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10 WAYS to Light Up...
Your WORLD

Robert Brownell shares an **Enlightening**Holiday Memory

**Our Gift to You** 





### A Time of Hope and

## Light...

Hope is being able to see that there is light despite all of the darkness.

-Desmond Tutu

There is a crack in everything. That's how the light gets in.

-Leonard Cohen

Every man must decide whether he will walk in the light of creative altruism or in the darkness of destructive selfishness.

—Martin Luther King Jr.

In faith there is enough light for those who want to believe and enough shadows to blind those who don't.

-Blaise Pascal

Faith is the strength by which a shattered world shall emerge into the light.

-Helen Keller

Christmas is a joy, religious joy, an inner joy of light and peace.

—Pope Francis

God is light, and there is no darkness in Him at all.

—1 John 1:5







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In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

-Matthew 5:16

Becky Johnston, Chief Creative Officer Becky@BeInspiredNetwork.com

Scott Brunscheen, Director/Faith at Work Scott@FaithatWorklowa.org

CONTRIBUTORS Amanda Marsh

Heidi Vermeer-Quist, Psy.D Kevin Duis

Shuttersteck.com Mariakrayneva/Shuttersteck.com Twinsterphoto/Shuttersteck.com

Faith at Work, Inc. 5585 North East 16th Street Des Moines, Iowa 50313 515.974.5415 FaithatWorklowa.org

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Beinspire

Jesus Christ is the...

# Light of the World

Drawn to the light, branches of trees and other plants actually compete with each other to "reach" for the sunrays in order to grow. Many of us feel that way as well...we have to have light.

I was reminded recently during a discussion with friends that the definition of "darkness" is simply the "absence of light." That is true whether talking about the physical, emotional or spiritual realm.

Learning about light and darkness must be important to God, too, as the Bible has more than 300 verses about light and 140 about darkness...including at the very beginning when in Genesis 1:3, "Then God said, 'Let there be light'; and there was light."

Christmas is a time of great joy, as it truly is about the birth of Jesus—God's greatest gift, the light of the world who came down into darkness. In John 8:12, during the time of his ministry, Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, but you will have the light that leads to life."

So at a time of the year when our daylight becomes the shortest of days in the northern hemisphere, this issue of *BeInspired* is about hope and light. Whether at Christmas or the dark cold days of January, we hope that you can brighten the day of someone else's life to make the world a better place! It can be a Merry Christmas everyday.





#### Robert Brownell...

## Holiday Surrender

From time to time, people ask about the time when I was homeless. I wasn't homeless for long. Many would say I wasn't homeless at all, really. I'm tempted to put myself in that camp. Nonetheless, there were a lot of things that happened to me in that short time.

But homeless I was. And I had my reasons.

And they weren't all that noble, either.

I had attended a Des Moines City Council meeting one evening in which scores of residents used the council and Mayor as piñatas. Figuratively speaking, of course. It went on for hours.

The issue was over the potential moving of the metro's largest homeless shelter, Central Iowa Shelter and Services (CISS) to a new location...near the residents' homes. It needed to be done, everyone had said.



The shelter needed to be bigger. More beds. All the right people understood the need.

Unfortunately, among those saying astute things about the shelter, not included were the residents in the neighborhoods. The experts had managed to leave them out of the decision making process. They weren't even slightly involved in the process.

But the residents said some dumb things, too. The shelter staff was incompetent, for example. And, another shelter, the Bethel Mission, was already near the proposed location for CISS, and it was a real madhouse. They said the streets around it were filled with panhandlers and wackos.

The residents maintained that CISS was dangerous and filled with violent drunks and thieves. Their arguments focused on how the neighborhood didn't need a whole warehouse of doped-up predators located just blocks from their kids' playgrounds. It was that kind of stuff, and hour after hour of it.

I wanted to prove the neighborhood residents were nuts. So I got this idea to become homeless. I would check into Bethel Mission and the CISS, not as a County Supervisor, but as just another brick-in-the-wall



homeless guy and see "what it's really like." I wanted to prove some people wrong.

And so I did. I learned a lot, too. None of which proved the residents were nuts, either. Not even close. But there were things to learn about me and about God.



Comparing the two shelters, Bethel Mission is "rule heavy." There strict times for are everything and an expectation that their "clients" find a job and go to chapel.

