

# Training for Triumph E-Newsletter Issue 010 May 2006

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new! Website:

[www.trainingfortrumphhomeschool.com](http://www.trainingfortrumphhomeschool.com)

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**1. Training for Triumph (TFT) Events and Announcements**

\*Letter From Donna—including CQLA testimonial!

Dear Readers,

This school year is winding down, and we are all turning our thoughts toward summer activities (lots of editing and typesetting, national speech and debate tournament, serving at disability camps, and serving in El Salvador for our girls; playing outside, playing kickball with their parents and siblings, long library visits, and lots of grass mowing (!) for our little boys) and toward next year's school plans. For those of you who are looking for an all-in-one language arts program with a composition and character focus, check out *Character Quality Language Arts* like Cari did last fall. She wrote to us recently:

My son is weaker in writing and sentence structure/application of grammar than any other subject (he has SO hated it for years now)... and until CQLA, there just hasn't been decent curriculum out there

for reluctant writers that wasn't a huge amount of preparation work for me. I was most pleased that he scored so well on the ACT after only a few months of working on CQLA---In October of 2005, he scored a 26 in English on the ACT, with that being his lowest scoring section. A couple of months later, he began CQLA, and after only four months of doing CQLA, he took the ACT again and scored a 31 in English (grammar, structure, rhetorical, etc)--a five point--20% increase! I was SO pleased...and I knew you would enjoy knowing your hard work in making CQLA available to homeschoolers was put to good use.

I know this is supposed to be a homeschool newsletter, but we Moms (generally the primary teacher) cannot do our jobs without many key things in our lives, two of which include Mother's Day desserts (!) and hearts that are free from bitterness and unbiblical expectations of God. For those reasons, this issue includes my favorite dessert recipes that my kids like to make for Mom (and others) for special occasions, a poem about my journey through grief, and an article entitled "Overcoming and Avoiding Bitterness," which details the process I have gone through in overcoming bitterness---and how to avoid becoming bitter in the first place. The best Mother's Day gift you can give yourself (and your family) is to overcome bitterness towards God and others that you may have allowed to grow as a result of unmet expectations. This article comes to you with much prayer and hope that you will find the peace that I have found over the past several years as I have sought to release God and others from expectations that when (seemingly or actually) unmet, may cause anger, hurt, and bitterness.

In other news, check out Kayla's new book, *Cloud of Witnesses*, a biographical compilation of godly heroes for second through fifth grade students. This is an awesome reader, beneficial read-aloud, and terrific writing source for young children. Lastly, if you are near Fort Wayne, plan to come to our "Almost 3 R's Workshop," an all-day language arts workshop for homeschooling parents. (See details below and at our website.)

Happy Mother's Day, Homeschooling Moms! They say a mother's work is never done---and that saying was derived before homeschooling ever gained in popularity. The author of this maxim couldn't have had any idea how true that would be in the lives of homeschooling moms. So...happy Mother's Day---and be not weary in well doing!

In His love,  
Donna

**\*Calendar of Events for TFT**

We are enjoying our convention season! We are getting to speak about some new topics, as well as the tried and true language arts, writing, and family life topics. If you will be attending one of the conventions/gatherings listed below, please stop by our booth and visit us—or come to one of our workshops.

If you are a coordinator for an event, and you are interested in having us speak, visit our web site's listing of thirty to forty speaking topics (being added to constantly) or contact us. We can adapt the workshops to your event/schedule as needed.

**Friday, May 19<sup>th</sup>: Fort Wayne Preview Night at First Assembly of God:**

Kayla and Cami are speaking about "Raising Children Who Are Ministry Minded"

Ray and Donna are speaking about their "Top 20 Pieces of Advice From Twenty Years of Homeschooling"

**Saturday, May 20<sup>th</sup>:** Donna speaking at Fort Wayne Area Home School expo—

\*Character Quality Language Arts

\*Top Twenty Products From Twenty Years of Homeschooling

**Friday and Saturday, June 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup>: Southern Illinois Homeschool Convention –**

Ray:

\*Introducing Speech and Debate

\*Meeting the Needs of Your Wife and Children

Donna:

\*Creating a Love for Learning

\*Prioritizing Your Life, School, and Home

\*Top 20 Products From 20 Years of Homeschooling

**Thursday, June 22<sup>nd</sup>; Friday, June 23<sup>rd</sup>; and Saturday, June 24<sup>th</sup>:** Ray, Donna, and two of the girls will be speaking at the Christian Home Educators' of Ohio convention---

\*Donna: Life in the Day of a Homeschooled Preschooler

\* Kayla: Dyslexia in the Real World

\*Ray and Donna: Reaching the Heart of Your Teen

\*Kayla, Cami, and Kara: Serving the Lord by Serving Your Family

\*Donna: Character Quality Language Arts

\*Donna: Top Twenty Products From Twenty Years of Homeschooling (last two are our vendor workshops)

**Friday, July 14<sup>th</sup> and Saturday, July 15<sup>th</sup>: Louisville, KY Homeschool Conference:** Ray and Donna will be doing their vendor workshops and getting to know the folks in Kentucky!

