

bloom!

Encouraging girls on their journey towards Biblical womanhood.

winter 2008

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Evans*

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*Mini
Winter
Issue!*

The Bulletin Board

White Hot Chocolate

This is the perfect drink for a winter day when you're expecting guests. After tasting this hot chocolate, you'll never want another again! *Submitted by Stephanie Theel*

Ingredients:

- 3 cups half-and-half cream, divided
- 2/3 cups vanilla baking chips
- 1 cinnamon stick (3 inches)
- 1/8 teaspoon ground nutmeg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/4 teaspoon almond extract
- Ground cinnamon, optional



Directions: In a saucepan, combine 1/4 cup cream, vanilla chips, cinnamon stick and nutmeg. Stir over low heat until chips are melted; discard the cinnamon stick. Add the remaining cream; stir until heated through. Remove from the heat and add the extracts. Sprinkle each serving with ground cinnamon if desired. Yield: 4 servings

—Simple Seasonal Crafts—

PRETTY POINSETTIA PENS

What you'll need:

- a pen
- green gardener's tape (available at most craft stores)
- an artificial poinsettia flower
- hot glue gun and glue

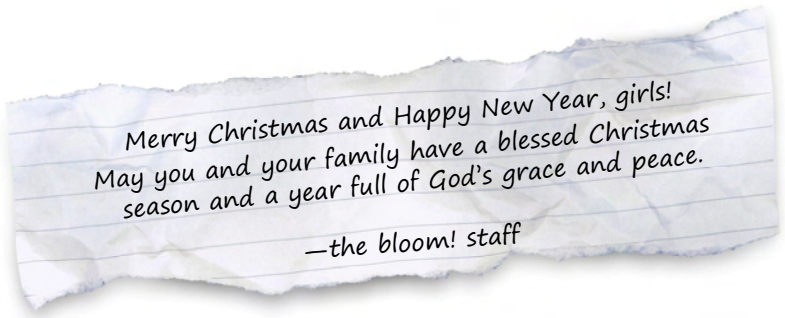
Instructions: Cut the artificial poinsettia blossom off the stem. Use the hot glue gun to attach the blossom to the top of the pen. Let dry. Take the cap off the pen and, beginning at the bottom, wrap the gardener's tape around the pen in a spiral until you reach the flower at the top. Put the cap back on the pen and write away!

FROSTED VOTIVE CANDLES

What you'll need:

- a glass votive and tealight candle
- modge podge glue (available at most craft stores)
- paint brush
- salt or white glitter

Instructions: Use the paintbrush to cover the glass votive with the modge podge glue. Before the glue dries, quickly sprinkle the glue-coated votive with salt OR white glitter. Be sure to keep the layer of salt or glitter thin (in other words: don't put too much on!). Let dry. Place candle inside the votive and light.



Merry Christmas and Happy New Year, girls!
 May you and your family have a blessed Christmas season and a year full of God's grace and peace.
 —the bloom! staff

"Christmas Eve"

By Christina Rossetti

Christmas hath a darkness
 Brighter than the blazing noon,
 Christmas hath a chillness
 Warmer than the heat of June,
 Christmas hath a beauty
 Lovelier than the world can show:
 For Christmas bringeth Jesus,
 Brought for us so low.

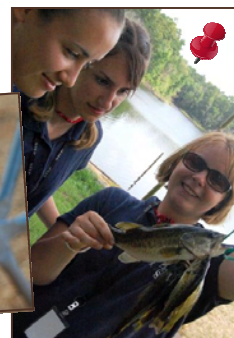
Earth, strike up your music,
 Birds that sing and bells that ring;
 Heaven hath answering music
 For all Angels soon to sing:
 Earth, put on your whitest
 Bridal robe of spotless snow:
 For Christmas bringeth Jesus,
 Brought for us so low.

This issue's Book Giveaway!

To win a free book of *Faithful Women and Their Extraordinary God* by Noel Piper, send us an e-mail with your full name and put "book giveaway" in the subject line. You must be a subscriber to enter the contest. The deadline for entry is January 26, 2009. The winner will be chosen randomly.



"So neither he who plants nor he who waters is anything, but only God who makes things grow."
 [1 Corinthians 3:7]



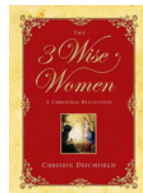
Extra, extra! Are you looking for a creative new way to snap a picture? Take some tips from these photos and check out **page 4** for more photos and suggestions from Janine Noble.