CISS has no chapel and while there are, no doubt, religious people in the shelter, the name of the building was changed to move "God" out of its identity. After a couple of guys froze to death on the riverbank in the 1990s, the area churches came together and built a homeless shelter. They didn't want any of God's sons or daughters dying just because they were homeless. They called it: Churches United.

Eventually, the name was changed to indicate a more secular direction. Central Iowa Shelter and Services was born. Before I went to CISS as a homeless person, a woman I respect told me the shelter would always be a failure. I asked her why she thought that.

"Because God's been driven out of the building. So, just watch what happens," she said. I resolved to be on the lookout for God's absence.

So I did my best impression of a homeless guy before I went to the Bethel and CISS. Actually, I did everyone's best impression of a homeless guy. I grew a skanky beard, dressed in rags, and practiced looking shifty and forlorn simultaneously. I thought it was a pretty good impression. Too bad, for all the effort, my costume had almost nothing to do with reality.

In a moment not designed to make my parents proud, I realized, after an hour or so at the Bethel, I was the worst dressed, worst groomed guy in the shelter. By far. I had guys steering way clear of me. I thought once I got to CISS, the bar might be a little lower than the Bethel so I'd "fit in" better.

Alas, also not true.

In less uncompromisingly delicate times, one would've said I was the one who looked like a bum or a hobo. Maybe even the town drunk. That's our perception of homeless; we see little distinction between the "homeless" and a "bum." And, in truth, we're partly right.

It's just that the scary guy with bloodshot eyes dragging a big garbage bag full of cans behind him while shouting at his Martian tormentor isn't the same homeless guy one would encounter at a Shelter.

There are commonalities, though. Between friends and family, bridges have been thoroughly burned. Many of the homeless have substance abuse issues and mental problems. One struggles to know which one came first. Now they're simultaneous.

It doesn't mean we should shrug our shoulders and move on. It's more difficult with a population that's, by design or self-abuse, clueless how to fix themselves. We're commanded to recognize the "least of us" by Jesus himself. So just shrugging and "moving on" isn't really an option anyway.

Area churches provide dinner for the homeless of CISS each evening. Prior to each evening meal, a prayer is said to the entire shelter. The place will fall silent, heads will bow, and at the conclusion of it, the shelter will erupt with a thunderous "amen."

When I saw it, I wanted to think about that. I thought about God and homeless shelters. Yes, the name was changed to signal a less religious approach to the shelter. But should a name



change be an insurmountable challenge to God? Can't He find His way around our ridiculous obstacles?

When I was homeless, the evening meal was served by a church in Ankeny. There were about a dozen parishioners there. They all came together and then left together when the meal was done. By that time, it was dark.

About an hour after the Ankeny folks packed up and left, I noticed two teenaged girls standing over a table piled up with clothing. I assumed they'd been there with the Ankeny types. But, by then, the Ankeny contingent had moved on.

Some women from the shelter were going through coats on the table. I walked up to the girls and asked, "What's going on?"

One of them said brightly, yet patiently so I'd grasp what she was saying, "we did a clothing drive," she said. "The two of us...at our school."

"Just the two of you?" I said.
"Yep," said Allie reaching
out to shake the homeless guy's

hand. "I'm Britney," said the other, her smile glistening.

I looked at my watch, it was pushing 9 PM. "Isn't it kind of late to be hanging around a homeless shelter?" I advised them, transforming back into my responsible adult self. "Are your parents waiting outside?"

"No," said Britney, "we drove down here ourselves. It's just from Johnston, no big deal."

"Why?" I asked, as it dawned on me they weren't part of the Ankeny contingent, after all. The girls were alone.

"Why what?" said Allie.
"Why come down here at



night all by yourselves?"

They glanced at each other.

"We wanted to make sure you guys got this stuff before the holidays and it gets cold" Britney said.

I had to sit down on that one. To me, this act of kindness was brave for Allie and Britney. It had been less than ten days since I'd heard full-grown adults weave terrifying stories about the violence, chaos, and the danger of the homeless. Those perceptions couldn't have been foreign to Allie and Britney. Everyone shared them. Even me.

Yet, there they were. Alongside God, I guess, who had soaked into the two girls and they, in turn, had brought His love and hope into a pretty hopeless place. The darkness lit up in there for a moment.

I didn't know how many guys and women were just playing the game with evening Grace and their booming "amen" afterward. Probably some. I hoped not too many.

But Allie and Britney weren't playing any games. Not a bit.

God doesn't give up so easy.



