

Clinging to the Vine: Leading in Brokenness

By Jen Pinkner

A few years ago, God led me through a time of brokenness. My father was struggling through the latter stages of Parkinson's disease and my husband was going through a hard time that affected me in all areas. I had a full plate of leading a small group and a job that was highly relational. I was also trying to carry out responsibilities to help with my father and mother, in addition to figuring out this new phase of marriage.

My circumstances were not changing for the better, if not getting worse, and all I had to garner strength from was my time with God in His word and prayer. I met with Him daily and established a pattern of self-examination, repentance and joy in Him. I learned for the first time that prayer was not about changing my circumstances. It was about clinging in joy to the Vine, the giver and sustainer of life.

During this time of brokenness, I continued to lead my small group. It was a scary thing because I was much more fragile. I had established a group in which the rapport was already built, but I really think I began to lead in a new way because I was so much more connected to God and His Word. I was actually strengthened as a leader because I was clinging to God and depending upon Him instead of my own skills or personality or gifting. God was doing a work in me that produced growth and a perseverance that could only be from Him.

Was this time easy? Oh no. But, I did learn trust and joy in the midst of pain. I learned about authentically struggling without making my struggle the center of my life—Christ became the center. I am so thankful for that time because that pattern of connection with God continues in my life.

So many times in my life, I have tried to pour from an empty, dried up container only to spread the dust of death around instead of the life of the Spirit. I have learned that if I try to lead others, disconnected from my relationship with Christ, I set a tone in the group that is artificial and inorganic. The group simply becomes another sermon thrown at them instead of a place for the lives of real people to connect to a real God who gives real direction in His word.

Depending just on my gifting, I try to hand out advice instead of bearing with them and listening. If I am not being convicted of sin daily as I walk with God, I am quick to be critical of others or point to a legalistic fix instead of pointing to the gospel. Or, in other times, I might give cheap grace that does not see the depth and deadly effect of sin by simply trying to please others by making them feel better. These are all ways to waste the time in a small group.

As a leader, I am not an expert. A small group is simply not a task to fulfill or a group of people to "fix." A small group is an organism with individuals that grow individually and collectively. As a leader, I am there to foster spiritual growth and community in others, and I cannot ask individuals or a group to grow where I do not grow myself.

What makes a good small group leader? The first thing is a growing, wrestling, struggling, real relationship with the One who transforms me into the likeness of Christ because that is the only hope for me as the leader and group as a whole.

How do I foster that relationship practically day in and day out? I spend time in God's word daily in study and not just a devotional thought. It is through the truth of His word that my heart is intersected. Only through that truth am I made aware of how places in my life are in direct opposition to God. In the light of His word, I take time to examine my heart in relationship to God and others and follow Him by repentance and obedience.

Again, I cannot ask the group to examine and grow if I am not practicing this in my own life. I want to lead in realities and not theories. I also take time to pray for the group as a whole and individually. I may plant and water to some extent, but it is the Spirit who grows them and brings fruit. As I learn dependence on Christ, I teach them that through my life.

As a leader, I am called to live a life of struggle, growth and authenticity just as I pray my group does. It is not about fancy methods of growth strategies, but it is about a life that clings to The Vine of Jesus Christ, our very hope.