The BOOKSHELF

::This Issue's Recommended Reading::



Practicing Hospitality: The Joy of Serving Others by Pat Ennis and Lisa Tatlock



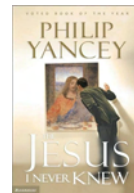
The Three Wise Women: A Christmas Reflection by Christin Ditchfield



The Complete Short Stories by Flannery O'Connor (ages 16+)



Worldliness: Resisting the Seduction of a Fallen World edited by C. J. Mahaney



The Jesus I Never Knew by Philip Yancey (ages 14+)

hope

“The Christmas message is that there is hope for a ruined humanity – hope of pardon, hope of peace with God, hope of glory – because at the Father’s will Jesus became poor, and was born in a stable so that thirty years later He might hang on a cross.”

J.I. Packer

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10

Dahlia Mayberry shares in the Sister to Sister column about resting in God.

But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those under the law, that we might receive the full rights of sons.

[Galatians 4:4-5]

:Our Purpose:

To encourage, inspire, and support girls on their journey towards a gospel-centered, world-altering, Biblical womanhood.

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We love to hear from our readers! Feel free to send us your suggestions, comments, questions, photographs, poetry, recipes, or article submissions.

Welcome to our mini winter issue! Because we’re just a bunch of teenagers who have responsibilities and school that come before the magazine, we’ve decided to have our winter issue be mini—half the size as usual. We hope this 12-page issue blesses and encourages you and we’ll be back to our regular 24-page issue come spring. Merry Christmas and Happy New Year!

In awe of Him,

Jessina Leonard, Megan Dutill, and Joanna Suich

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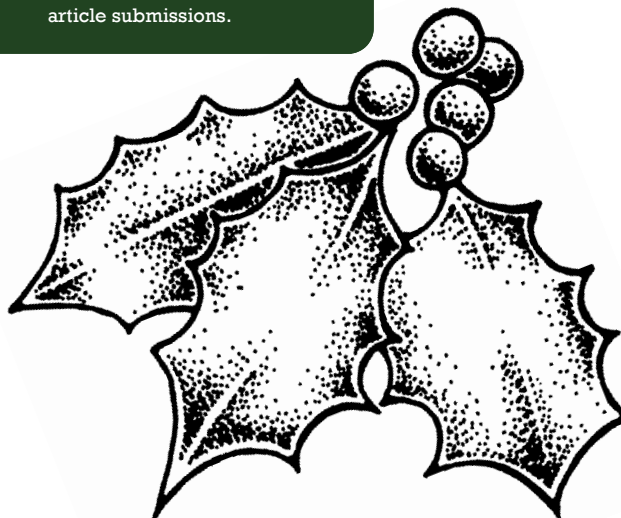
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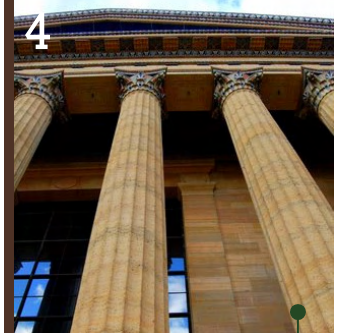
Jessina Leonard

Danielle Noble
Heather Paulsen



6

An interview with Elrena Evans about motherhood, writing, and the role of Christian women in feminism.



4

Practice these creative photography tips to take some stellar pictures this Christmas season.

{pho•tog•ra^{tips}•phy}

article & photography by Janine Noble

As we enter the Christmas season, there will be plenty of opportunities to take pictures! Choose a few of these tips and focus on making them work for you – and then add a few more. The more you get used to taking pictures, the better your eye will become in finding the “perfect” shot.



1

ZOOM IN. I love my zoom lens! Yet, even without a special zoom lens, you can still take a great picture. Be sure that you “fill the frame.” This means that you should try to fill the entire picture with your subject – instead of having distracting things in the background. There are two ways to “zoom in” – you can either use the “zoom” dial on your camera or you can take a few steps closer. Whenever possible, choose to take the few steps rather than zooming with the camera. This is because when you use the zoom dial, the picture quality decreases and any movement in your hands will cause the picture to become blurrier.



2

GO FOR THE ANGLE. This is one of my favorites! Instead of shooting strictly vertically or horizontally, tilt your camera and shoot on a 30° angle. If you do this, make sure the angle is large enough so others won't think you messed up. Whenever you break a rule, such as taking a straight picture, exaggerate so that people know that you purposely did it.

3

UTILIZE THE “RULE OF THIRDS.” For some reason, most people think that in order to take a good picture, you have to center the subject. Although this can be effective occasionally in certain circumstances, for the most part try to use the “rule of thirds.” To do this, divide your picture into thirds vertically and horizontally, then, place your subject in one of these lines. For an even more creative picture, position the subject on two intersecting lines!