Robert Brownell is a native of Cedar Rapids. He was elected to the Board of Supervisors in 2000 and he represents Clive, Grimes, Johnston, Polk City, Urbandale and Windsor Heights. He is the author of a successful first book, *Our Fathers Day.* (bpc Publishing 2013) He found Christ in 2006.

#### Editor's Note:

Robert Brownell is my kind of friend...thoughtful, honest, humble and compassionate—who leads by example. I have known him for 20 years, but clearly remember 2006, when he sought me out at a meeting to excitedly tell me he had accepted Jesus. Life's purpose had become clear. —Scott

#### 10 Ways to Make the World...

## A Better Place

By Samantha Hodder

I have always wanted to change the world. I remember being four years old, sitting glued to the television on Sunday mornings, not watching cartoons, but utterly captivated by World Vision.

I cried about the injustices in the world, and begged my mother to let me sponsor Maria, the girl with the large, sad eyes who was around my age.

My mom patiently tried to explain to me that we couldn't afford to send her money. I couldn't understand, since we seemed to live in luxury compared to Maria.

Having been raised in a middle-class community of about 800 people in rural Newfoundland, I had never seen a stark divide between the rich and the poor. We all seemed to be the same to my four-year-old eyes.

My heart broke for Maria, and all of the other children on the show. I vowed to myself that someday, I was going to help people like her.

Throughout my childhood, I told everyone that I wanted to change the world. Many didn't take me seriously. They'd say, "One person can't change anything." Still, I knew I wanted to make a positive difference by helping people, animals, and the environment. I started volunteering in elementary school.

As time went on, people around me began to criticize less, and many friends and family members decided to try some of the things I was advocating.

Each time I did something to make a positive impact, it left me wanting to do more.

You may think that you need to be a world leader or a

billionaire in order to make a difference. I always believed that being a good person is about the small things. It's about how you treat other people, not how many people you have power over.

If you'd like to make the world a better place, but aren't sure how to fit it into your busy life, these ideas may help:



Wolunteering doesn't have to consume all of your free time. You can volunteer as few hours as you would like! You can find an organization within your community, or you can even volunteer online, through websites that will allow you to help for even a few minutes at a time.

This can be one of the most satisfying ways to make a difference. You can literally save a life with just an hour of your time.



Donate used clothing. There are so many places and ways you can donate your used clothing. Some organizations even offer pick up services. Donate them to a homeless shelter, Dress for Success or an organization that sells them to raise funds.

Foster an animal. This can be such a rewarding experience. If you're able to part with the foster animals, they leave a hole in your heart, but fostering your next pet helps fill it, and you will be making a difference in



be making a difference in the lives of so many animals in need.

Spread the word about various causes in your community.

See an interesting fundraiser that an organization is hosting?



Share it on Facebook! See an animal that's up for adoption? Share it.

There are so many ways you can help an organization with just the click of a mouse.



Donate something you made to an organization that can use it. I make jewelry, hats, scarves, and other crafty things in my free time. You have talents—use them!

Join a bone marrow registry.

It's incredibly easy to sign up to donate bone marrow, and you never know when you could save a life.



Spread some kindness. Small acts of kindness can go a long way in making the world a better place. Think about a time when someone did something unexpected for



you that brightened your day. Weren't you a nicer person for the rest of the day because of that?

Change your diet to help the environment.

How about buying some free range meat or eggs? Or, buy organic food products. There are many ways you can change your diet to reflect your values.

Make your purchases support your values.
Every purchase you make supports something.
You can either support a large business that
exploits people, animals, and the environment, or you can buy
items that are local, organic, or fair-trade. It's hard to change this
all at once, especially if you're used to shopping for bargains, but
try changing just a few of your purchases to make them better
reflect the things you value.

## As one person I cannot change the world, but I can change the world of one person. —Paul Shane Spear

These are just a handful of the thousands of ways you can make the world a better place!

Just remember that every single thing you do makes a difference.

Don't ever let anyone—yourself included—discourage you from trying to be a better person and help others.

#### A Healthier Way to Share the Light...

## Milkhouse Candles



Candles are often connected with joyful times—celebrating Christmas and holidays or for gathering around a birthday cake. But there are many comforting effects of candlelight, too. During times of stillness and solitude, the beauty of the flame's soft light can touch one's soul.

What began for Janet and Eric Sparrow as simply sharing a love of candles grew into a hobby and then launched a business.

