



FOCUS



a newsletter for women who find themselves in difficult circumstances, feeling emotionally and spiritually alone

July 2004

Volume 9 Issue 10

Hurray for Cracked Pots!

A water-bearer in India had two large pots. Each hung on opposite ends of a pole that he carried across his neck. One of the pots had a crack in it, while the other was perfect.

The perfect pot always delivered a full portion of water at the end of a long walk from the stream to the master's house. The cracked pot arrived only half-full. Every day for a full two years, the water-bearer delivered only one and a half pots of water.

The perfect pot was proud of its accomplishments because it fulfilled magnificently the purpose for which it had been made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its imperfection, miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After the second year of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, the unhappy pot spoke to the water-bearer one day by the stream.

"I am ashamed of myself, and I want to apologize to you," the pot said.

"Why?" asked the bearer. "What are you ashamed of?"

"I have been able, for these past two years, to deliver only half my load because this crack in my side causes water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. Because of my flaws, you have to do all this work and you don't get full value from your efforts," the pot said.

The water-bearer felt sorry for the old cracked pot, and in his compassion he said, "As we return to the master's

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You're Invited!

*Come as you are . . .
no cost, no obligations, no requirements*



FOCUS Support Groups

- ◆ **Chicago, IL (north side)** Every other Tues. at 7 p.m. Call Bernadine at 773-745-2924.
- ◆ **Elmhurst, IL,** 2nd Thursday of each month, 7:00 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. Call 630-595-7023 for directions.
- ◆ **Palos Heights, IL,** 1st Saturday of each month, 9:30 a.m. to 12:00 a.m. Call 630-595-7023 for directions.
- ◆ **Westmont, IL,** First and third Saturday at 9 a.m.. Call Stephanie at 630-673-KARE.
- ◆ **Wheaton, IL,** 1st & 3rd Saturday of each month at 9:30 a.m. Call Joan at 630-690-0976 for directions.
- ◆ **Overbrook, KS** 2nd Thursday of each month, 6:30-9:00 p.m. Call 785-836-7475 for directions.
- ◆ **Madisonville, KY** Thursdays 6:00-8:00 p.m. Call 270-825-2423 for directions.
- ◆ **Lexington, KY,** Southland Christian Church Call 859-977-2742 for directions.
- ◆ **Olmsted Falls, OH** 1st & 3rd Wednesdays at 7 p.m. Call 440-427-7700 for directions.
- ◆ **Danville, PA** Every Tuesday, 7:00-8:30 p.m. Call Fay at 570-437-2755 for directions.
- ◆ **Knoxville, TN** Tuesdays at 7 p.m. Call 865-470-2820 x226 for directions.
- ◆ **Mt. Pleasant, TX** 1st and 3rd Thursday of each month, 7:00 p.m. Call 903-572-7070 for directions.

Contact Paula Silva at 630/595-7023 or email at Paula@focusministries1.org for details on starting a group in your area!



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house, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.” Indeed, as they went up the hill, the cracked pot took notice of the beautiful wildflowers on the side of the path, bright in the sun’s glow, and the sight cheered it up a bit.

But at the end of the trail, it still felt bad that it had leaked out half its load, and so again it apologized to the bearer for its failure.

The bearer said to the pot, “Did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path, not on the other pot’s side? That is because I have always known about your flaw, and I have taken advantage of it. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path, and every day as we have walked back from the stream, you have watered them. For two years, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master’s table. **Without you being just the way you are, he would not have had this beauty to grace his house.**”¹

Do you like the person you see in the mirror or are you like the cracked pot—apologizing for being you? Are you struggling to become like someone else so you will be better loved and accepted?

In his book *Ruthless Trust*, Brennan Manning writes, “The cracked pot was

sad because it compared itself to the perfect pot. Without the comparison, it would have been happy, content in the knowledge that it was exactly the way it was supposed to be.”

He continues, “The pot had assumed that the sole purpose of its existence was to haul water from the stream to the house. The flawed pot had not suspected God’s grand purpose for it: to give life to the dormant flower seeds along the path.”

The pot’s weakness actually became its strength.

“Without you being just the way you are, he would not have had this beauty to grace his house.”

