

The Best Way to Prevent Child Abuse

April is Child Abuse Prevention and Sexual Assault Awareness Month. I believe it is important for survivors to talk about what they survived in order to bring awareness and help others to speak up to stop the abuse.

I want to share with you something I wrote in regard to this issue, and I pray it continues to bring about much-needed awareness and offer hope to survivors to thrive.

Sexual abuse is more prevalent than we want to admit.

One in six men have experienced sexual abuse before they were 18. One in four girls will have experienced sexual abuse by the time they are 14, and statistics show that 93 percent of children and juveniles who are sexually abused know their perpetrator. One in every four women between the ages of 14 to 21 will have been sexually assaulted.

These are the statistics based on the victims that have spoken out and told of the abuse. Consider the victims who have not given voice to the abuse or assault they've lived through. Sexual abuse is an ugly truth that is hard to accept.

Often when a victim tries to tell and speak out about what is being done to them or what has been done, it is ignored or dismissed because the facts are messy. Psychologically, we can't fathom a member of our family or a friend—someone we love and trust—could commit such a heinous act, nor can we allow our minds to imagine it happening to a child.

The fact is this is our truth. We are the statistic, and we have a story that needs to be told. Survivors of sexual abuse and assault are often either scared into keeping quiet and obliging the abuse or are so young they know no other

experience and feel this is what is normal.

Many sexual abuse victims are told they have been bad and that this is a form of punishment or the opposite—that they are the favorite and are groomed to feel obliged to go along with the abuse to make the perpetrator happy. The scenarios are endless, but the results are the same.

The victim no longer has a voice, and this carries on into their adult life. Deep-seated feelings of insecurity, lack of self-esteem, unworthiness and lack of self-respect are the result. Often if a child is sexually abused at a very young age, then their awareness of their sexuality has been aroused, which brings feelings, responses and emotions that a young child is not yet ready to control or understand.

This leads to acting out sexually in the tween and teen years and can lead to drug and alcohol abuse at an early age. Experiencing intimacy and natural, normal boundaries in relationships is often affected by the abuse, which can heighten the sense of unworthiness, low self-esteem and lack of self-respect, which often leads to depression and, in some cases, suicide.

One way this can be prevented is to let a survivor know they have a voice that needs to be heard. Survivors need to tell their story, release what has been done to them and receive the support from loved ones and the counseling that will help them expose the shame, fear and guilt and learn to live normal, healthy lives. The more a survivor can talk, the more they will heal. Specific details do not need to be shared; often that brings a sense of revictimization. Simply acknowledging that this is their truth and that they survived and are given the freedom to experience the grief process is key.

The shame of the abuse does not lay with the victim; it belongs to the perpetrator. If you are a survivor of any form

of abuse and want to share your story in order to bring about awareness and offer hope to others, please email me at hopefulhearts333@. Your story is important.

Shannon Dietz is the author of the award-winning *Exposed: Inexcusable Me, Irreplaceable Him and Redeemed*, coming out this summer. Find out more about her ministry at www.shannondietz.com.

How to Respond to People Who Drive You Crazy

Like a woman cooking a large family meal, I have a pot on every burner right now. Front right is the woman who has given up on her husband. Back right is the child still going the wrong direction. Front left is the young woman who has given up on her family. Back left is the woman who sees no hope in herself.

I keep a spoon of prayer stirring in each pot where someone teeters on the edge of writing someone off.

According to the Free Dictionary by Farlex, the idiom *to write someone off* means “to give up on turning someone into something, to give up on someone as a dead loss, waste of time, hopeless case, etc.”

This usually comes with the phrase, “I’m done.”

I’m done with him.

I’m done with her.

Writing people off is tempting for three reasons:

- 1. We are worn out.** We are to-the-bone weary with trying to

understand or help or forgive. Fatigue causes us to throw up our hands in defeat.

2. We have no hope. Nothing changed last year. Nothing has changed this year. Why in the world should we expect anything to be better next year?

3. We have drifted from the gospel. We have forgotten that “while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8, NIV). We have forgotten that Christ pushed past His own weariness and pain and trudged on for the sake of love. We have forgotten that Christ held hope that we could become whole and blameless.

I see you today in that difficult relationship, so weary you can hardly take a breath. So much pain has been inflicted that you feel you will never be healed. You’ve been in the middle of the relationship challenge for so long that you can’t lift your head up and imagine things could ever change. It seems impossible to you. It seems impossible to everyone else.