When they began making ⊵ candles—Eric, a teacher in Manly, IA and Janet, an Occupational Therapist in Austin, MN—they used standard canning jars bought at local auctions for containers. As Janet and Eric experimented with glass milk bottles and shared their creations with family, friends and co-workers, requests for candles began to pour in and business grew...

Candles made from paraffin wax contain a carcinogen, and even the "green" and healthier candles advertised as "soy-based" often contained just a small percentage of soy. Janet and Eric believed consumers were looking for candles offering healthier alternatives, so they tested a variety of soy blends. As Eric says, "We were living on an acreage at the time, surrounded by soybeans, so we thought we'd give soy wax a try. It doesn't have any of the carcinogens; it's renewable."

With sales growing nationally and manufacturing reaching capacity at their Osage facility, Janet and Eric believe God opened a door to continue growing when a state of the art candle manufacturing plant just 40 miles away in New Hampton became available. The plant, owned by SC Johnson and Company to manufacture Glade candles, had closed and the building and machinery was being sold. With its purchase, Milkhouse capacity expanded from production of a couple of thousand candles per day in Osage, to their New Hampton facility with daily capacity for more than 30,000 candles.

Now, years after those original candles were made merely as a

hobby in Janet and Eric's home, Milkhouse continues to gain recognition for producing the cleanest burning candle on the market. With no artificial colors and no lead in the wicks, Milkhouse blends pure beeswax and natural soy wax from soybeans grown in the America's upper Midwest.

Milkhouse Candles is a recent winner of Iowa Farm Bureau's Renew Rural Iowa Leader Award. Janet is quick to remind folks that "We are a family company. I truly believe that everyone who comes to work with us feels they are part of a family, part of a team, and part of something bigger than just making candles."



Editor's Note: Milkhouse Candles can be found at Friedrich's Coffee in Urbandale, Woodsmith Store in Clive, Heart of Iowa Market Place in Valley Junction, or contact Milkhouse Candles at 800.565.1543 or visit their website at www.MilkhouseUSA.com.

#### From Darkness...

## Into Light

Simply amazing...the earth's surface curves out of sight at 3 miles, but if standing atop a mountain on a dark night a candle flame can be seen flickering 30 miles away! No wonder stars can be seen at great distances, as "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it." (John 1:5)

The village of Rjukan, Norway, is situated in such a deep valley that mountains block the sun's rays for up to six months every year. To brighten those darker winter months, the town constructed gigantic mirrors high on the mountain that track the sun and reflect daylight downwards into the town square below.

Whether watching the stars at night or seeking more daylight during the darker winter months, we are attracted to light...not darkness. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. If you follow me, you won't have to walk in darkness, because you'll have the light that leads to life." (John 8:12) Christmas is celebrated because Jesus was and is the light of the world. Just as a star guided wise men to come worship Him as a baby in a manger, so should we find His light...and reflect His compassion, forgiveness and love every day.

Where is the newborn king of the Jews?
We saw his star as it rose, and we have come
to worship him. —Matthew 2:2





## Hope Ministries

I was at rock bottom. I called Hope Ministries and my life went straight up from there. There is so much love and grace here. They do so much to help you. I wouldn't be alive if it weren't for this place.

—Sheryl, 2015 graduate



With the busyness of the Christmas season upon us—and all the joy it

entails—it's easy to focus on food, family and fellowship with those around us. But for many homeless and hungry Iowans, the holiday season is a reminder of what they've lost—or perhaps have never had: a warm home, a loving family and nutritious meals.

According to a report from the Iowa Institute for Community Alliances, nearly 12,000 homeless Iowans were served by local shelters and programs. Nearly 11,000 more were at risk of becoming homeless.

And according to Feeding America, one in eight Iowans struggle with hunger. 12.6% of all Iowans—or 389,250 people—are "food insecure," meaning they lack access to enough food for a healthy lifestyle. In Polk County alone, 54,080 people are food insecure.

The reality is staggering, but the vision of Hope Ministries—a 100-year-old ministry located in Des Moines—is hope-filled. They provide lasting hope through a living relationship with God in Jesus Christ while meeting the spiritual, physical and emotional needs of those who are homeless or in need of hope.