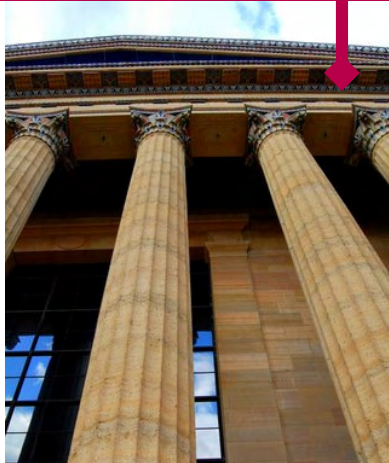
4

TAKE CANDID SHOTS. Digital photography has made it so much easier to experiment. Instead of taking two or three pictures at an event, you can easily take twenty or thirty. Some of my best pictures are candid shots – instead of having my subject look at the camera and say “cheese”! If you have a digital camera, take LOTS of pictures (and tell your friends to continue what they're doing instead of looking at you). You may end up with some priceless pictures!



5

CHANGE YOUR PERSPECTIVE. We're used to seeing the world from our eye-level. When you change your perspective, your pictures will also change. My friends sometimes think I'm weird because I'll lie on the ground or get in some interesting positions when I'm shooting pictures. Yet, I'd gladly get dirty to get a cool photo!



6

USE AN EDITING SOFTWARE. If you have a digital camera, your photography shouldn't end when you snap the picture. After you've uploaded it onto your computer, you can begin the editing process. You don't need Photoshop (and I wouldn't recommend that to start with!). A simple, free download such as Picasa works great! You can download it from <http://picasa.google.com>. Notice how much better the picture of my friends from Mexico looks once I edited it!



The *Real* Nativity Story

surprising facts from an excellent book

by Lara Bryant

When the phrase ‘nativity story’ is uttered, everyone paints a different picture in their head. My mind happens to envision a marionette puppet Christmas special they air on TV every year telling the story of Jesus’ birth. But no matter what comes to mind, there are usually several elements which stay the same – such as Mary riding on a donkey about to give birth, while a diligent Joseph is trying to find a place for them to stay. Somehow, I usually picture snow around the stable and Mary and Joseph being quite secluded until the shepherds and wisemen come to bow before the newborn king.

However, recently at my Bible study, we started going through a book called *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* by Kenneth Bailey. The first chapter detailed the birth of our Savior and completely changed my view of the miraculous event.

One of the first things that caught my attention was the fact that Joseph was from the line of King David. In our culture that doesn’t mean much, but in the Middle East, one’s family line is very important. It was a common practice in those days to invite travelers to stay at your home. Since Joseph had a royal lineage, when he took Mary into Bethlehem – known to the locals as ‘The City of David’ – all he had to do was say “I am Joseph, son of Jacob, son of Matthan... son of David” and all doors would be open for his growing family to stay. So how did they end up in a stable?

First off, if you read Luke 2:6 it says: “So it was, that *while they were there*, the days were completed for her to be delivered.” (NKJV, italics mine) Most people tend to envision it being night time when Joseph and Mary arrive in Bethlehem; they also see the innkeeper sending them away to the stable, and then moments later baby Jesus is born. However, with a closer look at what the Bible has to say, we find this is not most likely the case. The fact that they didn’t just show up one night and have the baby, means Joseph had a decent amount of time to acquire adequate housing. Also, the Bible states that Mary’s relatives Elizabeth and Zacharias lived in what we would call a suburb of Bethlehem. So if Mary started going into labor and the only shelter Joseph had found was a stable, one can logically assume the small family would go and stay with Mary’s relations.

So where did they end up? To answer that, close your eyes and envision the following: you walk into an average home in Bethlehem; the entryway, or what we know as a foyer, is small and rectangular, just large enough for some animals to fit into. Turn right and you’ll go up five or six steps into an average size living room- note there is no wall between the entryway and the living room, so watch your step or

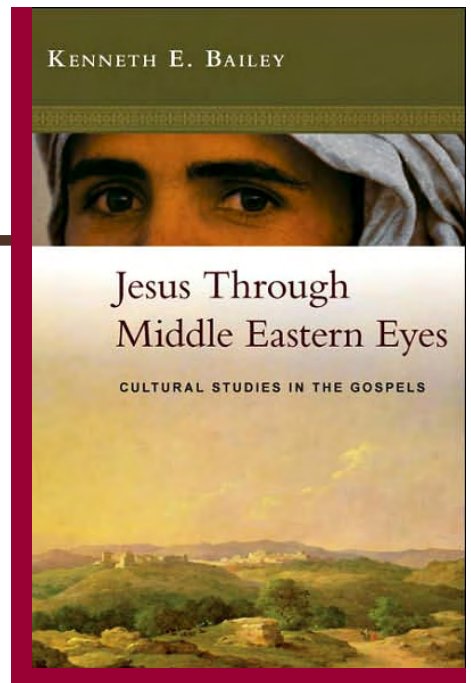
you could fall back into the foyer. This living room is your entire house; you eat there and sleep there. Now, there *is* one other room that is attached onto the living area, and is the guest chambers. In Greek there are two words which both translate into English as “inn.” The first is *pandocheion* meaning “all to receive,” or a commercial inn. The second word is *katalyma*, meaning “a place to stay,” or a guest room. This second word is what Luke uses when Joseph and Mary are told there is no room in the inn. There wasn’t a ‘no vacancy’ sign on the outside of a hotel; it was a family home that already had people staying in their guest room. Because Joseph was of a royal line, the family naturally welcomed the growing family to stay in their home. But what of the manger? The Bible clearly says: “...and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.” (NKJV Luke 2:7b)

