly speaks to this is Isaiah 35:3-4, "Strengthen the feeble hands and steady the knees that give way.

Say to those with fearful hearts, be strong, do not fear, your God will come to save you!" I don't

know what your life holds today, whether you are giving hope or needing it. Isaiah saw that the people needed hope and was exhorting others about this, and we are also

exhorted. When others faith is low or even nonexistent, they can be encouraged through our strong faith.

I will leave you with this. Hope itself, is a wonderful gift of God, a constant source of strength and the courage to face life. The objects of our hope need to be God, His Son, the Holy Spirit and the Living Word. Hope isn't merely a nice option that helps us temporarily clear a hurdle, it is essential to our survival as we live our lives here on earth. Hope always points the way to our suffering Savior and our Almighty Father in heaven; and, it always brings glory to our God. Eternal, good hope can be ours today and everyday through our relationship with "The Hope Giver" and through His Word that brings; truth, conviction, peace, clarity, joy and freedom. Hope is ours.

*Hope*  
to cherish a desire with anticipation.

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- Teresa Rinker



**Teresa Rinker** will be speaking at the Women's Winter Retreat, **Sweets for the Soul, Feb.19-21 in Trego, Wisconsin**, at the Heartwood Conference Center & Retreat. This weekend promises to shift our focus from the things of God to God Himself! Online registration is available at <http://autumnridgechurch.org/events/womens-retreat.html>.

Early bird discount if you sign up before January 17th!

## Out of My Comfort Zone

By Julie Smestad

Can you imagine walking up to a woman whom you do not know at University Square and asking if she would be interested in hearing the gospel? Then, after explaining the gospel to this un-churched woman, having her warmly thank you because she has never heard it before. Is this real? Or is it a dream out of an evangelism book? This and other amazing experiences were God's surprises for me as part of an evangelism class that I have been taking this fall.

It all started late last summer, when I discovered that I needed to present the gospel to five people during the fall semester. How would I find people who would be willing to listen? One of our early "Pre-Evangelism" assignments was to go to a public place and observe the people for one hour, thinking about ways to meet their needs. I chose to go to "University Square," have a take-out Victoria's Greek Salad, make a trip to the chocolate store, and sit and observe the people (might as well make this fun!). I saw professional people walking

briskly, confused people getting off the elevator, and many people sitting alone nervously clicking on their cell phones or reading. How could a person meet the needs of these people in a way that would draw them to Christ?

Later in the semester, with only a week before my first two evangelism "attempts" were due, I was getting desperate. Who would I present the gospel to? I had asked family and friends to pray for me, but most of my options seemed to fall through. Thankfully, I had a dinner get-together set up with one non-believing friend, but who else would be willing to listen? Attempting to follow the Holy Spirit's leading, I decided to trek off again to University Square with hopes of striking up a conversation with someone that would in turn lead to sharing the gospel. After nervously eating my salad, I decided to be "brave" and just ask a woman sitting alone if she would be willing to listen. Can you believe it? I truly surprised myself! After sitting down and presenting the gospel, realizing how spiritually hungry she was,

I was truly humbled. Here I was, so easily hung up with my own inhibitions!

Each opportunity that God gave me this fall was unique and special in its own way: a dear, close friend of many years; an acquaintance from one of my exercise classes at the RAC; a life-long friend of my mother's and her daughter. And believe it or not, I returned again to "University Square," but this time with a friend from my Precepts group, who wanted to be part of the experience! Each time God was faithful to prepare hearts, give me the right words, and give warm, loving interactions around the life-changing gospel message of Jesus' death and resurrection.

God's incredible gift to me this fall is allowing me to be part of His work in giving out His message to people that are incredibly hungry for spiritual things, in a culture that is extremely open. Now that the semester is over, I don't want to stop! Will you join me in going out of your comfort zone to reach others for Christ? There is no greater joy!



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-Julie Smestad

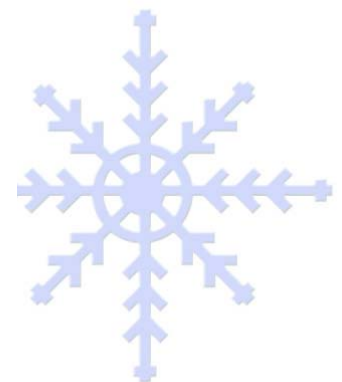
## Winter is God's Miracle!

Winter is God's miracle; did you know?  
For under your feet there is diamond snow.  
The trees are covered with crystal, too,  
And everything's sparkling, bright and new.