#### A History of Service to Those in Need

I consider myself completely free from my addiction. I feel surrounded by God on a daily basis. There's a Bible verse that talks about being a servant of the Gospel. That's where I am today and where I want to be in the future. —Mikel, 2015 graduate

Hope Ministries was formed through the July 2000 merger of two long-standing Des Moines missions: Bethel Mission and Door of Faith. Bethel Mission first opened in 1915, providing shelter and services to homeless men, as well as meals to those who were hungry. The Door of Faith opened in 1969, also providing men shelter, meals and other services.

Today these two ministry centers continue to provide much needed rescue and recovery services. Bethel Mission is a 110-bed emergency shelter for men that also houses Hope Café, where Hope Ministries serves upwards of 400 meals every day. Door of Faith

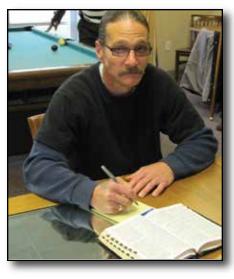
is a 102-bed long-term recovery center for homeless men.

In 2004, Hope Ministries' scope of service expanded to include Hope Center for Women and Children, which offers both short-term and long-term recovery programming for single women and mothers with children.

Hope Ministries also operates two ENCORE Thrift Stores one at 4640 Merle Hay Road and another at 500 E. Army Post Road—which provide low-cost, good-quality clothing,



Bethel Mission and Door of Faith, both part of Hope Ministries, have served the homeless in our community since 1915



household items, shoes, furniture and more.

Leon Negen, President and CEO, has served in leadership with Bethel Mission and Hope Ministries for 20 years. "I count it a privilege to serve those who are homeless, hungry and hurting each day—helping each one discover God's special plan for their lives."

#### **Giving Hope. Changing Lives.**

Being at Hope Ministries has changed my whole life. I don't walk around dirty and smelling like alcohol. I'm happy when I get up in the morning and I look forward to getting my life on track. — Terry, 2015 graduate

Hope Ministries' holistic, Christ-centered approach to meeting the needs of homeless and near-homeless men, women and children makes it unique. Hope Ministries provides both rescue and recovery services.

**Food.** Hope Ministries provides nearly 151,000 meals every year to hungry people in Des Moines and central Iowa. Community meals are served at Hope Café—a clean, safe and comfortable environment.

**Shelter.** Each year, Hope Ministries provides more than 55,000 nights of shelter at their emergency shelter and two recovery centers. They offer a total of 260 beds to those in need.

**Clothing.** Community members may receive free clothing through Hope Ministries' King's Closet voucher program. Emergency shelter and recovery guests also receive free clothing.

Recovery. Hope Ministries' recovery programs are meant to

break the cycles of homelessness, addiction, abuse and poverty, while teaching individuals the responsibility, accountability and skills they need to live productive, independent lives. The recovery programs include individualized case management, classes, chapel services and Bible studies, mentoring, job readiness training and more.

The free, long-term program for men lasts one year while the program for women and children lasts up to two years. The road to life recovery isn't an easy one. But with time, dedication and most of all, God's love and guidance, it is possible for once-homeless and hurting men, women and children to find long-lasting Hope.

Once individuals and families complete Hope Ministries' recovery programs, they are invited to continue to receive services and stay connected through Hope Aftercare. The aftercare program provides ongoing case management, classes and more to help graduates continue to grow and thrive.

#### Adopt-a-Room at Hope Center for Women and Children

When I felt I didn't have a chance left, I met people here who loved me and made me feel secure even when I was vulnerable. I can tell they have my best interests at heart. —Sarah, 2015 recovery resident



During the Christmas season, as we celebrate the birth of Christ, it is a reminder of the Holy family—a family in need who found themselves unexpectedly taking shelter in a stable where the savior of the world was born. And according to the beloved Christmas

carol, Away In the Manger, lovingly placed in a manger.

Away in a manger no crib for his bed
The little Lord Jesus lay down his sweet head
The stars in the sky looked down where he lay
The little Lord Jesus asleep on the hay

Hope Center for Women and Children provides safe, comfortable housing in a



home-like atmosphere. Life recovery programming meets women and children's spiritual, physical and emotional needs and, most importantly, offers the unconditional love and healing power of Christian community.

The need for outreach to homeless women and children has never been greater. The Adopt-a-Room program at Hope Center



offers individuals, families, churches and groups the opportunity to financially "adopt" a room and commit to pray for the women and children making use of the room.

For 100 years, Hope Ministries has remained 100% privately funded and does not accept any government funding that could compromise their Christ-centered mission.