Remember I described the foyer as “large enough to fit some animals into?” That’s because at night, the villagers would bring their animals into that front part of their home. Not only did it keep the animals safe from robbers, but in winter it also added heat to keep everyone warm. Once the animals were inside in the “stable” they needed to eat, so carved into the end of the floor of the family room were a few holes – or mangers. Therefore Mary, in the warmth of a home could easily have placed baby Jesus in a manger.

It was also interesting to note, that when the shepherds came to visit, if they had found Mary and Joseph and the Christ child living in circumstances any less than what they could offer, they would have insisted the holy family come back and stay with them. So they must have been sure the family was well looked after.

The above are just a few examples of how the real nativity story differs from our modern, somewhat romanticized version. But does this revelation detract from its greatness? I don’t think so; it merely opens up a whole new array of the glory and splendor of Jesus’ unlikely birth.

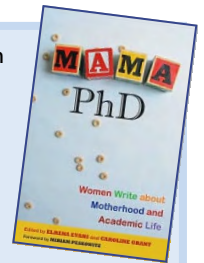
For more information and stories concerning the Gospels, read *Jesus Through Middle-Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospel* by Kenneth Bailey. I highly recommend it!





Author Profile: Elrena Evans

As a wife and mother of two (and another on the way!) and an author bringing Christ's voice into often dark places, **Elrena Evans** blends faith and family together in her writing. She recently co-edited a book entitled *Mama PhD: Women Write About Motherhood and Academic Life*. Grab some Christmas cookies and join in the conversation as Elrena shares about her family, her writing, and her mission!



Bloom: You have a life that many girls would love—having a beautiful little family and a little bit of a career at the same time. How do you balance making your family your priority while also writing?

Elrena: I am beyond blessed to be able to stay at home full-time with my children and still be able to have something of a career. But I won't pretend it's always easy, especially right now when my children are so young (4, 2, and one on the way). One of the ways I'm able to make this work is that I have a wonderful husband who is incredibly supportive—he's feeding the children breakfast right now while I work on this interview! And because he values our children, and our commitment to our family, and the work that I do, it helps me not only logistically but emotionally.

I've also learned that I have to value the work that I do; I have to make it a priority. That's really difficult for me, sometimes, because it can feel like anything that takes any time away from my children is by definition wrong! Leslie Leyland Fields, Christian writer and mother of six, has a quote in

her newest book that I just love: "For me, serving God means that I will spend some of my hours at home in front of the computer writing, instead of spending that time with my family, as I obey one of the callings God has placed on my life." I love that quote, I love the idea of being obedient to God in *all* of the callings He has placed on our lives. And when I look at my life that way, the question of balance becomes even more important: these are my callings, both of them. And if this is what God wants me to do, He will help me find a way to make it all work. Eric Liddell has a quote in *Chariots of Fire*: "I believe God made me for a purpose, but he also made me fast. And when I run I feel His pleasure." I resonate with that: my children are my purpose, but when I write I feel God's pleasure.

I could also answer that I've gotten *very* good at multi-tasking; I often joke that I spent more time working on *Mama, PhD* while I was nursing than while I wasn't, but I honestly think if you added up all of the hours I worked on that book, the majority would be hours spent typing and nursing at the same time!

Bloom: One of your biggest projects is the monthly column at *Literary-Mama.com*, *Me and My House*, an unashamedly Christian piece in the mostly secular world of mama-centric literature. Has being one of the few Christian voices in this genre affected your writing in any way? What inspired you to start this column?

Elrena: Being an unabashedly Christian voice in a secular publication has taught me, if anything, the importance of listening to my own voice. I was inspired to start the column because I was reading all of this wonderful mama-literature, but I didn't often see myself there, I didn't see women who were Christians writing about their faith. Which isn't at all to say that those voices aren't out there, just that I believe they are underrepresented. What I found, though, when I went to write my first column was that I was almost paralyzed by the thought of who would be reading it—what will my Christian friends think? What will

my non-Christian friends think? I'm a bit of a people-pleaser by nature, and that's one thing you can't control when your writing becomes public—different people are going to feel differently about your work, and it's absolutely impossible to please everyone. What I had to realize, eventually, was that was the wrong goal: I wasn't writing the column to please anyone, really, except God. So I had to learn to be true to myself and what I wanted to say, and not worry so much about what people were going to think. Which isn't to say I don't still worry...it's an ongoing struggle for me.