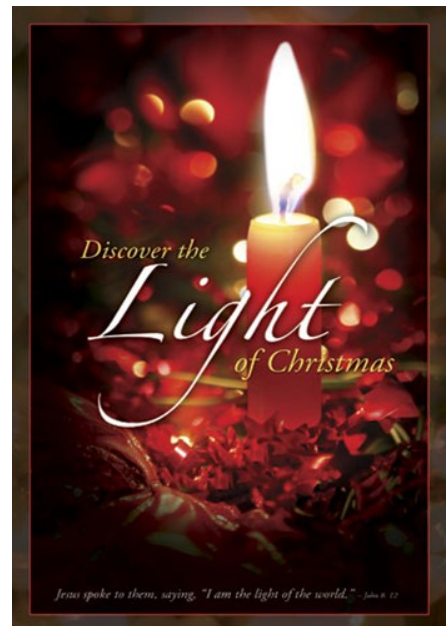
From smallgroupexchange.com



Life group prayer and praise

- Please keep my family in your prayers, that they stay healthy, happy and safe. ~ **Christina Boyd**
- Please continue to pray for **Rose Toscano** as she recovers from back surgery at home.
- My son **Stephen** is out of ICU—he had gall bladder surgery. Praise God, he is now in a regular room, feeling much better—please pray for quick healing so that he can come home—he has been in the hospital three weeks ~ **Robert Johnson**
- I just found out one of my friends **Beth's** 3 year old nephew **Nolan** is in the hospital with pneumonia. He has been battling a 104 degree fever for the last week and they can't seem to get it under control as his little lungs are filled with bacteria. ~ **Sherra Ellis**
- Please pray for my sons **Shaun and Nathan**, they are lost souls. ~ **Margit McCowan**
- My **brother Brian**, and **sister-in-law Sheryl**, are having marital problems, he is abusive and needs God's help. Please pray for him, they both need salvation. ~ **Jane Rodriguez**
- My middle son, **James**, needs some lifting up, he lost his children thru separation and in June was sent to jail for domestic violence. ~ **Pamela Dehnhoff**
- **My mom** has been diagnosed with advanced lymphoma and given weeks to live. Please pry for peace for her and for our family in this difficult time. ~ **Kim Edwards**
- **Please continue to pray for Karla Signs**, she is having lots of headaches still, please pray that God will heal her and relieve her headaches and that she can get into Mayo Clinic soon and that they would be able to relieve her pain. ~ **Sandra Signs**

Christmas Eve Service,
Thursday, December 24th, 6:00 pm
Please join us as we
usher in the
Birth of Jesus
with a candle light service
"Finding Joy".



Pray for our Military

- Jonathan Michaels Estrella— son of Sharon Boswell.
- Jason Bjazevich—Megan Owenby's husband—Army Special Forces— Stationed in N. Carolina.
- Joel Ellis—son of John & Midge —Serving in Iraq.
- Scott Harpell—son of Brian & Lynne— Stationed at Fort Bragg.
- Aaron Weston—nephew of Ken and Kathy—Stationed in San Diego.
- Eric Schmidt — son of Gene and Pat Schmidt — Camp Fallujah, Iraq.
- Benjamin Lagonia—dear friend of the Naylor family—stationed in Manitoba.
- David Coyle—son of Karen Mark— residing in Seattle, member of the National Guard.
- Adam Flynn—a young Marine safely home and out of military.
- Brett Love—grandson of Wilma—Army National Guard-Serving at home.
- Robin Swartz - Serving in the military - currently home in Everett.
- Christian Chmielewski—nephew of JoAnn Couturie' - in the Marines.
- ENS Andrew E. Timpner (fiancé to Christin Suthard) on deployment with USS Momsen.
- Devin Abbitt—nephew of Paul Abbitt - Marine, stateside.
- Doug Baer—a teacher at Kamiak HS heading to Iraq in the Army Reserves—thru Sept. 09.
- Duane Neyens—brother to Kathy Chapman—Nat. Grd. Afghanistan.
- Philip Ankney-LCPL Afghanistan Cousin of MaryAnn Peterson.
- Jeffrey Lillard—son of Barbara Lillard — Srg. In Army, Stationed in Afghanistan.
- Aaron Chmielewski— joined the Marines. Nephew of JoAnn Couturie



Life Group Happenings

All in the Family

by *florence miller*

Congratulations to Amanda Harpell and Andrew Franz!!! who were married on Sunday, December 13th in Temecula, CA, the heart of California's vineyard country. Father of the bride, **Brian Harpell** writes: Amanda's brother, **Scott** was the groomsman and Scott's wife of two months, **Angela**, was the bridesmaid. Amanda's mom, **Lynne** sang during the 40 minute ceremony and proud Dad officiated without making too much of a fool of himself. Drew's parents, **Jerry and Roberta Franz** and Drew's three sisters were present. Grandparents, **Howard & Norma and Aunt Debbie & Uncle Murray** traveled from Nova Scotia to be a part of the wedding. **Brian and Lynne**, holding on to each other, were heard numerous times that day to say, as they looked at their two kids and their life partners, "*We are very blessed! God has been good to us!*" It was a very FUN weekend experience." The wedding was held in California so that Scott and Angela would be able to attend. After two rainy days, the sun shone for the outdoor ceremony.



A REQUEST: Last week we were able to bless a home in our neighborhood with a fully decorated tree. The family was overwhelmed. There remains a need: a single bed in good condition. Please contact **Jeanne Iversen**.

Rose Toscano had emergency back surgery last Friday due to a ruptured disc and loss of feeling in one leg. The surgery only restored a tingling feeling in her foot and parts of her leg. A good portion of the leg is still numb. She is quite concerned about the long term impact of the situation. She was released from the hospital on Sunday and was sent home with a walker and meds. She is concerned about being stuck at home for the next month and asked **Chris Frizzell** to spread the news and ask for visitors. She has someone to provide transportation for the kids. Her Mom is helping out and the family has meals for a week, provided by Garfield Elementary. She is going to need help over the next month or so, specifically with people who would be able to come over and help out with getting her to the bathroom since she needs support with her mobility. Also Chris suggests if some of you could find the time to stop by and support her emotionally it would be help greatly.