The weeds in the fields just dazzle your eyes.  
Even the housetops brighten the skies.  
And on the ground, where there used to be grass,  
You'll find it looks like glittering glass!

The icicles dangle like jewels so rare.  
Yes, winter is a miracle, every year, everywhere!

By Sandy  
Carlson



## Non-denominational Christian Children's Choir: A New Program Started by ARC Member

By Abbie-Jo Wilcox *There is still time for your child to join the choir*

Please, let me take a moment and share with you a blessing in my life. Just over a year ago, I was approached to start something new and different for children in Rochester. We weren't sure what it was, but knew it needed to be. As we thought and prayed, God gave me an idea. I had a sense that He was leading us to unite His family into one body. I did not tell anyone of this, for I wanted to be sure that this was truly His will and not my own. Then, a wonderful thing happened. One by one, people began approaching me with the exact same idea as I had, to create a children's choir where students from all Christian denominations could join together in song and form lasting friendships.

We would sing on a weekly basis and also worship together as we visited each other's Sunday services. But where would we meet and who would participate? Again, God provided for us. Hope Summit Christian Church would be willing to let us practice in their building free of charge, in addition to letting us use their stage and equipment for our annual musical! That took care of the where, now for the whom. The Lord provided students from several area churches and also their parents who were proficient at running lights and sound, playing the piano, and designing sets. Each step of the way it was clear that God had planned this choir and the people who were a part of it!

This year we have gained new students and have been asked to sing at various churches. Autumn Ridge introduced our ministry to the Rochester Evangelical Pastors Association. We have truly been blessed by God!

If someone you know would be interested, there is still time to join the choir. Any child ages Kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade can participate. We practice on Sunday afternoons from 3:00 to 4:00 pm at Hope Summit Christian Church. There is no audition or fee required to become involved. If interested, please call the director, Abbie-Jo Wilcox at (507) 252-6984.



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and prayed, God  
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-Abbie-Jo Wilcox

*I wrote this poem about my Granddaughter, Heather Van Sickle, who now attends Michigan State University in Marquette. -Katie Van Sickle*

**A little girl knelt down one night  
To say her prayers by candlelight.  
With eyelids closed and fingers folded  
her heart and mind had surely been molded.**

**This little child so sweet and dear  
Knew the story you will hear  
Of Jesus' love for YOU and ME.  
She thanked the Lord as you can see.**

**Like little children with our voice  
Once again it's time to rejoice.  
Be silent now and hear his call  
For Christ was born to save us all.**



## Avoiding the Truth: A Story of God's Incredible Gift of Healing

By Kristi Verret

**I am an avoider.** Yes, through and through, it's not something I am proud of. I avoid walking the dog, even when she squirms. I avoid the laundry, until we're out of our favorite outfits. I avoid conflict; nothing makes me *squirm* more than conflict. But, the most detrimental thing that I have avoided for way too long is truth. Avoiding truth is what kept me from God's gift of healing in my life. Losing my baby girl, Samantha Grace, opened my eyes to a whole different kind of world, and a whole new truth, one that I absolutely could not avoid.

A month to the day after my husband and I were married, my father died suddenly and unexpectedly. His death thrust me into a whirlwind of heartache and depression. The depression I was dealing with was not just sadness. It was a defiant refusal to look at the truth. I didn't want to face his death because it was a reminder to me of my mother's death. I didn't want to see the truth that I was parentless at 22 years old. For a while, I found ways to avoid the truth.

First, I sought comfort in sleep. I slept all day, and took sleeping pills to sleep at night. Second, I thought

we needed to move. So we moved closer to relatives which brought me to my third means of avoidance, relationships. I handed control of my life over in exchange for some temporary comfort and affection, some empty reassurance that I was still worth being loved. These worked well at first, but never lasted long enough to offer permanent healing. I could never be filled by anything or anyone in my life because what I was missing was the truth.

Until we lost Samantha we didn't know what truth or faith was. We didn't know how to live in the moment. We lived always in the hope for tomorrow. But when a child you love and adore, and hoped for dies, you can't take it a week at a time. You can barely take it a day at a time. Most often it's moment to moment, minute by minute. Finally, God had gotten me to a place where I had come face-to-face with the facts. The truth I needed to face was: *I don't control anything!* Each day, each breath, each moment I take for granted can be altered, lost, or healed, but only under His command. I didn't want to face this truth. It was easier to accept the lie, "*You just do this, you just change that...*"

As long as I was fooled by this lie, I was relying on myself to find peace, hope and happiness.