Bloom: You've written a lot of creative essays and stories, contributed to two anthologies, and even co-created your own anthology, *Mama, PhD*, for women seeking the balance of families and graduate school. What is the mission that you seek to embody in all your varied writings?

Elrena: When I was in college, I took a class where we studied the works of J.S. Bach, and I learned that he wrote the letters "SDG" on all of his compositions: *Soli Deo Gloria*, to the Glory of God alone. I can't think of a better mission. And it's also a challenge, I think—a challenge I gave myself at one point: was I willing to write those words on every single thing I did? To not only identify myself as a Christian, but to be able to answer honestly, yes, this is for God's glory, this is my very best work? When the stakes are that high, I think it requires an even greater level of excellence—I am putting my name on this piece of writing as a Christian, as an ambassador for the Lord, as His hands and feet on the earth...that will make me go back and do one more read-through even when I don't feel like it!

Bloom: You seem to have dabbled in almost all kinds of writing—fictional

stories, creative non-fiction, and more—do you have a favorite style?

Elrena: Creative nonfiction comes the most easily to me, especially writing about my children. I often think about that, though—how they will feel when they are older and are able to read what I've written about them, and how much of their lives I really want to put out there for anyone to see. I'm guessing as they grow up that I will take more and more of their inspiration and channel it into my fiction writing, to preserve their privacy. But even though I love fiction, I really have to think about it when I'm writing—writing nonfiction about my children just comes more naturally.

Bloom: You've consistently defined yourself as a "Christian feminist." Since these words are usually considered antithetical, what is your definition of this?

Elrena: In one of my columns, I wrote: "I picture Christianity and feminism as overlapping circles—a Venn diagram, if you will—with my personal ethos falling firmly into the center of the overlap. Being a feminist means I try to stand up for women's rights, whether they be the right to equal pay for equal work or the right to stay home with a family. It means I try to keep my eyes peeled for injustice, speak up for the voiceless whenever I can, and do my best to bring about justice and peace on the earth. That last bit is a line from the Book of Common Prayer, actually. My faith and my feminism go hand in hand as I search the Scriptures and see over and over again: feed the hungry. Clothe the naked. Look after the poor, the widowed, the orphaned...[and] more often than not, the poor, the downtrodden, and the oppressed are disproportionately women."

To expand on that a bit, I heard a sermon once that talked about Jesus as being one of the first feminists—and I'll admit that caused a quizzical eyebrow raising on my part at the time, but when I really listened to what the pastor said, it made sense to me. God created us in His image, male and female, both representatives of Himself. Historically, though, women have often been seen as being less than men—and I don't think that was ever God's intent. So what did He do? He chose to come to earth, to be born of a woman in a very patriarchal culture, and through his ministry He consistently reached out to women as well as men. And it was to women that He first appeared in His resurrected form.

When I look at the status of women now, not only in this country but on a global scale, it breaks my heart. I think it breaks God's heart, as well. By being a Christian feminist I want to speak out that injustice against women is wrong, it is—like so much in our culture—out of line with what God created, what God intended. Being a Christian feminist means that I will work against that injustice, in whatever little ways I can. We live in a culture that has gotten so far off course: it doesn't value women, it doesn't value children, it doesn't value the incredible work that mothers do in raising their children. As a feminist I want to say yes, this is important, this work that I am doing to raise the next generation is invaluable. I'd like to see that work honored, respected.

I'd also like to stop the exploitation of women's bodies in popular media. I think it's so hard for our little girls to see themselves as precious children of God when everywhere we look the media is telling us otherwise, and it's so hard to get away from. My family doesn't own a TV that gets any channels (we use it to watch videos...an awful lot of VeggieTales!) and I've taken myself off of every single catalog mailing list I can to try and stop the bombardment of advertising arriving in my mailbox, most of it featuring dangerously underweight (and seriously underclothed) women...but I still can't block it all out. Advertising is everywhere, and so much of it is degrading

"We live in a culture that has gotten so far off course: it doesn't value women, it doesn't value children, it doesn't value the incredible work that mothers do in raising their children. As a feminist I want to say yes, this is important, this work that I am doing to raise the next generation is invaluable.

I'd like to see that work honored, respected."

to women. I don't want my daughter—or my son!—to grow up surrounded by those images. I don't even like to put gasoline in the car when I have my children with me, because now the gas stations have screens at each pump, running advertisements, foisting cultural values on their viewers that are so antithetical to what I stand for as a Christian. (My four-year-old daughter has picked up on this, incidentally...“I don't like those movies at the gas station,” she told me the other day!)