When you measure the value of your life by comparing yourself to others, you are dishonoring God and belittling the gift He has given you. (John 3:27)

Manning writes, “Despite our physical cracks, intellectual limitations, emotional impairments, and spiritual fissures, we are providentially equipped to fulfill the unique purpose of our existence.”

What was God’s grand purpose for you when you were born? If His grand purpose for me was to celebrate 50+ years of a wonderful marriage, then I have miserably failed. But I suspect God knew ahead of

time about my flaws, and in His wonderful grace redeemed my messed-up life so I could minister to other hurting women who are affected by dysfunctional relationships or domestic violence.

What about you? Are you so focused on your flaws that you can’t see the purpose of your existence? Did you know that God adores you just like you are—flaws and all?

In his book *Bread for the Journey*, Henri Nouwen writes, “To be grateful for the good things that happen in our lives is easy, but to be grateful for all of our lives—the good as well as the bad, the moments of joy as well as the moments of sorrow, the successes as well as the failures, the rewards as well as the rejections—that requires hard spiritual work. Still, we are only grateful people when we can say thank you to all that has brought us to the present moment. As long as we keep dividing our lives between events and people we would like to remember and those we would rather forget, we cannot claim the fullness of our beings as a gift of God to be grateful for. Let’s not be afraid to look at everything that has brought us to where we are now and trust that we will soon see in it the guiding hand of a loving God.”

So instead of beating yourself up because you don’t measure up, ask God to show you how He has used your flaws as beauty to grace His table.

Stop apologizing to the world for not being perfect, and start living life to the fullest as the person God created you to be—cracked pot and all!

Manning writes, “God often uses those who have major flaws or who have been through a great deal of pain to accomplish many vital tasks for His kingdom. No one is too messed up for God to use.”

On Judgment Day, God will not ask you why you were not like

_____ (fill in the blank with Mr./Ms. Perfect’s name)

He will ask you why you were not His beloved _____ (fill in your name)

¹ A story from India—author unknown

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The mission of FOCUS Newsletter is to encourage women who are struggling in difficult circumstances to find strength and hope in Jesus Christ.

Subscriptions: \$15 per year (12 issues). Send check or money order made payable to FOCUS, P. O. Box 323, Hanson, KY 42413. Complimentary subscriptions are available for those who cannot afford a subscription.

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Responses from *Train the Trainer* Seminar

June 26, 2004

- The seminar inspired me to open my home for support groups and possibly a resource center. It was Christ-centered. Another thing I found meaningful was as I looked around the room and saw all the other women and their commitment to step out and use their experiences and gifts. It was incredible. Thank you!
- The entire seminar was wonderful. I wish it could have lasted longer.
- The manual was excellent. Great job!
- I have seen the need for a support group in my area and I want very much to start one. We're missing a lot of women by waiting for the church to step up and be more proactive in this fight.
- In the crisis pregnancy ministry, I see a lot of women who are hurting from abuse of some kind. This seminar helped me to understand and meet them at their point of need.
- Good job of starting and ending on time. You are both articulate, excellent at presenting materials, staying on task, staying focused on the topic at hand. I came away feeling "I can do this" (with God's help, of course!). I wish I had brought others with me. It's obvious you have put a lot of planning and preparation in the manuals, the workshop, the ministry.
- You are a blessing. Keep on doing God's work!

"Restoring the Hope"

Conference for Women



with

Lynda Elliott

Author, Conference Speaker, Personal Life Coach

Topic:



"Keeping a Princess Heart"

In a Not-So-Fairy Tale World

September 18, 2004

9 a.m.—3:30 p.m.

Harvard Avenue E-Free Church

Villa Park, IL

To register, call 630-595-7023
or register online at focusministries1.org



FOCUS Heartbeat!

by Brenda Branson



In his book *Ruthless Trust*, Brennan Manning writes, “The awareness that the eternal, transcendent God of Jesus Christ is our absolute future gives us the shakes . . . we want to live the rest of our lives in a shoe.”

We’ve been doing a lot of shaking recently as we contemplate the future of FOCUS Ministries.