Keith and Sandy Porter have been very concerned about their 10 year old granddaughter **Alina** and two moles which appeared to be cancerous as they rapidly changed color. But her biopsies came back negative and they are praising God daily. They write: "We are living in Mt. Vernon in a Senior's Park. We purchased a double wide manufactured home in March that Keith has been completely redoing. Ninety percent of the paneling is gone and replaced with sheetrock with rounded corners. We have all new electrical fixtures. Some floors have been replaced with hardwood and the rest will get new carpet or tile after the first of the year. He has really been working hard. Keith has a great shop for his projects now. He just finished a 19 room dollhouse for 5 of our grandchildren. And he has a garden space too. We have no lawn to mow and the yard is all Japanese, including a Japanese tea house in the back. We are loving it and the lack of traffic. But we do miss everyone at First Baptist greatly. We are attending Emmanuel Baptist Church on College Way. They have a really early service so we can attend before Keith has to go to work. It's great and they have the largest missions program in the county so we are very excited about that. I am praying that one day the Lord will allow me the health to get back out there in the field, but if not there is much that we can do here. . Wishing you God's richest blessings during this beautiful Christmas season.

Lois and Tony Tysseling write the following: The S.A.M. Outreach on Friday, December 4th to the Seniors of the Everett area was a resounding success that went way beyond our hopes and expectations. To a person, we were delighted to share the Miracle of the first Christmas through music, scripture and blessing. The handbell choir, singers, organ, Gene Dobson's drama, and Oscar's solo were given to the listeners with our happy hearts and voices. Comments were very positive: "please do it again"; "present this as a Sunday morning service"; "best music we've heard for a long time"; Dave Miller's praise was best, "You guys are better than the Mormon Tabernacle Choir". Our feeling is if we reached and touched one person, it was worth it. The smile of the people who came were thank you enough."

A huge thank you goes out to the many, many volunteers who were willing to give of their time and talents to make the two Sunday night performances of Taproot Theatre such a success. **Greeters, Ushers, Tech team, Ticket sellers, Makers and Servers of desserts and coffee, Childcare providers and Outreach team members** who mingled with the guests, this event could not have happened without you. May God bless each one of you richly with the knowledge that our community was blessed because of you. **Gloria Love**

A Gift card was found Sunday night at Taproot Theatre....please phone the office to identify and claim it.

Lifegroup Contributing Opportunities

Update December 13th

Adult attendance: 257

Children: 9 am: 39+11 10:30 am 51+23

Youth Small Group: 18 + 5 Middle School 14+3



Christmas volunteers needed at the Everett Salvation Army. (2525 Rucker Ave.)

Volunteers are needed between today and this coming Friday Dec.18 to help fill children's gift bags. Show up any day this week at the alley entrance of the building between 9:00 AM and 4:00 PM and Joanne will put you to work. We still have almost 200 bags left to fill so if you have some spare time please stop by for a while and lend a hand.

USHER CAPTAIN 2009:

December—Darrell Olson
Marc Owenby

January—Pete Sontra
Luckey Elkins

COFFEE HOUR 2009

December 20th
Florence Miller
Women of Purpose

December 27th
Kay Olson
Home Fellowship

January 3rd
Frank Riddell
Lake Stevens LG

January 10th
Dan Clark
Life Group

January 17th
John VanDalen
The Followers



December 16th,	Tyrone Fatzinger
December 17th,	Helen Swart
December 18th,	Tanya Huber, Marty Menia
December 19th,	Sue Church
December 21st,	Margaret Logan, Tom Willadsen

Lela Meadows Scholarship

ATTENTION ALL HIGH SCHOOL SENIORS, COLLEGE STUDENTS, POST GRADUATE STUDENTS: Application for the 2010 Lela Meadows Scholarship are available, beginning January 4th in the church office. To be eligible to apply you need to be a current and active member in our church. Application deadline is Wednesday, **March 31st, 2010 at 4:00 pm**

Tithe envelopes are
now available in the
Pacific Room

AVALANCHE RETREAT

4th thru 8th Grade Avalanche Retreat is coming soon! Register now with either Pastor Nathan or Pastor Alex—cost is just \$70.00 and they will be going to Cascade Meadows Camp in Leavenworth on January 29th, returning on the 31st. You won't want to miss this exciting time, playing in the snow, inner tubing and having fun and fellowship with your pals. Experience God in the snow.