I could go on and on and on, but for now I'll just say that it's very important to me to raise my children, both my daughter and my son, to recognize that God has created us *all* in His image. And if we could start to value women and the work that they do, even on small scales, my prayer is that it will spiral outwards and work against the values we're exposed to in our culture.

Bloom: You've shined Christ's light onto this dark corner by bringing your version of feminism to different feminist events. What have you learned from standing alone for a different cause in these sometimes hostile environments?

Elrena: Two things come to mind. The first was a Women's Studies conference at which I was presenting, where they were selling t-shirts that said “This is what a feminist looks like.” I went and asked if they had any maternity or nursing T-shirts, and got a very blank, puzzled stare in response. So then I had the opportunity to explain that I'm a feminist, and at this point in my life I need clothes that are maternity and breastfeeding friendly! And we talked about that for a while—can you be a feminist and be a stay-at-home mother? A wife? A Christian? And if the answer, as mine is, is yes, then do pregnancy and childbirth and breastfeeding and the care of little ones become feminist issues? Again, my answer is yes, absolutely. And although some feminists would agree with that right off that bat, many don't—so I was glad to have an opportunity to have that discussion.

The other thing that comes to mind is the

importance of being able to listen. I took a class in graduate school on feminism, and at the start of the class the professor made a comment that you couldn't be a feminist and be pro-life. Up goes my hand—obviously!—and we talked about it for quite a while, but I never really felt she was listening to what I had to say. But then I turned that around a bit: was I really listening to her? That was hard. I'm so committed to being pro-life, I really can't imagine being anything else—there is no other option, for me. But can I *listen* to what someone who isn't pro-life is saying? It was very, very difficult. I tried to put myself in her shoes, to understand the terror of being pregnant in difficult circumstances—and again, in a culture that doesn't value children, or motherhood, and does little if anything to truly support either. I was trying to look for places where we agreed, so we could move on with the conversation...but it was difficult. The issue of being pro-life is probably the most tricky for me when I talk to other feminists who aren't believers, because I've found that most people are willing to listen to me talk about my faith—but people are not willing to even try and hear what the other side has to say about abortion. And I think that inability to listen is hurting our nation. Because there are things we agree on—traditional Christians and traditional feminists—but we can't move forward and act on them because we can't seem to hear each other. Personally, I would love to see feminists take on abortion from the other side, as a feminist issue, as something that hurts our women and needs to be stopped...but we're a long way from that at this point.

Bloom: Do you have any tips for aspiring writers?

Elrena: Almost every writer I know says “write every day,” and for a long time I struggled with that advice because, for me, it just isn't possible. I would say write as much as you can, and *live* every day. Writers draw so much of their inspiration from lived experience, and learning that was incredibly helpful for me—maybe I'm not going to get to write anything today or tomorrow or all week, but all of that time I'm living my life as fully as I can, immersing

myself in all the blessings God has given me, and I think that makes me a better writer in the end.

My other piece of advice would be to learn your strengths and weaknesses. For me, I really like editing my work, which a lot of writers don't, so knowing that I have that strength helps me craft my work time to make it be the most productive. I don't worry about anything when I write my first drafts (and often I'll leave little notes to myself like “Oh wow, that's cliché!” or “Fix this, obviously!”) but I've learned not to get hung up on those first drafts because I know I'm going to go over it again and again and again—I just have to have something on the paper to start. One of my weaknesses...well, perhaps I shouldn't say! But the comment I get the most frequently from editors is that I lack visual description, I don't tend to describe how things look. Now that I know that about myself, I can pay attention to it, but even more so, I can try to figure out why that is. I think it's because I'm far more interested in what people think and feel and say than in how they look, and that carries over into my writing. But knowing that I tend to be spare on the description helps me find ways that I can work what I'm good at—editing, for one!—into helping me with some of my weaker points.

Thank you, Elrena, for answering our questions!

*Elrena Evans lives with her husband, Bill, and two young children in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania. She is the co-editor of the essay anthology *Mama PhD: Women Write About Motherhood and Academic Life* (Rutgers, 2008) and she writes the monthly column “Me and My House” for *Literary Mama* (www.literarymama.com) about her journeys through faith and mothering. Visit Elrena's website at www.elrenaevans.com.*

If you have any questions for Elrena, please submit them to Bloom! (see contact information on page 3) and a future issue of the magazine might feature your question and Elrena's answer.

All photographs from Elrena Evans.



a letter from *Heather*

Dear Little Sister in Christ,

I remember the Christmas Eve before I met my husband. I was 27 years old and living at home with my parents and sisters, who also were also both single (at ages 28 and 29). The prospects were dim and I felt like the three of us were *doomed* to be single the rest of our lives!