Our recent trip to Colorado Springs to meet with Focus on the Family staff and tape a radio program with Dr. James Dobson was awesome! We were treated like royalty and overwhelmed by gracious kindness.

Why were *we* asked to be part of a program on domestic violence? True, for the last nine years we have spent most of our waking hours developing literature and curriculum on domestic violence, and offering hope to women who are struggling in unsafe relationships.

But it had to be God’s intervention that opened the door for us since we did nothing to work the angles or manipulate our way in. It is as if God decided to advertise our ministry on the largest billboard in the evangelical world—Focus on the Family’s radio program and website!

Just a few months ago, both Paula and I felt compelled by God to quit our jobs to work full-time in this ministry. It was a huge leap of faith to leave the security of a regular paycheck to depend totally on God to provide for our needs. There was a small pittance for salaries in the FOCUS budget, but no guarantee how long it would last.

Although the experience at Focus on the Family was exciting and thrilling, *it was also terrifying!* The broadcast reaches 200 million people all over the world. Those who can’t listen to the radio broadcast can listen via the internet.

Dr. Dobson realized the potential for an overwhelming response in the form of phone calls, emails, and letters, and

instructed producer John Tracy to set up a triage to handle immediate needs which could not wait for the normal response time.

After the broadcast was over, we asked ourselves, “What is God up to? What does He have in mind for us?”

Surely He did not take us to Colorado Springs just for a thrill ride, even though it was very thrilling! Our imaginations soared as we wondered . . .

- If we are contacted by even one-half of one percent of potential listeners to the broadcast, who will the Lord send to help us answer the phones, letters and emails? Will He miraculously provide the funding for salaries so we can hire adequate staff?
- The cost to send basic literature (not counting books and tapes) to potential contacts from this broadcast will be in the thousands of dollars. Will God provide extra funding to cover postage and printing expenses? Who will He send to help us with the mailings?
- There will likely be several invitations throughout the U.S. from churches who are interested in reaching out to hurting people. Will the Lord provide money for travel expenses? Who will oversee the KY and IL Women’s Centers and distribution of literature while Paula and I are traveling?
- We have had to rent a car when we travel to lead or attend workshops and seminars because our vehicles are old and unreliable. The cost to rent a car for 17 days to drive to and from Colorado was over \$800. We do not have funding to buy a much-needed van. Who will God prompt to donate a vehicle or provide funding to continue renting a car?
- If God grows this ministry in a substantial way, we will need staff and advisors. Who will He send? Through whom will He provide funding?

- Will God lead us to develop a program to provide transitional and safe housing? If so, who will donate the properties or send the funds to purchase real estate? (Average cost for a house in Kentucky next to the Women’s Center is \$30,000 to \$40,000.)

- One of our grandest dreams is to purchase a facility in Elmhurst, IL which would house the Illinois Women’s Center, distribution and mailing center, headquarters and main office for the ministry, counseling offices, small transitional apartments, and a worship center. ***The facility is available for a mere \$3 million.***

In both Kentucky and Illinois, we have developed a loosely structured plan for expanding our ministry, including specific people to hire for strategic staff positions and real estate which would provide room for further expansion. None of these plans can be accomplished without God’s miraculous intervention to provide funding. One wise friend said, ***“God has opened many doors for FOCUS; now He will have to open many pockets!”***

We don’t know what the future holds for FOCUS, but of this we are sure—whatever God has for us will be the absolute best, whether it is to be satisfied with our current outreach or to be stretched and challenged as God paves the way into new territory.

Sometimes the excitement and anticipation makes us confident, bold, and trusting. At other times, we are terrified and ready to run for the hills when we think about our inadequacies and the task ahead.

Please pray for us as we draw near to God that we would desire His presence so much more than His blessings, that we would have the courage to walk through the doors He opens and be satisfied with the doors He closes.

We invite you to join with us in prayer and financial support as God leads.



Just For Fun

Chinese Proverb

To be happy for . . .