#### Foundation for a Better Life

*I wanted a stronger, more intimate* relationship with Christ, and I'm finding that at Hope Ministries.

Tajuana came to Hope Center for Women and Children after being released from prison. While nine months of incarceration was difficult in itself, the worst part was being



separated from her two little girls: the oldest, age 6, and the youngest, only two weeks old at the time.

"I started smoking marijuana at 13 and later progressed to hard-core drugs at 21," Tajuana says. Her addiction jeopardized her ability to hold a steady job, and she experienced bouts of homelessness, staying in shelters or wherever she could find a place to lay her head. She tried a variety of treatment programs. Fortunately, she was blessed with family members who helped care for her children when she was unable to provide for them on her own. But she longed to be the mother they needed and give them the home they deserved.

Now a resident at Hope Center, Tajuana has been reunited with her children who have joined her at Hope Center. "Our needs are being met beyond what I ever imagined—with shelter, clothing, food, diapers, and in so many other ways."

When Tajuana completes the program, she wants to continue her education and find a career in the medical field so she can support her children on her own. "I'm really grateful to be here. It's been such a blessing to be accepted into this program and to live life again," she says, adding her life is now focused on the 

#### Heidi Vermeer-Quist...

## Beating the Blues

For many people, the anticipation of celebrating the holidays with family and friends is something they eagerly look forward to as they begin planning months ahead for cookies to bake, gifts to share, meals to prepare and serve, along with festive decor to complement the Christmas season.

However, there are many others who, during the year, have experienced a loss of a loved one, a job, a home or even their health to cancer or other traumatic injury. Surrounded by so much joy, the sadness of the loss can be overwhelming. This type of overwhelming sadness is more commonly known as the Holiday Blues.

Thus, for many people enduring those circumstances—often beyond their control—the topic of grief can be quite unnerving. It certainly doesn't sound like fun!

Like most of us, if you are experiencing the "Blues," you may not want to revisit that particularly painful time of grief or loss in your life. You might be afraid to go back "there," dreading the thought of feeling that pain again.

Let's look at Jane's experience. After 15 years of dedicated service to her company, Jane was laid off but told it wasn't because of her performance. The company needed to cut some positions and hers was one of those. Now Jane is devastated and her mind is racing with thoughts. What could she have done differently? How could her employer do this to her? What kind of future does she have now? Jane is struggling with how to handle distressful thoughts and emotions.

Fast-forward three months. Jane began coping by immediately looking for another job. She found a job at a local retail store but



at half the pay, and it bores her to tears. While Jane is able to work and grateful for that, after three months at this new job, she dreads going to work every day.

Now be honest with yourself. Are you experiencing the Holiday Blues or seriously grieving this holiday season?

My dear friend and mentor, Linda Wilson, dealt with grief as she battled Leukemia several years ago. She emerged stronger in her faith and character as she faced multiple crises. Linda used these 5 "C's" in the face of a crisis or unexpected loss.

- *Cry out to God* (prayer for self and asking others to pray with and for you).
- Count your blessings (slow down and just notice what is going well. When you count your blessings it changes your outlook and your mood).
- *Claim His promises* (in His Word, the Bible).
- Consider your options and opportunities (again, SLOW DOWN! Don't make hasty decisions out of your emotions of grief—fear, anger or depression. Tend to those emotions by listing out your options. Perhaps enlist a trusted friend or counselor to help you think through your options and opportunities as your recover from a loss).
- Choose to trust (squeeze out every ounce of learning that you can).

These 5 "C's" provide structure when we are dealing with the intense emotions of grief. Structure helps us move through our emotional stages toward a grounded place of acceptance and willingness to adapt to the difficult situation.

God fortifies us through his Word—the Bible. You can read thousands of passages to back up this claim. Here are just a few,

but I encourage you to engage in God's Word. Open it up. Read it. Start with the Old Testament Psalms and hear songs of both despair and joy:

Despite his failures, throughout Psalm 103 King David reminded himself, Praise the Lord, I tell myself; all that is in me praise His holy name. We need to remind ourselves as well. Who would have thought that David was a cognitive behavioral sort of guy?