It was when we got home from the Christmas Eve candle light service that I sat in my parent's living room and cried, "None of us are ever going to get married! What's wrong with the guys out there, don't they see three, lovely, godly women here! I am doomed to live here the rest of my life!" Boo hoo!! Not one of my finer moments (filled with self-pity, doubt, pride, and total frustration with God), but one of those moments I'll never forget.

Four days later my sister met her husband and they were married 11 months later. Eight months after she was married, John and I were married. And three years after I was married, my other sister got married!

That was our last Christmas as single women living together. If you would have told me that I *never* would have believed you! Now, here we are all busy being wives and moms and God has taken our family of 5 to a family of 15 in the matter of 7 years.

But the holidays are tough for singles. I remember this deep longing to decorate my own Christmas tree and have my own family traditions. Those longings seemed to be more alive when the holiday season hit.

But as I type, looking at my own Christmas tree that I decorated with my husband and sons, I laugh at myself—my selfish and prideful old self! That night in my parent's living room seems silly to me as I take inventory of all the blessings God has given me! God knew what He was up to! (Duh, Heather!) He knew the plans for my life! It is one of those moments where I wish I would have been more patient and trusted more in God's goodness in my life.

I share my story in hopes to encourage you., not to give you a false sense of hope, but to know that life is filled with change. And just when you think you can't handle one more moment in the season you are in, God will give you the grace you need to endure! Or He'll change the circumstances in your life!

May this Christmas season you experience the love, grace, and joy of our Lord and Savior in a new and refreshing way! And if you find yourself in one of the moments I described earlier, know that I am praying for you and that some day (chances are) you'll look back and have a good laugh!

In His Grip,
Heather

Heather Paulsen with her husband, John, and two sons, Miles and Luke...and a new baby on the way!
[photo from Heather Paulsen]



Sister to Sister:
Letters of
Advice from
Older Girls

R E S T

by Dahlia Mayberry

Are you finding rest amidst school, life, and the busyness of the Christmas season?

Rest has been a word that God continues to speak to my anxious heart and busy mind.

As a student at Cornell University, I daily struggled with rest. And it was through these daily struggles that God taught me the importance of rest. He has revealed to me that in order to rest we must trust Him with our entire being for it is only in God that we find true rest.

St. Augustine said “Thou hast formed us for thyself and our hearts are restless till we find rest in Thee.” I think this explains why I want to relate with God. When I am not resting in Him, it becomes so easy to forget who God is and who I am in light of that. I begin to put my identity and trust in my work, my success, my personality. I give my heart over to other gods which inevitably fail me, and I find myself working harder and harder for a goal that I cannot achieve on my own. I become stressed; I become anxious; I become restless.

When I am not resting in Him, it becomes so easy to forget who God is and who I am in light of that.

I never really thought about rest until the second semester of my junior year at Cornell. Until then, I spent many nights getting

3-4-5hrs of sleep a night, and I took pride in that, thinking it meant I was stronger and more capable than others. But then I got sick and found myself stuck on my couch for about a week. My sleepless nights and over-driven work habits had caught up with me. I think God was beginning to show me that I as a person have limits and that I need to trust in Him, the Limitless God. I began to see that trusting Him meant taking time to rest, and thus began a journey – that I am still on today – of learning to rest in God as I trust in Him.

What does it mean to rest in God? I think resting in God means abiding in God. It means acknowledging that we are constantly within His presence. Psalm 139:7 says “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your Presence?” and Deuteronomy 31:6 says that He will never leave us nor forsake us. We are constantly in the Presence of God, but I think in order to practice this presence we need daily reminders to acknowledge that His glorious, restful Presence is all around us and to depend on His presence. For me this has meant growing in a discipline of setting aside time to be alone with God daily. I want to spend time in His Word so that I can learn more about who God is and who He has created me to be. It is in these truths that I am reminded of my purpose for the day. It is not to ace my exam, or to be ac-

cepted by my friends; it is to worship and glorify God. This helps give perspective to my day, the work I have to do, my relationships, and whatever else might be before me that day. It takes trust to set aside time for Him, but as I spend time with Him, He shows me that He is ultimately trustworthy and cares for me, so I can cast my anxieties on Him. A wise old friend of mine once said that the purpose of a quiet time is “to restore our spirit to the highest degree of harmony with the Lord’s Spirit”. This harmony is what I call rest.

Resting in God means abiding in God...It is in these truths that I am reminded of my purpose for the day. It is not to ace my exam, or to be accepted by my friends; it is to worship and glorify God.