\*Character Quality Language Arts

\*Top Twenty Products From Twenty Years of Homeschooling

### **\*Check out our new web site!**

If you haven't checked out our web site yet, we invite you to do so! We have many articles, Frequently Asked Questions, past newsletters, curriculum descriptions, and more. It is filled with links to take you to our English curriculum, our tape sets, our character materials, our speech and debate items, sample essays, and more. We have added our "Top 20 Products From 20 Years of Homeschooling," so check it out!

For those of you who purchased the old *CQLA Teacher's Guide*, you will find the Frequently Asked Questions and Character and Content Area Overviews at the web site for you to print off, so you do not have to purchase the new TG if you would rather not.

Additionally, we have a full one month sample for each of the four levels (Pre A, A, B, and C) of CQLA that you may print off and use with your children for four to five weeks. That's right. One full month of curriculum to try before you buy! Just go to CQLA, then the four levels, then the sample units, and print! (Also accessible at bottom of home page now!)

### **\*Friends Wanting TFT Newsletters and Updates**

If you have friends who would like to receive TFT newsletters and updates, please have them email Kara at [trainingfortrumph@mchsi.com](mailto:trainingfortrumph@mchsi.com). Also, past newsletters are available for reading and printing off at our web site [www.trainingfortrumphhomeschool.com](http://www.trainingfortrumphhomeschool.com).

### **\*Graduation Open House Tips and Recipes Available at our Web Site**

If you are looking for graduation open house help and recipes, go to our web site, click on "Past Issues of Newsletters," and open the May/June 2005 edition. This newsletter is filled with helpful hints for hosting a graduation open house, such as formula for determining approximate number of guests you may expect, our favorite open house recipes, money saving ideas, and more. If you have a graduate from homeschooling this year, congratulations! I've always said that

when it comes to homeschool graduations, the parents should wear the cap and gown and get cards and cash too! ☺

### **FREE Language Arts Workshop in Fort Wayne, Indiana This Summer**

Plans are being made and a facility is being secured for Training for Triumph to co-host a free language arts workshop for homeschooling parents. We are hoping to hold it on a Saturday in mid-July. It will run from eight am or so until four or five in the afternoon, with lunch being available for purchase. (Proceeds from lunch will go to One Heart Disability Ministry.) We will have several fifty minute sessions, and each session will be scheduled in such a way that you may just attend the portion of the workshop that you desire (i.e. reading and early language skills; grammar and SAT prep, etc.). Or you may attend all day! Watch future e-newsletters and our website for the details as they unfold.

### **Fall Cottage Classes for TFT Announced**

Training for Triumph's fall cottage class schedule and registration form are now available at our website—and will be available at the Fort Wayne Homeschooling Expo as well. We have something for everyone this fall---art for elementary and middle school students, several writing classes (including composition, story writing, and research paper), US history, apologetics, speech and debate, elementary and middle school speech, economics, and sign language. Check us out for a class or two for your students this fall!

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### **2. Spotlight on One of Our Products—New Product Now Available Through Training for Triumph: *Cloud of Witnesses***

*Cloud of Witnesses* is a biographical compilation of fifteen godly heroes. Finally, a biographical compilation written at an elementary level! This soft-cover book of approximately 120 pages contains short biographies of heroes that children should admire, including Hudson Taylor, Amy Carmichael, Gladys Aylward, George Mueller, Adoniram Judson, and more. This book tells the story of each person's life and ministry at a third or fourth grade reading level. While this is a new book, written by Kayla during her last two years of high school, it represents a few biographical compilations that we have used for years for writing source material that are no longer being published. Children in grades two through six will no longer have to wade through thick biographies to find material for

biographical essays. May also be used for family devotions and read aloud. The cost for this book is \$10.

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### **3. Frequently Asked Questions About WBLA, CQLA, or Language Arts**

\*How can I learn to be a better CQLA teacher?

First of all, I want to encourage you that once you "learn the ropes," you will always have the same format, the same order, the same style of lessons, etc. in all CQLA's for all levels! Thus, trying to stick with it during the learning curve can be very valuable for home schooling moms. I will enumerate some answers below.