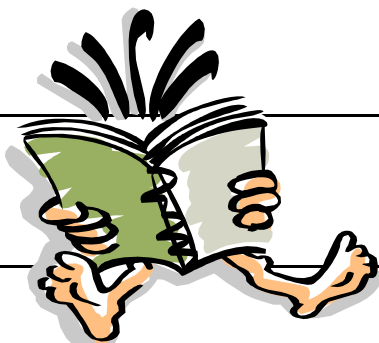
1 Hour Take a Nap

1 Day Go fishing

1 Week Get married

1 Month Inherit a fortune

A Lifetime Help someone else!



Book Review

by Brenda Branson

Ruthless Trust

by Brennan Manning

“The supreme need in most of our lives is often the most overlooked—namely, the need for an uncompromising trust in the love of God.” In this book, Brennan Manning tells you how radical trust in God’s love can transform everything in your life.

If you are a “ragamuffin” (a saved sinner who is conscious of his brokenness and powerlessness before God and who casts himself on His mercy), you will enjoy this book. It will teach you how to turn self-rejection to self-acceptance because Jesus has accepted you.

The author writes, “You will trust Him to the degree that you know you are loved by Him.” How deep is your trust? Perhaps you need to be reminded just how much God loves you, and to what extent He will go to track you down with His relentless love. All He asks for in return is trust.

The author leads you through his own life of pain and joy where he learned how to abandon himself to God. He challenges you to join him on the ragamuffin’s path to God. If you take the challenge, your life will never be the same!

Recipe of the Month

Crunchy Pralines

1 pound light brown sugar
(about 2 1/2 packed cups)

2 T. butter

1/4 cup water

2 cups pecan pieces

Line a large baking sheet with wax paper and set aside. In a large saucepan, combine the brown sugar, butter, and water. Cook over medium heat, stirring to dissolve the sugar, for about 3-4 minutes.

When the mixture begins to boil, add the pecans and continue to stir for about 5 minutes.

Remove from the heat and drop by the spoonful onto wax paper. Let cool and harden. Peel from the paper, using a thin knife as necessary.

Store in an airtight container at room temperature up to two weeks.

Yield: about 2 dozen

Recipes courtesy of Emeril Lagasse

Obstacles to Trusting God

Ruthless trust is an uncompromising trust that *God loves you*, no matter what you have done or what you may do, and that *God is good*, whether or not He intervenes in the midst of your pain.

It is a child-like confidence that God will never abandon you, that He is at work in your life, even when you don't feel His presence or see His hand.

Brennan Manning writes, "Uncompromising trust in the love of God inspires us to thank God for the spiritual darkness that envelops us, for the loss of income, for the nagging arthritis that is so painful, and to pray from the heart, 'Abba, into your hands I entrust my body, mind, and spirit and this entire day—morning, afternoon, evening, and night. Whatever you want of me, I want of me, falling into you and trusting in you in the midst of my life. Into your heart I entrust my heart, feeble, distracted, insecure, uncertain. Abba, unto you, I abandon myself in Jesus our Lord. Amen.'"

The formula for ruthless trust, according to Manning, is "Faith + Hope = Trust."

Faith is belief that God *is*; **hope** is believing that God *will do* what He has promised, and **trust** is living with *absolute confidence* in the Father's acceptance and unconditional love, and *totally abandoning* yourself to whatever He asks you to do, even when it doesn't make sense.

When you realize you are powerless and helpless in your own strength, with absolute confidence in God's love, then you will be able to totally surrender to His will. Manning writes, "Jesus needs nothing but our humility and confidence to work miracles in us."

It is easy to have faith, hope and trust when life is good, when there's plenty of money in the bank, when friends and family are supportive, and when you aren't defeated by a poor self-image.

But there are many obstacles that will make it hard to trust in God's love and goodness. In his book *Prayer is a Hunger*, Edward Farrell lists amnesia, inertia and mañana as three greatest obstacles to

trust. He writes, "We are all subject to forgetfulness of God's faithfulness in the past, laziness to act on the divine promise, and postponing until tomorrow what Jesus is asking of us today: childlike abandonment in trust."