I have found that resting in God’s presence doesn’t stop with a quiet time, but that I must continually acknowledge His presence throughout the day. It has helped me to realize that I cannot compartmentalize God or make time with Him just a priority to check off a to-do list. He is not a part of my life, He is my whole life, my whole being. Some things that have helped me to remain in the Rest of God throughout the day are scripture memory and prayer. Both help me

to meditate on God's truth and to communicate with Him throughout the day.

I think one big obstacle for many – myself included – in spending time with God is the desire to see results. If we put something in, we expect an outcome. I think this is another area of trust for us. Another friend, when speaking on Psalm 16, said, "If you set the Lord continually before you, He *will* change you." It might not be right away,

but the Lord promises that if we remain in Him and He in us, that we will bear much fruit. We must trust that He is faithful to His promises.

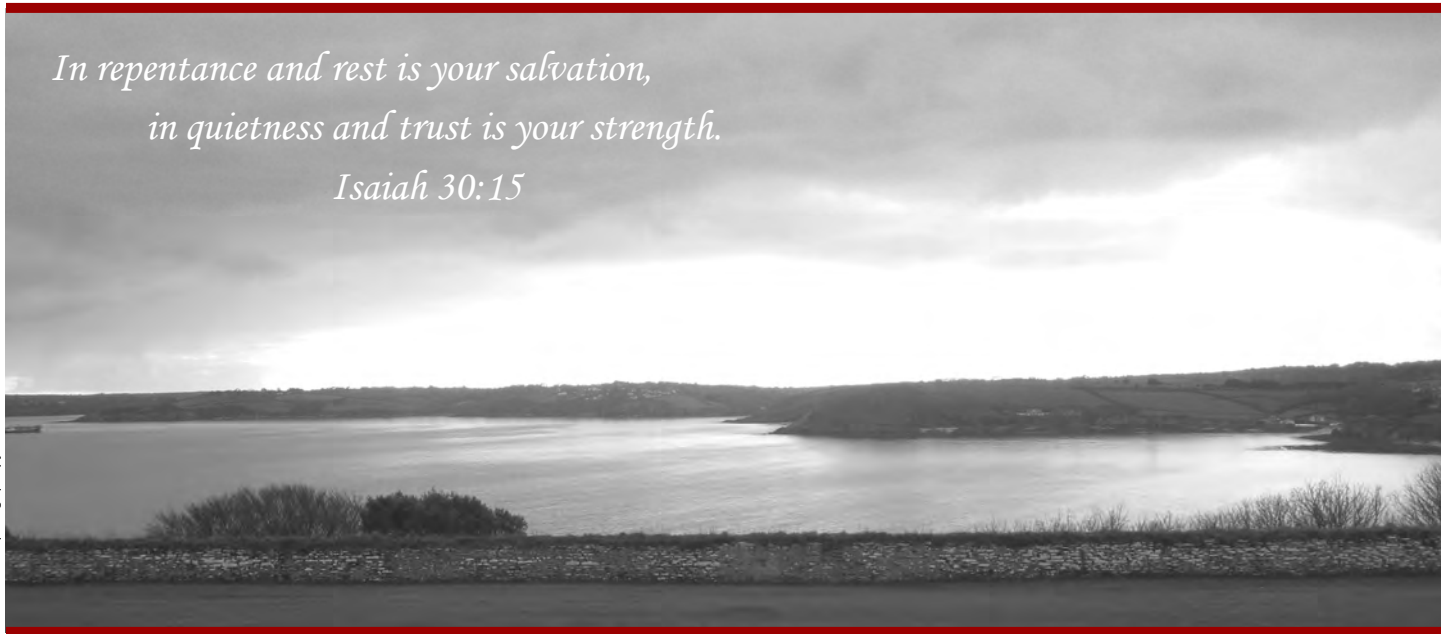
Henri Nouwen says on the discipline of solitude, "The discipline of solitude allows us gradually to come in touch with this hopeful presence of God in our lives, and allows us also to taste even now the beginnings of the joy and peace which belong to the new heaven and the new earth". Jesus

himself says in John 17:3, "Now this is eternal life: to know You, the Only True God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent." In seeking God and abiding in His presence now, we have access to the greatest gift in all eternity, which is beholding God Himself, and this I believe is the sweetest fruit of all.

In Christ,
Dahlia Mayberry

*In repentance and rest is your salvation,
in quietness and trust is your strength.
Isaiah 30:15*

photograph by Jessica Leonard



Meet the Author:

Dahlia Mayberry

Dahlia Mayberry is a New Hampshire native who graduated from Cornell University in 2008 with a degree in Nutrition. She is currently working with EDGE Corps, a two-year staffing position with the campus ministry, The Navigators. She loves nutrition and cooking, and plans to pursue her Dietician's License after EDGE Corps.



photo from Dahlia Mayberry

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