1. If you want an overview of the entire program, we recommend that you get the *CQLA Teacher's Guide* that comes with a cassette explaining the program. It is only \$18.00, and it reviews the entire program---with an actual paper copy of a lesson in front of you to follow along --and has over a hundred pages of helps for CQLA teachers. (For non-CQLA users, this TG contains the entire Checklist Challenge that a high school senior should be able to do to one of his papers and Grammar Cards containing grammar and punctuation rules in alphabetical order. Valuable resource even if you decide not to use CQLA!)
2. If you want to learn more about what a weekly lesson should look like, you may want to order the CQLA demonstration video from Training for Triumph for \$15.00. It shows me teaching two of my Level B students one entire weekly lesson (in a very fast forty-five minutes!). With the video, you get the weekly lesson that correlates, so you can follow along with me and my students. I think just seeing it in action helps tremendously and answers so many of the beginning questions (including "Which passage?").
3. We have a three-tape cassette series entitled *The Almost Three R's* in which I describe how to teach reading, language arts, and composition. This cassette series is available for \$12.00 and comes in a three-cavity cassette holder. It is unrelated to CQLA in that it does not reference the program, but many of the concepts CQLA ascribes to are elaborated on in it.
4. We are developing all day language arts workshops in which I describe how to use CQLA, give Moms a "Grammar 101" lesson, teach editing and revising strategies, and more. This workshop will be appropriate for CQLA and non-CQLA users, so you would be able to bring friends along who are not using CQLA too. Contact us to set up a workshop in your area.

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### **4. To Make You Laugh; To Make You Cry; To Make You Smile; To Make You Ponder... Prose, Poetry, and Anecdotes**

## “Grief Journey”

by Donna Reish

He became my all when I least expected it—so suddenly it came,  
The day I went from a partial trust---to fully trusting His name.  
It took such great loss to receive such gain—to wholly trust Him for all,  
Yet now my faith seems so grand, when before it had been so small.  
He took from my grasp what I clung to, fingers curled ‘round it so tight,  
And led me by that now-opened hand—through the deepest, darkest night.

We walked through the barren desert; my thirst became so grand,  
Then He quenched it from rivers of living water—I drank it from His own hand.  
We walked through the thick, scary wilderness---I held onto my Everything,  
He opened His arms like a mother bird, and sheltered me under His wing.  
I cried a river of tears—and each one He tenderly dried,  
Then He rocked me just like the child I am, and with me, I saw He cried.

We took the dangerous trek, on the steep, rugged mountain side,  
And with every step he held me up—as my foot continued to slide.  
For rest, we went into caves—they were dark and cold and damp,  
He warmed them with the Light of Himself—He became our Lamp.  
We faced all kinds of dangers, eerie noises and piercing sounds,  
His soothing voice scattered them; soon the dangers were no longer found.

The journey seemed long and endless, but at last we reached the top,  
The beauty I now beheld—Oh, I was glad I hadn’t stopped!  
We picked wildflowers together and talked as we sat in the sun,  
The joy we shared on the highest peak can be compared to none.  
He told me secrets of His great love—mysteries I’ve never known,  
Then He led me home, with my heart so free-and I’ll never be alone.

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### 5. Book Review Just for You

*Help for the Harried Homeschooler* by Christine M. Field

Over twenty thousand homeschoolers have been helped by Christine Field’s thorough homeschooling book, *Help for the Harried Homeschooler*. I can see why so many moms love this book! First of all, Christine has a love for homeschooling and homeschooling moms. Her desire to help homeschoolers succeed is obvious in her writings (in her books and magazine articles). Second of all, she gives so many how-to’s that you feel as though you are at a family/homeschool conference right in your house! *Help for the Harried Homeschooler* is sub-titled “A Practical Guide to Balancing Your Child’s Education With the Rest of Your Life,” and the author gives many ideas and practical tips for doing just that.

This book is divided into sections: Homeschool Basics, In the Homeschool Classroom, Family Issues and the Homeschool, and Personal Issues and the Homeschool. Within those, she has helpful chapters, such as “Chaos Control,” “Structure vs. Freedom,” “Beyond Academics,” “Evaluation,” “Learning From Burnout,” and more. At more than 270 pages, you will more than get your money’s worth if you purchase *Help for the Harried Homeschooler*.”

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## 6. In the Kitchen

### Desserts for Mom for Mother’s Day

I thought I would share some of my favorites that I like for our baker to make in case some of your kids want to make you a Mother’s Day dessert! These are my absolute top favorite things to have Kayla bake for company, etc. Of course, now the other girls can make most of them, too, but for many years Kayla was our designated chef, and she enjoyed making them many, many times throughout the years.