But there is the gospel.

As we pull up close to the gospel, we remember there is hope for every man to be transformed when the light of Christ shines into his or her darkness.

So, what to do with a person who causes you struggle like this?

If you’re determined not to write them off, then the alternative is to write their name on your heart. Vulnerable place, the heart. But either way, there will be wounds, yes? Better to pull a person in close and suffer long than to shove him away.

Christy Fitzwater *is the author of A Study of Psalm 25: Seven Actions to Take When Life Gets Hard. She is a blogger, pastor’s wife and mom of two teenagers and resides in Montana. Visit for more information about her ministry.*

When Have You Wept Over Your City?

"As He approached Jerusalem and saw the city, He wept over it and said, 'If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will ... hem you in on every side. ... They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you'" (Luke 19:41-44).

This passage was in my devotions one morning recently. As I meditated on it, I felt almost a chill of fear, not just for Jerusalem, but for any city that provokes God's judgment by rejecting God's Son. To reject Jesus is self-destructive, whether for an individual, a city, a nation or a world.

As Jesus entered the city so long ago, He wept not only because of the judgment He knew was coming, but because of how very close Jerusalem was to real, lasting, permanent peace. Yet she was so blind to it that even when the Prince of Peace entered with tens of thousands of people proclaiming Him as the long-awaited Messiah, she still missed it. Jesus Himself was the answer, and He came to that which was His own, but His own did not receive Him (John 1:11).

Which made me wonder: When was the last time I wept over my city? In some ways, Raleigh, N.C., has not been like Jerusalem. While we, too, have had a history of faith, Jesus uniquely came here through an organized Bible study thirty-six years ago. Since that time, literally tens of thousands of men and women have gone through this structured Bible study system, which now numbers 10 classes, each with 500 members.

In addition, there are many Bible studies offered within local church programs. Today we have at least 8,000 to 10,000 men, women and young people studying the Bible weekly for themselves in organized classes. And that's within a county of less than 1 million people.

My earnest prayer is that Jesus would feel He has been received in this city. That He would feel at home here. And that His presence in the hearts of His disciples who live in this county would maintain the peace, protecting us from the judgment that is coming on the world.

My question to you is the one I asked of myself: When was the last time you wept over your city? When was the last time you even prayed for your city, earnestly asking God to show you what you can do to make Jesus feel welcomed and received in the place you call home? Start praying now, because Jesus, not politics, is still the answer: "Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain" (Ps. 127:1).

Praying for the peace of Jerusalem ... and my city.

Anne Graham Lotz is a best-selling and award-winning author. Her most recent releases are Wounded by God's People, Fixing My Eyes on Jesus, Expecting to See Jesus and her first children's book, Heaven: God's Promise for Me. She is the president of AnGeL Ministries in Raleigh, N.C.

5 Ways You Can Use Easter to

Evangelize

Why do we celebrate Christmas more than we celebrate Easter? We spend an entire month decorating our homes, singing special Christmas songs about Jesus, giving gifts in His name, and why do our yards light up every night to remind people of “The Reason for The Season”; but when we get to April or May, we spend a few days wishing people a Happy Easter, make a nice ham, perhaps attend a Sunrise Service and sing a handful of songs about Jesus’ resurrection.

The contrast stood out to me in such a sobering way as I reflected on this question that came to mind a couple of months ago. While Jesus’ birth is an important event in history and our Christian faith, as the Creator of the Universe chose to come to earth and dwell among us, His birth did not save us from sin. Had He been born and simply lived, we would still be lost.

The Jews would have their sacrifices and we would be Gentiles without a hope! It was His death, burial and resurrection – His defeat of death, hell and the grave – that gave us the hope of having our sins removed as far as the east is from the west. It was His spilled blood that purchased our redemption!

I was saddened and deeply troubled as I reflected the lesser importance placed upon this day that should be the most celebrated day for the Christian. We should spend more time preparing for, celebrating, singing and declaring the true message of Easter. I truly believe the enemy has successfully diverted our attention from the most joyous event in all of the history of mankind – that the Creator of the Universe chose to be falsely accused, beaten, ridiculed and put to death in the manner of a common criminal – all so He could redeem us.

God is God – He could have chosen to assign a different method

of redemption. One less painful, one less humiliating, one less sacrificial. He didn't have to choose blood as the cleansing agent for sin. But He did. And He sent Jesus to live and die. And then rise again from the dead.

