



beauty for ashes

introducing...

Where did the school year go? It seems like just yesterday we were preparing for a new batch of freshmen to hit our campuses and now many of those young students are knit into our churches and becoming leaders themselves. Change happens before our eyes and yet often we get comfortable with the way things are and may not want things to change. Both Peggy and Shalom have been willing to step out of their comfort zone to try new things recently. As a result, both have been greatly blessed. Our prayer is that you will also experience this blessing as you follow Christ's leading.

For His Glory, Wendy & Kathy

wilderness experience *peggy myers* *columbia, missouri*

Women's Wilderness LT has appealed to me from the first time I heard about it. I loved the thought of spending time in the mountains with God alone, because this opportunity would not present itself in my normal, everyday life. I loved the idea of meeting with God under circumstances that I had not encountered (two days of solitude, camping without distractions, etc.). I thought that meeting God under these conditions would help me grow, because the environment of WWLT is designed to focus solely on Him.

To give some background, this year leading up to my WWLT experience was difficult for me. I had moved home to raise support and lost some good friendships in the process. I came back to The Rock in Columbia,

Missouri; and though I loved my job, I was surrounded by new faces and felt the lack of friendships I had lost. I signed up for WWLT hoping to retreat, rest and refuel with God.

The first night of WWLT was low key. We woke early the next morning to hike up the mountain. I enjoyed the hike and the other women but was ready to be alone. That first night, I wondered what my two days of solitude would look like. As I prayed, I realized that I wanted to take the two days to be friends with God. This idea excited me, because I lacked solid friendships but desperately wanted to "hang out" with a friend. I woke the next morning eager to start this process, but soon realized that I didn't know how to be friends with God. I prayed that God

would reveal Himself to me as a friend, and He did so throughout the next two days.

The Lord taught me friendship in several instances, but I will focus on just a few. During the first day, I felt led to read about Jesus. I read through Matthew 5-7 because that section is comprised of Jesus' own words. I wanted to read His words so that I could know Him better. While hiking later on, I felt an urge to talk to God about some minor things. So, this is what I did. The conversation was like any normal conversation I would have with anyone else, only the other party didn't speak audibly. Afterward, I sensed that God was pleased. I always pray for and about things; but I rarely, if ever, just talk to God about them. As I thought about this conversation, I

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staff profile: *shalom sanchez* *los angeles, california*

Many women have communicated how their lives have gone down a path they did not expect. This is very true for me as well. I attended LT right after I graduated from college in 2000, and something from that LT has stuck with me ever since then. I can still remember how one of the pastors was talking about the faith chapter in Hebrews and how men and women in the Bible waited on God's promises and trusted God. Man died without seeing promises fulfilled but still trusted and believed in God. Waiting a couple of years or even a month is hard for me to do, so I can't imagine waiting and even dying still trusting and having faith in the unfulfilled promises. Hearing these stories challenged me to wait more on God's timing and not take things in my own hands. Of course, it has been harder than I thought to do this.

During college I sensed God calling me to inner city ministry in Los Angeles. Waiting on God, it took four years before I felt God's peace to move. I have been in LA for 7 years and just recently began to feel like am I finally doing what I really love and desire to do. I have started mentoring college students and at-risk high school students at a local high school. I am also getting ready to help start a church in the neighborhood I have been living and working in for the past 4 years. In many ways I am in

a place I never imagined I would be, yet more content and happier than I have ever been. God put this verse on my heart that Paul wrote to the Philippians and I pray it can be something I can say as well. Philippians 4:12-13 "I know what it is to be in need and I know what it is to have plenty I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want I can do everything through him who gives me strength." The key is the last part—I want God to give me the strength and not do anything in my own power.