#### Cherry Delight

A delicious, creamy dish that my mom made for our holidays when I was little. You can cut the filling and cherries in half and make it in one pre-made graham cracker pie crust instead of a 9 x 13 baking dish, if desired.

#### Crust:

2 ½ cups graham cracker crumbs                      ½ cup sugar  
2/3 cup butter, melted

#### Filling:

2 bars cream cheese, softened  
16 oz. Cool Whip  
3 cups powdered sugar                                      2 tsp vanilla

Two cans cherry pie filling

1. Mix crumbs and sugar in 9 x 13 glass baking dish or rectangular Tupperware.

2. Pour melted butter over the crumb mixture and press down into the pan evenly.
3. Cream the cream cheese in mixer.
4. Add powdered sugar and continue creaming. Add vanilla.
5. Fold in cool whip until it is mixed throughout.
6. Dollop filling over crust everywhere and smooth down evenly.
7. Cover entire filling with the two cans of pie filling.
8. Refrigerate and serve.
9. Serves 12+.

### Butterscotch Pudding

There's nothing like homemade butterscotch pudding. We use this for pies, occasionally, but more often than not, we use it for "banana pudding." It is a hit everywhere we take it---layer pudding, vanilla wafers, banana slices, walnuts, and real whipped cream—then repeat. (We often just put walnuts in one half for those who do not like nuts.) Everyone raves about it---and Kayla has learned great patience in making this delicacy—and makes it better than anyone I know!

2 cups brown sugar	4 TBSP sugar
1 stick butter	3 eggs
6 TBSP water	4 cups milk
¼ tsp salt	2 tsp vanilla
2/3 cup cornstarch/flour mixture	

1. Put brown sugar, butter, and water in pan.
2. Boil for about five minutes until syrup is light brown.
3. Add milk and heat until just about boiling.
4. Combine flour/cornstarch mixture, salt, sugar, beaten eggs, and just enough *extra* milk (0-4 TBSP) to pour easily.
5. Add flour-cornstarch mixture to pan.
6. Cook on medium heat until thick, stirring constantly with wire whisk. (Watch closely or it will stick or scorch.)
7. Remove from heat and add vanilla.
8. Makes 10-12 servings or enough filling for two pies.

### Chocolate Chip Cookies

This is our regular chocolate chip cookie recipe. It is Toll House Chocolate Chip Cookies without the coconut. When sugars and butter are thoroughly whipped, these are the best chocolate chip cookies ever.

4 ½ cup flour  
2 tsp baking soda  
2 tsp salt  
2 cups butter and Crisco combined (1 cup of each)  
2 (12 oz) pkg chocolate chips  
1 ½ cup sugar

1 ½ cup firmly packed brown sugar  
4 eggs  
4 eggs

1. Preheat oven to 375'.
2. In bowl, combine flour, baking soda, and salt.
3. In mixing bowl, cream butter, Crisco, sugar, brown sugar, and vanilla thoroughly.
4. Beat in eggs.
5. Gradually add flour mixture.
6. Stir in chocolate chips by hand until thoroughly mixed.
7. Bake in convection at 375' for 6-9 minutes; 9-11 minutes regular oven.
8. Makes 10 dozen 2 ½ inch cookies.

### Texas Sheet Cake

This makes a lot of cake for a large group—and is our favorite sheet cake recipe as it is moist and does not contain cinnamon (something that we feel should never be mixed with chocolate!). The icing is a snap—and the cake is frosted while still warm. Very easy and fast. Notice it calls for a “jellyroll” pan—not a 9 x 13 pan.

2 sticks butter  
2 Tbsp (heaping) cocoa  
1 c water  
2 c. white sugar  
2 c. flour  
1/2 tsp. salt  
1 tsp. soda  
1/2 c. sour cream

Mix butter, cocoa, and water and bring to a boil. Put the rest of ingredients in a bowl and mix well, then add the cocoa mixture and mix. Pour into a greased pan ( 10 1/2 x 13 1/2 ). Bake at 350\* for 20 minutes.

### Texas Sheet Cake Frosting

1 stick butter  
6 Tbsp milk  
2 Tbsp. cocoa

Boil the above ingredients for one minute. Add 1 # box ( about 3 3/4 c.) powdered sugar, 1 tsp vanilla and 1 cup nuts (opt.). Frost cake while warm.

### Scotcheroos

Yummy bars made with either Rice Krispies or Special K (corn flakes type cereal) cereal (or a combination of the two). Turns out fine with generic cereal. Also yields a huge amount—and kids love them!