Is it possible, then, that the enemy has purposely tried to subdue the true message of Easter? There are five ways you can use Easter to evangelize:

1. Host a focused home Bible study for your neighbors. You can do a group study through a book about Jesus and His life or just about the truth of the gospel. One good study would be Lee Strobel's book *The Case for Christ*.

2. Host a five-day Easter club for children. This would also give you an open door to their parents. Choose stories, games, activities and crafts that focus on Christ, His life, death and resurrection and what they mean for us.

3. Do crafts and activities with your children that focus on the true meaning of Easter and include their friends. Pinterest is full of ideas, from resurrection gardens to pretzel crosses, resurrection rolls and resurrection scenes (like a nativity scene).

4. Purchase and distribute free copies of books that present the gospel in a clear way. Ideas are *Jesus: the One and Only* by Beth Moore, *The Case for the Resurrection* by Lee Strobel or *Good and Evil*, a comic book Bible that is perfect for children. Let them know that this is an Easter gift from your family to theirs.

5. Plan a family outreach. Whether it is volunteering in a food kitchen or assisting your church in a specific Easter outreach, reach out to the lost.

The message of Easter is not spring. It's not a new dress and white shoes. It is not going to church and hearing a nice sermon. It is not a huge potluck after service where you eat a

lot of good food and have a good time with old friends.

The message of Easter is that Jesus, by the power of the Holy Spirit, defeated death, hell and the grave and paid the penalty for our sin. His resurrection was the final blow to Satan's kingdom. It was the final victory.

It is finished!

Rosilind Jukic is an American girl married to a Bosnian guy who lives in a small village just outside of Zagreb. They have two crazy boys 3 and under who are as opposite as boys can be. When Rosilind isn't writing, she is dreaming up recipes and searching for ways to organize her home better. You can find her at A Little R & R, where she writes about missions, marriage and family, toddler activities and her recipes.

Daring to Feel Again

Still stuck in Isaiah 58, and the very first verse is shouting my name today in a not-entirely-pleasant way.

“Cry out loudly, don't hold back! Raise your voice like a trumpet” (v. 1, HCSB).

Isaiah goes on to implore us to weep and wail because those with whom we share a neighborhood or a city or a country or a spinning globe are far from flourishing.

If I'm honest, I have some trouble here. My emotional tank is pretty much empty. Or maybe not empty. Maybe just used up on things closer to home. I'm spending a lot of energy dealing with the stuff inside the walls of the Family Stern. It's hard to move my heart outside to other places and feel for them as well. I stay away from sad movies. I'm careful with the news I

read. I know it's cowardly, but it feels like survival. Fear and self-absorption, dressed up like wisdom.

The thing is, it hasn't always been like this. I used to care so much about orphans brutalized in other countries and a generation of American teenagers being beaten up by our culture. They were wedged in my heart in a way that kept me up at night, dreaming of solutions and strategies for change. Now I push aside the heavy thoughts, certain I can't afford to feel sad about anything else and that I only have enough to take care of my own people. Only enough bread for my own house.

Through this fast, however, God has been whispering to me something dark and stormy and dangerous, and it's this: It's OK to feel again. In fact, He's telling me it's more than OK—it's right and wonderful, and though it seems like it will break me, it will not. It will actually strengthen and expand my heart in ways that let me breathe deeply again.

This singular focus I've had on the sorrow in my own world is like daily submitting to water torture—the constant dripping of one drop in one spot leads to miry, myopic living. Today I can feel Him gently lifting my head to look around at our beautiful, broken world and saying, "See it. Feel it. Serve it."

Without the willingness and supernatural ability to feel the pain of those sick with hunger and poverty and loneliness, we will never have the passion to become the healing we are called to become: Christ in us, the hope of glory. That counts for something. That ought to matter.

Jesus, make it matter more to me than ever. I can't do everything, but I can do something, and I want to hear my something today. I want to be re-called and reclaimed for this grand adventure of bringing hope to a hurting world.

Part of a prayer I love by Walter Brueggemann makes a bold

ask, and I'm shouting it up to the heavens for myself and my church:

We are listeners, but we do not listen well.

So we bid you, by the time the sun goes down today

or by the time the sun comes up tomorrow,

by night or by day,

that You will speak in ways that we can hear

out beyond ourselves.

It is your speech to us that carries us where we have never been,

and it is your speech to us that is our only hope.