Other obstacles to trust include:

- **Pain and suffering**—Physical and emotional pain can keep you self-absorbed and unsure that God is reliable. Some have been so traumatized, bruised, battered, and betrayed they are barely surviving one day at a time. Manning writes, "Trusting in God's goodness does not mean you will not get hurt. God's goodness brings both pleasure and pain."
- **Evil**—People looking for justice ask these questions: "Why does God allow evil? Why doesn't He intervene? Is He really there? Does He care?" Job struggled to find justice in his suffering. Manning explains, "Though Job is beset by suffering and loss on every side, his trust endures even when understanding fails. The story of Job implicitly states that we can endure the unwanted intrusion of evil when we have experienced a theophany—that is, an insight into the reality of God."
- **Your own insecurity, inadequacy, inferiority, and low self-esteem**—In the book *Inner Voice of Love*, Henri Nouwen writes, "For as long as you can remember, you have been a pleaser, depending on others to give you an identity. But now you are being asked to let go of all these self-made props and trust that God is enough for you. The root choice is to trust at all times that God is with you and will give you what you most need."
- **Health & Wealth Religion**—God has never promised that He will provide good health and unlimited wealth as a reward for our faith. He promises to be with us *through*

our struggles, the disasters, and disappointments of life. If you are riding the roller coaster of "name it and claim it" (or "blab it and grab it" as Henry Cloud describes it), you may have difficulty trusting God when He doesn't meet your expectations. God is not a genie in a bottle that grants wishes upon prayerful demand nor a vending machine deity that dispenses treats when you insert the coins of your good works. He desires your simple trust in His ability to work for your good, even through painful circumstances.

- **Fear**—Many people fear what God would ask them to do if they surrendered to His call. They are terrified God might ask them to eat worms in the jungle or live in a cave in Afghanistan. Some worry that they would have to give up their manicures, salon appointments, and health club memberships. "If He would just let me stay in the temple of my familiar, I would entrust myself to Him wholeheartedly," writes Manning.

God desires your complete trust. What are the obstacles that keep you from totally abandoning yourself to Him?

Perhaps the greatest obstacle is not believing how much you are loved. "You will trust Him to the degree that you know you are loved by Him," writes Manning.

How incredible it is to be accepted and loved for who you are *right now*, instead of who you could be or should be! Do you believe that with all your heart, or are you holding back in disbelief that God is incapable or that you are unworthy?

In *Above All*, Manning writes, "Our response to Jesus will be total the day we experience how total is His love for us. Instead of our self-conscious efforts to be good, we should allow ourselves the luxury of letting ourselves be loved, not after we clean up our act and get all our ducks in a row, not after we have eliminated every trace of sin, selfishness, dishonesty, and degraded love from our resume, not after we have developed a disciplined prayer life . . . **but right now, right here . . .**"

Take the risk . . . it's worth it!

Will You Help?

- Approximately \$2,400 is needed *each month* to provide salaries for Paula and Brenda, who are now working full-time with FOCUS. Only \$250 per month is currently being pledged. Please consider making a monthly pledge for this immediate need.
- If 3,000 people pledged \$10 per month, we would have funding to hire much-needed staff, maintain IL and KY Women's Centers, expand distribution of literature world-wide, and provide transitional housing without government funding or grants.
- Shop online at www.igive.com at your favorite stores (including Dell Computers; brand-name clothing stores and outlets; favorite books, electronics, and appliance stores, etc.). Designate FOCUS Ministries as your favorite charity and we will receive a percentage of the amount you spend online.
- When you need to buy a **book or CD**, log on to our new website at focusministries1.org and go to "Recommended Books." We have a link to Amazon.com from which you can order any book or CD (just click on Amazon logo) and FOCUS will receive a percentage of the proceeds.

Did you know donations can now be made online at www.focusministries1.org?

Words That Heal

Take my side, God—
I'm getting kicked around,
stomped on every day.

Not a day goes by
but somebody beats me up;
They make it their duty
to beat me up.

When I get really afraid
I come to you in trust.
I'm proud to praise God;
fearless now, I trust in God.

What can mere mortals do?