12 cups Rice Krispies and/or Special K cereal  
2 cups corn syrup (white or clear Karo)  
2 cups heaping peanut butter  
2 cups granulated sugar

1 12 oz bag chocolate chips  
1 12 oz bag butterscotch chips

1. Place corn syrup and peanut butter in sauce pan over medium heat.
2. Cook on medium heat, stirring frequently until mixture is boiling.
3. Meanwhile, measure out cereal and pour in huge bowl with enough room left for stirring hot mixture into/over the cereal.
4. Once mixture is boiling, remove from heat and add the peanut butter
5. Pour hot mixture over the cereal, trying to coat cereal evenly.
6. Stir hot mixture into cereal until cereal is well coated.
7. Press cereal and syrup mixture into two 9 x 13 pans or one huge/steam table type pan that is sprayed well with PAM or buttered liberally.
8. Push down evenly and firmly, so the bars are compacted as opposed to light or loose cereal.
9. Melt chocolate chips or butterscotch chips according to favorite method; we put them evenly into glass measure, cover with plastic wrap, and microwave at 50% of power for three to five minutes. Remove from micro and stir. Chips should melt easily when stirring. If not, micro at 50% for an additional 30 seconds, stirring every fifteen seconds or until thoroughly melted. (Note: Mixture will not appear melted unless stirred. Do not overheat or chips will become hard and will never remelt properly.)
10. Spread chocolate/butterscotch chip mixture evenly over bars.
11. Cool and cut into squares.
12. Freezes well

### Apple Crisp

This wonderful apple recipe is the best apple crisp recipe I have ever had. It was given to me from a German Baptist friend back home (Union City, Indiana many, many years ago) and is especially yummy because it adds another step that most apple crisp recipes omit—that of a syrup over the apples before the topping is added. It takes extra time, but it is SO worth it!

6 cups finely diced apples

Syrup:

$\frac{3}{4}$ cup sugar	1 cup water
2 TBSP corn starch or quick tapioca	
$\frac{1}{2}$ tsp vanilla	

Topping:

1 cup flour	$\frac{3}{4}$ cup quick oatmeal
1 cup brown sugar	1 tsp cinnamon
$\frac{1}{2}$ cup melted butter	

1. Place apples in greased 9x12 baking dish.
2. Combine syrup ingredients (except vanilla) in sauce pan, and cook on medium heat, stirring often, until thick and clear. Remove syrup from heat and stir in vanilla. (I prefer the tapioca for thickening this sauce.)
3. Pour syrup over the apples in the baking dish.
4. Combine all topping ingredients in bowl, cutting in melted butter with fork or pastry cutter until mixture is crumbly.
5. Sprinkle topping over apples and syrup until evenly distributed. (Note: You may also use  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the topping in the bottom of the baking dish, beneath the apples, if desired.)
6. Bake at 350° preheated oven for 45-60 minutes until apples are cooked and the crisp is bubbly and browned. (Convection oven: 30-45 minutes.)
7. Serves 8-10.

### Apple Dumplings

This recipe was given to me by Ray's Grandma Rager. She always made these in a little toaster oven (so she didn't heat up her kitchen with her big oven!) when we went to visit her in Florida when Ray and I were first married. We only visited her once a year, but she taught me more about cooking and baking in our short visits than anyone else, showing me how to make white sauce, apple dumplings, swiss steak, apple salad, meatloaf, hamburger stew, and more.



3. Place each apple half in center of a dough piece, sprinkle apple with cinnamon-sugar mixture, pull dough up around apple half and seal at top by pinching dough together with fingers.
4. Place dumplings in two oiled 9 x 13 pan.
5. Pour syrup over apples.
6. Bake in preheated 375' oven for 35-45 minutes until crust is golden and apples are cooked. (Convection oven: 25-30 minutes.)

### Lilli's Yummy Frosting

This frosting is simple and fast since it is not a cooked frosting; however, the taste seems like it would take a long time. We love this frosting between layers of a double layer (or four layers when two layers are sliced in two, like a "torte") chocolate cake made with a Duncan Hines cake mix. It is a creamy, light (in texture, not in calories!) frosting that stays soft and creamy and must be refrigerated due to the whipping cream.

1 (8oz) pkg cream cheese softened  
2/3 cups packed brown sugar  
1 tsp vanilla  
1/8 tsp salt  
2 cups whipped cream (premade, like Cool Whip)

1. Cream the cream cheese until fluffy.
2. Pour all but whipped cream into mixing bowl and continue to stir until well blended.)
3. When well blended, fold in the whipped cream and stir by hand until all folded in.
4. May frost cake immediately or refrigerate the frosting, as desired.