So give us ears. Amen.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of the newly released Beautiful Battliefields. She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her Goliath came in the form of her husband's terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends, and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Ore.

Logging Mileage in the Barren Land

It's 12 hours. Around the lake and Flathead cherry orchards. Through Missoula, where we lived in poverty for five months during early marriage—hate that town. An overnight in Bozeman and nabbing my girl from Montana State for a hotel slumber party. Turn at the oil refinery in Laurel.

Grumble at the "Welcome to Wonderful Wyoming" sign because it's immediately followed by a mandatory 10-mile-an-hour drop

in speed. Pass the Buffalo Bill Museum in Cody and then go through an hour and a half of land with no people in it. Honk the horn through the tunnels after Thermopolis and then watch the Wind River Mountains, backdrop to my childhood home, grow bluer and taller.

When it's that man of mine driving, he grumbles at the post-Cody stretch. Says he hates driving that leg of the trip the most because it's miles of nothing.

I think it's beautiful.

And on this trip especially, going home again so soon after my dad died, the terrain greets me as an empathetic friend.

I know how you feel, it says.

Brown.

Windblown.

Lonely.

Nothing grows here, except miles of sagebrush and an occasional very brave tree.

I keep driving, enjoying the companionship of a place that knows it should be sad with me, and the Lord whispers to me: *These miles are a place.*

They're a real place on the highway, lovely or not, and no matter how many times we drive to Wyoming from Kalispell, summer or winter, holiday or for no good reason, we have to go through that part of the country.

And there are stretches of life that we cannot go around.

Pain and grief. Stress and hardship.

They're a real place.

And we can't get from where we are to where we want to go without passing through the soul-lonely land.

But after long, am-I-ever-gonna-get-past-these miles, there will come a place in the road where green grows and color marks the landscape again. A place where water flows fast and there's more to see than just nothing.

We'll get there.

"Though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials ... " (1 Pet. 1:6, NIV).

Christy Fitzwater is the author of *A Study of Psalm 25: Seven Actions to Take When Life Gets Hard*. She is a blogger, pastor's wife and mom of two teenagers and resides in Montana. Visit [for more information about her ministry](#).

Taking the Time to Learn Perseverance

I snagged a glorious 20 minutes on the phone with a dear friend yesterday, while she chewed on a Costco dog and I inhaled a Subway flatbread pizza. The cuisine of busy working moms.

We talked about our broken mommas—hers with more busted ribs than a person can count on one hand, thanks to a head-on, and mine with a bed that's cold on one side now.

It hurts so much and is so good, I said.

I know, she said. And she really knows.

She said how most folks want to hurry up through difficulty because it hurts so much, but those of us who know Christ walk through it nice 'n' slow.

We know Jesus came to pull us out of darkness and to present us blameless, as His bride, before the living God. Me and this sister have come to terms with the fact that the only way between the point of rescue and the point of heaven is through sorrow and trial.

Compression.

God letting the hard stuff push in, both walls at a time, to press out the sin and knead in the good.

"To him who is able to ... present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 24, NIV).

He is able to present us blameless, if we are willing to go through the process.

The question that needs immediate answer is this: Do we want to be comfortable right this second *more* than we want to become pure and spotless?

A word to this friend of mine: How precious it is to have a bestie who says, "Yes, this pain is wonderful." How valuable the friend who knows God is using all of this hardship to shape us into something perfect.

So, don't rush your hard time (or anyone else's, for that matter).

Give full attention to every lesson being taught, every nuance of influence God is working in that heart of yours. Tiptoe through experiencing the magnificence of God when you are in the worst spot.

It's hard, but it's good.

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When a Loved One Says Goodbye

On Sunday night, my family gathered around the table as we've been doing every Sunday night for no one knows how long. We laughed and shared amazing stories from our morning in church. That may sound silly, but most of us work at our church and we love it dearly. That day was just a really good church morning, filled with people we love and care for and the God who cares for us.

Steve doesn't eat around the table with us, and hasn't for a long time. He eats downstairs in the one chair that possesses just the right proportions for the herculean effort that is lifting a spoon. You just wouldn't believe how difficult eating can be when you have no muscles in your arms and neck. It's impossible for him to both eat and talk, so he prefers to focus on the meal and then be with family.

After dinner, we took our dessert downstairs to be with him. We usually do this, but this night was different because we knew he had words to say.