Deuteronomy 31:8 says, "God is striding ahead of you. He's right there with you. He won't let you down; he won't leave you. Don't be intimidated. Don't worry." (The Message)

I didn't want to live in acceptance, that scary place of not knowing what may or may not happen to me or the ones I love. I wanted to live in the place of assurance. Well, that is what God wanted for me too! Isaiah 41:13 says, "I, your God, have a firm grip on you, and I'm not letting go. I'm telling you, 'Don't panic. I'm right here to help you.'" (The Message)

He wants me to live in HIS assurance, not my own assurance. I need to change my 'avoider' ways, and be open. Open to God, open to His truth, open to change. Living in the moment is what faith is all about, living; peacefully in acceptance of the truth; peacefully in the possibility of change; and, taking the opportunities He provides as they arrive. Being an avoider nearly cost me this beautiful gift of healing in my life through God's truth.

Avoiding truth is what kept me from God's gift of healing in my life.

-Kristi Verret

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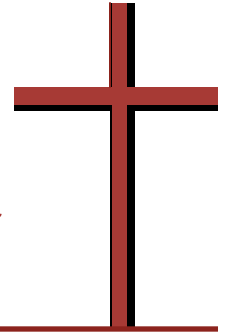
-Isaiah 41:13  
(The Message)

Kristi Verret is the author of *Unforgotten Children*, a book about how God used loss in one family's life to create healing and purpose. The book walks the reader through everything from the first joyful moments of discovering the pregnancy, through the devastating news of loss, and the restoration that followed. Learn more about *Unforgotten Children* at [www.unforgottenchildren.tatepublishing.net](http://www.unforgottenchildren.tatepublishing.net).





# Women In Touch



## Inside This Issue:

God's Incredible Gift of Healing.....Pg. 2

Christian Children's Choir .....Pg. 3

Out of My Comfort Zone..... Pg. 4

Winter is God's Miracle..... Pg. 4

God's Incredible Gift of Hope.....Pg. 5

Gift of Steadfastness.....Pg. 6

Spotlight Interfaith Hospitality Network.....Pg. 7

God's Eternal Gift.....Pg. 7

Pools of Refreshing Testimonies.....Pg. 8

## An Early Christmas Gift from God

By Carol Johnson

A gift came to me in October when I was looking through the contents of a box. The box became a treasure chest containing simple artifacts of my earlier years—baby shoes, streetcar tokens, food ration books, Gold Bond stamps. Among these items were a pile of papers with my mother's handwriting. They were Christian songs written in Swedish and English. I wondered if she had written them when she was a church soloist, writing the words down to use while singing. I began to look through the papers and suddenly stopped when I read, "Oh blessed peace that in my heart is hidden."

These words seemed to leap off the paper because they spoke of a feeling I had during some difficult months of my life. Peace had been hidden when I watched my husband's health decline because of Parkinson's disease. The word hidden to me in that moment meant "something hidden away so deeply that it couldn't be found," in contrast to "put in a safe place" as in "hidden in the hollow of His hand" and "hiding in Thee."

"Oh blessed peace that in my heart is hidden." These words might have been important to my mother as she recalled the grief associated with the death of her first husband who died one week after they were married. Perhaps her peace had been hidden for a time and then uncovered as the later song lyrics show. "Oh restless soul where were thou art living. Come seek the Lord—He'll give thee peace of heart... a gift of God so gracious is naught out Christ the Lord." My mother's peace was found in God as she went on to become a Bible study teacher, a lecturer, and a teacher at Bethel College.

I think of this experience, discovering my mother's hand-written songs, as a gift from God. He used the words of this song and the following Bible verses to help me find my hidden peace: John 14:27, Ephesians 2:14, Isaiah 26:3, among others.

Thank you, God, for the gift of peace.

## God's Incredible Gifts

By Katherine O'Grady

This issue focuses on God's incredible gifts in our lives. God has blessed us with so much this year. As we look back and reflect, we see that He has carried us through and has gifted us with much more than we deserve or can imagine. Many of you submitted such inspirational stories telling how God has blessed your life this Christmas season. I am inspired

as I read these. God is at work individually in our lives and in the life of Autumn Ridge Church. It makes me realize that I am blessed to have the gift of you, solid and supportive women of the faith. Keep Growing. Keep seeking Him. As one of my favorite hymns by Helen Lemmel says, "Turn your eyes upon Jesus, Look full in His



wonderful face, And the things of earth will grow strangely dim, In the light of His glory and grace."