### Heath Cake

Delicious, simple, and very rich! You add part of the toppings when still warm, so you do not even have the wait time after baking. Can be ready in a snap.

1 can sweetened condensed milk  
8 Heath bars, crushed or one bag Heath bits (we prefer the bars since they have chocolate on them)  
1 Duncan Hines chocolate cake mix and the ingredients called for on the box  
1 12 oz tub Cool Whip

1. Make cake according to directions on box and bake in a 9 x 13 baking dish.
2. After removing cake from the oven, while it is still warm, poke holes all over the cake with something about the size around of a pencil (i.e. non-spoon end of a medicine spoon, a knife that you twist once inserted, etc.).
3. Pour the sweetened condensed milk over the cake while warm. It will absorb into the cake and into the holes all over the cake.
4. When cake is cooled, sprinkled most of crushed Heath all over cake, reserving a small amount for topping.
5. Spread Cool Whip all over cake and sprinkle remaining Heath over it.

## **7. Get Connected: Internet Site Review for The Old Schoolhouse Magazine**

<http://www.thehomeschoolmagazine.com/>

I recently had the privilege of meeting Christine Field, author of *Help for the Harried Homeschooling Mom* and writer for *The Old Schoolhouse Magazine* (TOS). She gave me some back issues of TOS, which I quickly devoured. What an awesome magazine! Anyway, I thought readers would enjoy browsing at their incredibly helpful site. Check out the homeschoolbloggers. There are some interesting, helpful, heart-warming moms blogging there. Click and learn!

## **8. Article from TFT**

### **“Overcoming and Avoiding Bitterness”**

Many years ago I began down a path that led to a place in my walk with the Lord that was less than healthy for a Christian woman---a path of bitterness. Of course, I didn't know that I was heading that way when it was happening. That's the thing with bitterness; you often don't realize that you are becoming bitter until it is too late.

It began with the unexpected death of my twenty-four year old brother Billy from a form of walking pneumonia. Billy had had some rough years after his high school graduation, including drugs, alcohol, promiscuity, and depression. A year before his death, he came to live with me, Ray, and Joshua when I was nineteen years old and expecting Joshua. Things were turning around for Billy. He was born again, started college, and had a job he liked.

I had invested so much into Billy's life during his year with us---and felt that I was personally responsible for his salvation and life. My emotions were so wrapped up in his well being. When he died, I was devastated. How could God allow this to happen? This marked the planting of the first seeds of bitterness in what I call my "bitterness garden." True, only little bushes sprouted from this, but they were sprouting—and I was doing nothing to stop their growth.

A few years passed, and I developed RH antibodies during my second pregnancy. Our daughter was born healthy, but because she was a different blood type than I (and in spite of the appropriate preventive, rhogam shots), the antibodies appeared, and nothing could remove them. Our next three babies were healthy and unaffected by the antibodies since they had my blood type (and antibodies did not harm a baby with my blood type). We had dozens of ultra sounds and amniocenteses throughout these pregnancies to monitor their health, but they were healthy (God gave me what I wanted), so I had no reason to become angry with Him for a few years.

All that changed with our sixth child. He was the "wrong" blood type, and he became very sick after birth---and caused the antibodies to rise to extremely dangerous levels for any future affected babies. He was in the hospital for several days, followed by daily outpatient treatment/testing for another two weeks, resulting in a blood transfusion, but he eventually became healthy as the antibodies left his body and new blood was given to him. My response to these difficulties caused my "bitterness garden" to become even more fruitful. I was angry with God because He allowed the RH disease to interfere with my dream of ten children (as now any positive babies we had would probably die before birth). More bitterness sprouts, various bushes, trees, and vines, flourished.

The final planting (and the biggest one) in my bitterness garden took place when God allowed something to happen to us that made me hate---others, for sure—and perhaps even God Himself at times. I was grieved and devastated beyond what I ever thought possible. And now it was sealed: I could not trust God. He let bad things happen to me over and over.

So, fast forwarding to nearly seven years ago, I was expecting our eighth baby—a little girl whom we all loved more than I could have imagined. The pregnancy was difficult—we found out early on that she was the "right" blood type to become very sick from the now-dangerously high antibodies. I cried, prayed, worried, and cried again as I feared losing her (and my fertility, as once the RH disease killed one of our babies in utero, the chances of us having another live birth was very slim). Bi-weekly ultra sounds and at least bi-monthly amniocenteses followed to keep tabs on her health. Any signs of the RH disease harming her would require an intra-uterine blood transfusion every other week or so in order to keep her alive until she could be born.