In the Old Testament, the book of Job serves as an example of someone who lost everything and was rebuilt. The prophet Isaiah assures us, You [the Lord] will keep in perfect peace all who trust you, whose thoughts are fixed on you! (Isaiah 26:3)

In the New Testament, listen to Jesus and the disciples as they build one another up and offer encouragement in the midst of suffering and loss:

Jesus said, Peace I leave with you. My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. (John 14:27)

And finally, the apostle Paul writes, Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful... (Colossians 3:15–17)



#### About the Author:

Heidi Vermeer-Quist, Psy.D. is a licensed clinical psychologist as well as a wife, mother, musician and family business consultant.

In 2002, Heidi helped to establish the Des Moines Clinic for Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services that has grown into a fully-staffed outpatient mental health clinic.

Heidi is the author of Gardening Your Life, a threephase growth group rooted in solid Christian teaching. Book One of this personal growth series is now available.

For additional information or to order, please contact the author at:

gardeningyourlife@gmail.com



#### Celebrating A Family Favorite...

## Christmas Brunch

We are five women from one farm family who love to find new ways to celebrate everyday life together.

We plan family gatherings, try new recipes, take care of



our homes, and educate our kids. Together, we cherish our beautiful family farm, time spent with our family, and most of all—our faith in Iesus Christ.

Every year, usually on Christmas morning, we gather at my parents' farm and enjoy a festive holiday brunch with savory and sweet casseroles, special drinks, and traditional Christmas breads. Most of the recipes have been passed down by dear grandmas and aunts and have been enjoyed for more years than we most of us can remember. We pull out all the stops to celebrate the birth of our precious Savior.

Another wonderful aspect of our brunch menu is that most of the dishes can be made in advance. Christmas Eve and Christmas morning are packed full of gifts, Church services, and other fun times with our family. Few of us have time to prepare complicated dishes, so these make-ahead recipes are wonderful. Some of them can even be made weeks in advance and frozen.

Here are our two of our favorite Christmas brunch recipes. We hope you'll enjoy making them to share with your family this Christmas. — Annie

#### Cheesy Hash Browns with Ham Casserole...

# A Family Favorite

My Mom received this recipe from my Great Aunt when I was young. It quickly became a staple in our household growing up due to the simplicity of the recipe along with the versatility of the dish. — Shelby

32 oz. frozen shredded hash browns

16 oz. of flavored sour cream chip dip of choice (I prefer French onion, party or ranch)

1 10 1/4 oz. can cream of chicken soup

3 tbsp. milk

2 c. shredded cheddar cheese

2 c. ham, cooked and cubed

#### Topping:

11/2 c. crushed com flakes

3 tbsp. melted butter



- 1. Combine all ingredients (except topping) and pour into a greased 9x13 pan.
- For topping combine melted butter and crushed cornflakes and spread evenly over mixture.
- Bake at 350 degrees for 1 hour.

Notes: You can add extra ham to make it a main dish, remove the ham and serve it as a side dish of potatoes when grilling or keep it as is, for a nice brunch alternative. It can be made ahead of time and also can be frozen for ease on cooking day.

Freezing directions: Follow above direction however, do not add cornflake top as the result of the frozen topping will be soggy. Add cornflake topping after removing from freezer, right before baking or omit from recipe all together. Lighter version: Use light sour cream chip dip and/or omit buttery cornflake topping.

#### Christmas Tea Ring...

# A Holiday Tradition



Yeast breads are at the top of my food list in life. "Man cannot live by bread alone..." that's God speaking and I have often wanted to question Him on this verse because I love bread and rolls so much!

I grew up with Christmas Tea Ring every year at our table! It was just one of those staples that made Christmas in my home so special. (Mom was a terrific baker. Oh how I miss her...especially during this holiday season!) I remember my mom doubling and tripling this recipe. Our kitchen table would be full of many rings to deliver to friends and neighbors and family. It's just one of those things that money can't buy. — Denise

½ c. sugar

½ c. shortening (I use Crisco)

½ c. boiling water

2 eggs

2 tsp. salt

2 pkgs. yeast

7 c. all-purpose flour

#### Filling:

3 tbsp. soft butter, (spread on dough)

2 tbsp. sugar, sprinkled atop

1 tbsp. brown sugar, sprinkled atop

1 tsp. cinnamon, sprinkled atop

1/4 c. raisins, optional

1/4 c. black walnuts, optional

1/4 c. Craisins or dried pomegranates, optional

#### Vanilla lcing:

2 tbsp. butter, melted

1 c. confectioner's sugar

1 tbsp. milk (approximate)