So, on an ordinary Sunday, just like all the Sundays before it (and yet not at all like the ones before it), my husband said goodbye. He used simple, deep, honest words. No hype. No revisionist history. Just real. Like Steve. Like we all would hope to be, I think. It was ... excruciating. And beautiful. Just exactly like the last three years of our lives.

Steve's surgery has been rescheduled for Thursday in Portland. He is not expecting the worst, and our doctor there has given us lots of hope that this procedure can turn out OK, even at his level of progression. So, it's not that he sees Thursday as an expiration date, but he knew the conversation had been waiting too long. He knew in his heart there were words sitting like jars on a shelf, waiting to be taken out and given like gifts to those he loves most, and he's at a point in his life where the jars had become weightier and weightier. It was time to pour them out.

There are some jars in my life too. I feel them in the background, mostly invisible, but sometimes they pop up out of nowhere and call to me. The thing is, I hate awkward conversations. And I'm discovering that while this world we live in is full of words, words, words, it's easy to say pretty much nothing with them. I fill a day with *how are yous* and *when in the world is it going to stop raining*, and I forget to tell people how much they matter. How deeply, inestimably valuable they are to me and how blessed I am to be a witness to the beauty they are living. I'd rather avoid the words that might come out schmaltzy or insincere or might land strangely in the space between us.

But the Word became flesh and stormed right into our world. Into our fights and family dinners. Into our insecurity and pride. Into our hurt and heartache. God's words, wrapped in the Word, came into the down and dirty of life to free us from the shallows of relationship and move us into the deep.

My husband is a man who, through the fires of affliction, is learning God's way with words. He will never be sorry, and neither will we. Because the words that were said on Sunday and the tears cried over plates of key lime pie were pulled from the jars on Steve's shelf and carefully transferred to the hearts of Whitney, Corey, Victoria, Tess, Josiah, Casey, Noel and me. No matter what happens on Thursday, those words will live on in us, and they will multiply, and soon our jars

will overflow and splash over into hearts that need them outside our Sunday dinner.

Bo Stern is a blogger and author of the newly released Beautiful Battliefields. She knows the most beautiful things can come out of the hardest times. Her Goliath came in the form of her husband's terminal illness, a battle they are still fighting with the help of their four children, a veritable army of friends, and our extraordinary God. Bo is a teaching pastor at Westside Church in Bend, Ore.

Where Have All the People Gone?

“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever” (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

On March 8, 2014, a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777, on its way from Kuala Lumpur to Beijing, vanished over the South China Sea. Without a trace. And with 239 people on board. It's being described as an “unprecedented mystery.” Where is it? Where have all the people gone?

The pictures of grieving friends and family members of those who are missing are heart-wrenching. I have prayed for God's peace and comfort for them, as well as God's direction of the search and rescue teams who are desperately looking for clues that will solve the mystery. But the unanswered questions seem to intensify the horror:

How could a modern airliner drop out of sight so quickly and completely?

What happened to the plane itself?

Was it hijacked?

Was it blown out of the sky?

Did something happen to the pilots so that without guidance the plane plunged intact into the depths of the sea?

Bottom line: *Where are all the people?*

The answers don't seem to be forthcoming as I write this. But as I have prayerfully pondered all of the above, I can't help but wonder: Is this worldwide sense of shock and helplessness, of questions and confusion, of fear and grief a glimpse of things to come? Is this a small snapshot of what the entire world will experience the day after the rapture of the church? Because the Bible is clear. There is coming a moment in time when Jesus will come back to gather to Himself all those—dead and alive—who have put their trust in Him. And on that day, the world will be asking, "Where have all the people gone?" Not just 239 of us, but millions of us.

On that day, with millions of people directly impacted by their own missing friends and family members, in the midst of overwhelming shock and helplessness, of questions and confusion, of fear and grief—when the world searches for clues, how easily will they find the answer in what I leave behind? Instead of an oil slick, will there be traces of His grace and glory and truth?

This is a thought I can't seem to shake, so I share it with you. Will your life and mine be a light to the world (Matt. 5:14) that points people to Jesus after the rapture?