At twenty-one weeks pregnant, I was having a small group meeting with my field trip moms/support group when a couple of dear friends and I began discussing my pregnancy. They knew my past bitterness and lack of trust in God—and they were good enough friends to call me on it: "Donna, why is it that you cannot trust God with this baby?" I wept as I reminded them that God could not be trusted because he let such bad things happen to me. I knew that He loved me. I knew

that He died for Me; and I loved Him---but to trust Him with those I loved was something my bitterness forbade me from doing.

They continued: “Why does God have to do what you want Him to do in order for you to trust Him?” Why couldn’t they understand---it wasn’t fair that God allowed Billy to die; it wasn’t fair that I had RH disease; it wasn’t fair that God let others hurt our family. If God was going to be that untrustworthy, I would have to try to handle things myself as best I could (i.e. trusting in my perinatologist, never trusting God for my children’s well-being, worrying that someone I loved would die again, etc.).

I cried and cried, and they loved me and prayed for me (just like they always have for the past ten to fifteen years of our friendships), but I was unmoved. I had a fruitful bitterness garden that was watered frequently with my tears of hurt and anger, and nothing could change that.

The next day, during my second ultra sound of that week, we discovered that our baby girl was sick. She would die in several days unless she had a successful intrauterine blood transfusion. We were admitted in the high-risk pregnancy unit in an Indianapolis hospital and the transfusion was started. However, at twenty-one weeks gestation, her cord was so small, we knew the transfusion might not work. A team of ten gathered around, ready to give her the blood that would buy her another week or two of life (until the next transfusion), and we all watched on the ultra-sound machine for two hours as our perinatologist attempted dozens of times to insert the transfusion needle into her tiny cord—only to poke microscopic holes in the cord, from which she bled to death after two hours of the attempted procedure. I thought I would die of heartache as I watched her slowly quit moving and saw her heart cease beating.

There is good news to this heart-wrenching story: halfway through the procedure, my discussion and prayers with my friends rang in my head. I didn’t want to be bitter towards God. I wanted to allow God to be God in my life. While lying there watching Carly’s cord slip away from the transfusion needle repeatedly, I told Him that I would accept whatever happened to our baby—and to my ability to have more children. I told Him that I was tired of being filled with bitterness and anger and that I know that I do not have a “right” to have things my own way. I told Him that I would trust Him regardless of what happened to our baby—and to me.

It was a good thing that happened when it did, because my weekend of grief was only beginning. To make an extremely long story short, I was induced and told that it would probably take seventy-two hours for her to deliver since she was so early. We questioned my laboring as I had had seven c-sections up to this point. The doctor felt sure I would be fine since she weighed less than one pound. Within twenty-four hours my fever was raging and the baby and the contents of my uterus were floating around my stomach as my uterus had ruptured. We went in for what was to be a one hour c-section and uterine repair but turned into a four hour process of trying to unadhere the placenta from the uterine wall (placenta accreta). I came out of the surgery with no baby---and no uterus.

To say that I was heart-broken would be a grave understatement. To say that our entire family hurt deeply does not adequately describe what we felt. I spent the next week in the hospital battling all sorts of things that resulted from the rupture and acreta—and battling the biggest foe of all: bitterness. Would I stay true to my word during the transfusion and not be angry at God for not giving me what I want or would my grief turn to anger, then bitterness—and begin planting that bitterness garden all over again?

As an aside here, you never know who you will have a chance to minister to through your daily life. The nurses called my experience the “weekend from hell.” Whenever a nurse change was made, the new nurse referenced my situation with what the previously-on-duty nurse said. During one such change, my new nurse said, “I’ve heard about you all from the other nurses.” I said, “I know; they told me what they’re calling my weekend.” She responded, “Oh, no, not that. I mean I’ve heard that you and your husband have this incredible marriage and relationship that every nurse on the floor is jealous of!” Ray was simply doing what he always did: being Jesus to those on the earth—loving and caring for me like he always does.

Anyway, we cried all week long---and I often lay across Carly’s empty hospital bassinette and wailed. I wept as we left the hospital—for the last time ever after a birth—empty handed. For weeks, I was incredibly sick ---physically and emotionally. Ray and I spent many hours talking and crying--we made a decision for Ray to leave his high-pressured, sixty-hour-a-week job and get a “regular” nine to five job in order to put the needed time and attention into the children we had. Life is too short to spend it on a career that forces you to not be able to do the things God calls you to do. (We had been discussing this for months; our experience that week confirmed what we needed to do.)