1 t. vanilla or almond extract

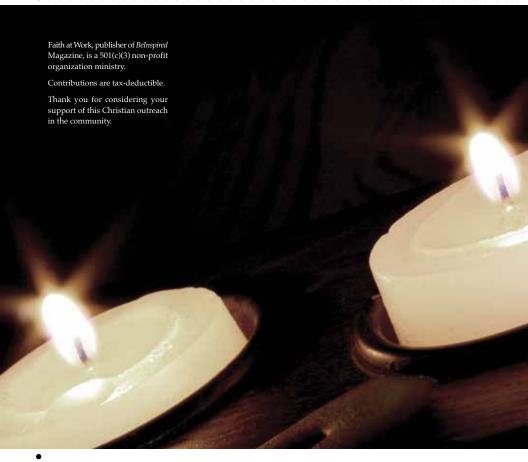
#### Garnish:

6 green maraschino cherries

6 red maraschino cherries

6 English walnut halves

- 1. In small bowl, dissolve 2 pkgs. dry yeast in ½ c. lukewarm water. Set aside. In a large bowl, dissolve ½ c. sugar and ½ c. shortening in the ½ c. boiling water. Cool. After cooled, add to large bowl, 1½ c. cold water, 2 well-beaten eggs, the salt, and the yeast-water mixture. Stir together.
- 2. Add 4 c. all-purpose flour and beat with electric mixer until smooth. Add 3 more c. flour and stir together with a spoon. Place in large greased bowl and place in refrigerator for at least 2 hours before using. (I use the same bowl, just wipe it out and grease). This may be stored in the refrigerator for up to 2 weeks.
- 3. Divide dough into 2 equal parts. Place the other half back into refrigerator. Roll dough out on lightly floured surface into a 9"x15" rectangle.
- 4. Spread the butter directly on dough. On top of the butter, sprinkle 2 T sugar, 1 T brown sugar, and 1 t cinnamon. If using, sprinkle the raisins, walnuts, Craisins, and or pomegranates.
- 5. From a wide side, roll into a roll, as if making cinnamon rolls. Pinch edge all the way across so that it won't unroll. Place the pinched edge underneath to hide it. Transfer onto a greased cookie sheet. Bring the ends together (pinch them together) and make a uniform ring.
- 6. From the outside cutting inward make cuts with scissors, ¾ into the wreath, 1" apart all the way around. Take each section and twist ¼ turn, laying each section on its side. Use this technique all the way around, in a clockwise direction. Let rise for 1-2 hours.
- 7. Bake at 350 degrees for approximately 25-30 minutes, until golden brown. Let cool on rack.
- 8. While baking, make the icing by mixing 2 tbsp. melted butter, 1 c. confectioners sugar, 1 tbsp. milk, and 1 tsp. vanilla or almond extra. When cooled, drizzle with vanilla icing.
- 9. Garnish with green and red maraschino cherries and English walnut halves.



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#### Standing At the Pearly Gates...

## Run Forrest Run

When Forrest Gump died, he stood in front of St. Peter at the Pearly Gates. St. Peter said, "Welcome, Forrest. We've heard a lot about you." He continued, "Unfortunately, it's getting pretty crowded up here and we find that we now have to give people an entrance examination before we let them in."

"Okay," said Forrest. "I hope it's not too hard. I've already been through a test. My momma used to say, 'Life is like a final exam. It's hard.'

"Yes, Forrest, I know. But this test is only three questions. Here they are."

- 1) Which two days of the week begin with the letter 'T'?"
- 2) How many seconds are in a year?
- 3) What is God's first name?

"Well, sir," said Forrest, "The first one is easy. Which two days of the week begin with the letter 'T'? Today and Tomorrow."

St. Peter looked surprised and said, "Well, that wasn't the answer I was looking for, but you have a point. I give you credit for that answer."

"The next question," said Forrest, "How many seconds are in a year? Twelve."

"Twelve?" said St. Peter, surprised and confused.

"Yes, sir. January 2nd, February 2nd, March 2nd..." St. Peter interrupted him. "I see what you mean. I'll have to give you credit for that one, too."

"And the last question," said Forrest, "What is God's first name? It's Andy." "Andy?" said St. Peter, in shock. "How did you come up with 'Andy'?" "I learned it in church. We used to sing about it." Forrest broke into song, "Andy walks with me, Andy talks with me, Andy tells me I am His own."

St. Peter opened the gate to heaven and said,

"Run, Forrest, Run!"





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