Anne Graham Lotz is a best-selling and award-winning author. Her most recent releases are *Wounded by God's*

People, Fixing My Eyes on Jesus, Expecting to See Jesus *and her first children's book*, Heaven: God's Promise for Me. *She is the president of AnGeL Ministries in Raleigh, N.C.*

When Ministry Doesn't Go the Way We Plan

I sat at my computer in the basement that chilly Sunday evening in North Dakota, pounding out a long email to my sister that could rival *War and Peace*. A missionary had visited our church and shared with us what the Lord was doing in the country where he and his family served. It touched a deep place in my heart, as I was preparing to leave for the mission field in a few months.

I was overflowing with excitement. In my mind's eye, I could see an amazing work of God: a revival, an awakening, a New Testament church arising to power and victory in Jesus and the kingdom of God advanced with authority!

The passion of this vision surged through me as I sorted through my belongings, deciding what could fit into my limited luggage and what would have to stay behind or be given away. It wasn't easy, but that vision in my heart enabled me to make the hard choices. And I embarked on a journey that looks nothing like what it did that wintery night in North Dakota.

When Ministry Doesn't Go the Way We Plan

This August will mark my 10th-year anniversary on the mission field. And I can say with full assurance that nothing—*literally nothing*—has gone as I dreamed it would. Why, then, does God give us these visions and dreams, if He knows

they will not come about as we thought?

1. The human prism. I contend that much of what I envisioned was more “Rosilind” than God. There were elements of God’s plan in that vision, but they were wrapped with, entertained with and heavily seasoned with my own ambitions. And while ambition is most often rooted in pride, I believe God does understand that we “see through the glass darkly.” He gives us a vision that we simply can’t see the way He sees it because He is divine and we are human. We can only see through the prism of what we know.

As I prepared for my journey here where I serve, I approached it from an American perspective. That was the only perspective I knew. But what works in America doesn’t work in Croatia, and it took me several years to learn what *does* work here, and that knowledge has given me the wisdom I need to minister in a way that is effective.

2. We couldn’t bear it. Had God revealed to me then what I have experienced these past 10 years, I am fairly sure I would have never left America. While these 10 years have been sprinkled with amazing events, such as meeting my husband, getting married, having two beautiful babies, buying our first home and meeting some of the loveliest people I’ve ever known, they have also been laced with some pretty hard times. Disappointment, failure and great loneliness mark major milestones in this journey of mission work.

God doesn’t tell us the whole story for a reason. It would terrify us with its greatness, wonder and, yes, disappointment. And as I ponder this truth, I am reminded of something Corrie ten Boom wrote in her book *The Hiding Place*. She shares how her father illustrated the way God leads us through these times. He doesn’t give us the grace for the journey until we need it. But when we need it, it is there in abundance for us to not only survive the journey, but to

victoriously win this race with our arms stretched out as we soar across the finish line.

3. We must die. A major element to ministry is death. While I know that sounds morbid and is frankly not very encouraging, it is true. Jesus was the first to mention this with regard to ministry. He told His disciples that if they were not willing to take up their cross—a symbol of death—and follow Him, they were not worthy to be His disciples. In ministry we must die. We must die to our **visions**. We must die to our **ambitions**. We must die to our **plans**. We must die to **ourselves**. If we don't, we will never see fruit.

Jesus illustrated this for us with a seed. He said, "Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it produces much grain."

When a seed lies in the ground, it rots. It dies. But from death comes life—a tender shoot, then tiny leaves. As the shoot grows and strengthens, flowers begin to bloom, and then nourishing fruit grows. All of that beauty and nourishment come from death. If we refuse to lay down our dreams, visions, ambitions and self and bury them, we will never experience the true life of Christ and fruit of the kingdom in our ministry.

As I look back on that night 10 years ago and recall those dreams and ambitions, I can't help but chuckle a bit. They were immature and filled with deadly pride. During my time here, I have struggled to hang onto those selfish dreams, been forced to let them go, cried tears of loss and disappointment, considered myself a miserable failure, and come to peace with the fact that I cannot—*must not*—live. It must be Christ who lives in me—and He must work through me. And the joy of death, the sweet aroma of that sacrifice, is worth the loss. Because in dying we live, and in being destitute of self, we are rich in Him.

This is when ministry truly becomes ministry!

*Reprinted with permission from Missional Women. **Rosilind Jukic** is an American girl married to a Bosnian guy who lives in a small village just outside of Zagreb. They have two crazy boys 3 and under who are as opposite as boys can be. When Rosilind isn't writing, she is dreaming up recipes and searching for ways to organize her home better. You can find her at A Little R & R, where she writes about missions, marriage and family, toddler activities and her recipes.*