Psalm 56:3-4
The Message

Partners In Ministry

- YES! I would like to receive FOCUS Newsletter each month for 1 year at the rate of \$15 per year.
- I want to partner with FOCUS to educate churches and individuals about domestic violence and help families suffering from the trauma of abuse. Here is my faith promise of \$_____ per month as God provides. Here is my one-time donation of \$_____ to use where most needed.
- I want to support the Women's Centers in KY and IL and provide salaries for directors and staff. Here is my donation of \$_____ or my monthly pledge of \$_____.
- Enclosed is my gift of \$_____ to provide complimentary copies of FOCUS Newsletter to women and organizations who cannot afford a subscription.
- Count on me to be a prayer warrior for this ministry. Please send me specific requests.

Name _____

Address _____

City, State, Zip _____

FOCUS Ministries, Inc., P. O. Box 323, Hanson, KY 42413



FOCUS
P. O. Box 323
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O Lord, You Alone Are My Hope! Psalm 71:5 NLT

The Princess and the Predator

continued from Vol. 9 Issue 9

... A True Story of God's Grace

The eerie quiet in the hallway was more deafening than the raging screams a few minutes earlier.

Suddenly, the conference room door opened and a gurney was wheeled out into the hallway. Glenda and her attorney peered around their bodyguard to see what was happening.

It was Ron! With paramedics on each side of the gurney, he was being wheeled down the hallway toward the elevators. Ron's attorney appeared in the doorway, white-faced and visibly shaken, but alive!

Even though Ron had delighted in terrorizing Glenda throughout their marriage, she could not help but feel pity and concern for his well-being. His blood pressure had spiked dangerously high as his rage escalated.

Ron was taken to the nearest hospital for a psychiatric evaluation. However, by the time he saw the psychiatrist, he was calm and charming, and convinced them to release him instead of staying overnight.

Glenda's attorney obtained permission from the judge to suspend Ron's visitation with Rico until he was re-evaluated by a court-appointed psychologist. She advised Glenda to "get out of town" with Rico just in case Ron wanted revenge.

Glenda and Rico quickly loaded up her car and traveled 400 miles to her parent's home where they stayed for the rest of the week.

There was a sense of urgency in the voice of Glenda's attorney as she advised Glenda to take every precaution

to protect herself and Rico from Ron. She distributed Ron's picture in her law office in case Ron showed up. He blamed her as the cause of all his problems and accused her of destroying him.

He had also threatened her family, saying things like "I know where your family is and I know where they go to school. I know where to reach them." She was so concerned about her children's safety, they were sent out of town to stay with relatives and eventually changed schools.

Glenda's attorney was not the only one who was afraid of Ron. Because of his veiled threats toward a counselor's family, she refused to testify in court. After Rico's guardian ad litem was discharged following the signing of the custody agreement, she refused to get further involved because she was afraid of him.

Ron had also threatened a witness right before she testified, and threatened to sue anyone who helped Glenda or exposed him.

Even Ron's attorney asked to be released from the case after his violent acting out in the conference room.

How far would Ron go to get revenge? It was unnerving for Glenda to constantly look over her shoulder to make sure Ron wasn't stalking her. She carefully scanned the parking lot at her apartment building and work place before going to her car, and made a quick inspection underneath the car for suspicious wires or objects.

If there was no explosion when she opened the car door, what would happen when she turned the key in the ignition . . . BOOM???

Glenda posted a picture of Ron at both entrances of her apartment building with a note advising other tenants to call the police if they spotted him inside the building.

Although it was tense for a few weeks, Glenda made a decision **not** to live in fear. She was finally free of Ron's tyranny in the home, and she would not allow him to control her again through fear and intimidation.

She did not, however, underestimate his potential for violence, and remained alert without becoming neurotic.

Within a short time, Ron convinced the court-appointed psychologist that he was not a danger to Rico, and visitation was resumed.

The medical report indicated Ron had collapsed in the court room due to stress and high blood pressure, possibly an anxiety attack. Some believed Ron staged the whole thing to convince the judge he had been coerced into signing the custody agreement.

Glenda didn't believe either scenario. She knew Ron's true identity had finally been revealed as he dropped the Prince Charming mask and unleashed the wrath of Genghis Kahn.

It wouldn't be long, however, before his true self was back in hiding, seeking for someone to fall for his victim role and help him mount a new case against Glenda. The trap was carefully set using tears and Rico for bait . . .

to be continued . . .