Yes, we grieved. And I still do. A certain song on the radio can have me crying for thirty minutes as I long for Carly. Seeing too many darling babies in a short amount of time makes me teary-eyed for days as I mourn the fertility that I no longer possess. Sometimes even writing curriculum can bring back the pain of not having any more children as I get overwhelmed with this season and tell myself that if I had been able to have more children, my life would be very different with little kids everywhere instead of deadlines and stress. (The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence!) But grief and bitterness are two very distinct things. Thankfully, I had much grief, but no bitterness.

Grief is the normal process we go through during loss. We hurt; we ache; we long for that which was taken from us; but after an appropriate amount of time (which is different for each person), we hurt less; we ache less; and we long less. My heart will always feel a hole from not having Carly, but there is no anger; there is no bitterness; there are no expectations that God must fulfill for me in order to trust Him.

Bitterness results when unmet needs (or seemingly unmet needs) are handled incorrectly. It often begins with grief, but instead of the grieving process waning and eventually ending, the grief turns to anger. We are angry at those who hurt us—and the God who allowed it to happen. Anger remains in us if do nothing to remove it. Then anger turns to bitterness.

We can become bitter at God for a multitude of reasons: past hurts, deep losses, not getting what we want, expectations that God does not meet, unyielded rights, and more. It is only through truly yielding our entire lives---and all of those unmet expectations---to God that we can be free of bitterness.

Oftentimes, a bitter person does not want to admit that she is bitter. We call our bitterness by other euphemisms in order to convince ourselves that we are not really bitter. We say that we are not bitter; we are just “hurt.” We say that we are just still grieving (after an appropriate grieving time has passed). We say that we just don’t understand God. We say that we are not bitter towards a person, but rather we are just deeply hurt (for how long?). We say that we are just broken-hearted—not bitter.

Grief has its place in the Christian life. Look at Job. I marveled, after Carly died, how deeply Job grieved. It gave me the peace to know that God expects us to hurt and grieve when we experience loss. Of course, Lazarus’ family and friends also mourned greatly when they lost their loved one. There comes a time, however, when grief can turn to bitterness; it is that transition we must be aware of.

So, how does one, first of all, avoid bitterness? We avoid bitterness when we are yielded—when we do not blackmail God or others into giving us what we want. If we do not have expectations of our husbands, of our children, of relatives, of friends, and of God, we will not become hurt or angry when those expectations are not met. When loss or hurt does come to us, we will, of course, ache, but we will not hold it over God’s head (or anyone else’s head) that it happened. We will turn to God and the appropriate people in our lives for comfort and love, but we will not “charge” God or anyone else with “failing us.”

What makes us think we have a “right” to a pain-free life? Why do we think God owes us a certain lifestyle or familial bliss? Don’t get me wrong: there are times that I’m scared to death of something bad happening to someone I love. There are faithless times when I’m afraid my children will marry selfish people—and not experience the marriages that I long for them to have. Sometimes I’m fearful of losing a loved one. I’m often scared of sickness and pain. But I know I don’t deserve to have everything my way---and I no longer expect God to give me everything my way—or else.

Once bitterness is within us, it takes more than simply saying, “I will no longer be bitter” to be free from it. We must release the bitterness we are holding—and the anger, resentment, jealousy, hurt, and expectations that caused it to grow in the first place. We have to love and trust God from then on—regardless of the circumstances of our lives. It isn’t easy. Sometimes I fall back into the same patterns—especially those of expectations from God—but I know God’s Word says that we should only expect food and clothing (“having food and raiment, let us be content)—and that pain is part of this world.

My bitterness garden is gone—no sprouts, blooms, or buds are apparent. I am working hard all the time to be sure it doesn’t have any new growth. I am trying

desperately to trust God—and not hold Him responsible for my “happiness”—but rather joy in the Lord and His salvation.

Overcoming bitterness has resulted in many other positives in my life—lessened expectations of Ray and the children, less negative ways of looking at others, more yielding of my rights, etc. These positives have affected my children in important ways too. They have also learned to trust God regardless of the outcome in situations. It has even affected little things, like winning debates and expectations of their siblings. My love for Ray has increased as I look at the wonderful things he is and does—and not at the things I think he should change. I’m more accepting of others who might disappoint me—and able to love my parents and step-mom more sincerely. My children do not feel responsible to be “good” in order to keep me happy. (Wanting to please me and feeling responsible for my happiness are two different things; I want them to want to please me, but not to feel a responsibility for my emotions.) I love God in a new and fresh way, with no strings attached. In effect, I am free.

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