My life seems to be a recurring cycle of saying, "I will never do that," and then God changing my heart. I never thought I would go to a small college, never thought I would move to LA, never thought I would work with college students, never thought I would still be single at my age, and I never thought I would participate in a marathon. Of course, all of these things I can now see have been such a gift from God. It's funny how much I have fought God in these areas. When I finally submitted, I was able to see how much a blessing they have been. The



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wilderness

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remembered my reading from Matthew earlier, and I realized that God was showing me how to be friends with Him. He wanted me to take time to get to know Jesus; and then He wanted me to take time to experience Him in a new way, in this conversational way. I realized that's what friends do. They take time to get to know each other and to experience each other.

Another example happened on the last night. I had been kind of zoning out when the Lord very clearly said, "Go play." I had been in the woods for two days, but hadn't run across any fallen trees, swung from any branches, or jumped in any creeks. Abstinence from this behavior is unusual for me, because I love doing all of these things. After sensing God's leading, I ran around the mountainside playing and immensely enjoying God's creation. After about thirty minutes, I found myself in a little valley, and I turned my face toward the hills that encased me and realized that I was witnessing the most beautiful sight I had ever seen. The sun was setting, and its golden rays illuminated the hills and the purple flowers. The creek was crisp and God's glory stretched upwards all around me. I had to stop and sing praise songs. At the end of this time, I realized that I was completely enjoying myself and God, and I knew that He was enjoying me. He had enjoyed me as I enjoyed His creation, and I relished in singing His praises as He relished in hearing them. I knew God as a friend in that moment. We just enjoyed each other, as friends do.

God is my father, and in that relationship, He provides readily and willingly for me. He gives much while I receive. God is also my Healer. He listens to my brokenness



and puts my pieces back together. He gives healing, and I receive. God is my redeemer. I am a sinner, and can't make up for it, but God sent His Son to pay the price of my sin for me. He gives redemption, and I receive.

I have known God in several roles, and He is the main giver in all of them. I know Him in a new way now however, a more reciprocal way. He is my friend. A friend I can talk to and a friend who can talk to me. A friend who gives and a friend that I can give back to (though my giving does not nearly equal His). A friend I can get to know and a friend who knows me. This friendship is enjoyable, and it has to be a two-way street, as all friendships are. I know I will continue to experience God in



Peggy (in the front) with other gals at WWLT

different roles during different seasons of my life, but I am delighted to have experienced Him more fully as a friend. Women's Wilderness LT is different for everybody, and God meets each participant where they are at. For me, during WWLT I got to spend two full days with my best friend. I'd say that's a pretty good deal.

shalom

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Lord knows my desires even more than I know my own.

A big thing for me right now has been running a marathon. I have never liked running, so the idea of running a marathon or even more, *training* for a marathon was something I never would have planned to do. Some of my friends have been working with at-risk high school kids in a mentor program for the past 4 years. They work with the kids on all levels of life goal and in the process of all of it they help train them to run the LA marathon. I have always desired the avenue of mentoring they were involved with, minus the running.

All that changed this year. I started getting involved with the mentor side of this ministry once a month, and then started helping the slower students with core strengthening a couple of times a week. I assumed this would be the only part I would be involved with; but I got more and more involved. It has been such an amazing way to live life with these kids and bring the light of Jesus to them. As the training has gotten more intense, the conversations I have been able to have with the kids have gotten

more intense. I was able to share the gospel with one student that had never heard it before. Now he will be my running partner in the marathon. The Lord knows me so well and knew I would love **all** aspect of this kind of mentoring. It has been something I never would have imagined I could do or would want to do, but now I am so excited for this gift the Lord has given me.

With all of this I can not help but think of this verse in Ephesians 3:16-21 "I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God. Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

Update: The marathon was on Memorial Day and all 17 students finished well. In addition, Shalom finished and hit her goal! Way to go, Shalom!

"To all who mourn in Israel, he will give beauty for ashes, joy instead of mourning, praise instead of despair. For the Lord has planted them like strong and graceful oaks for his own glory." ~ Isaiah 61:3 NLT