

SPRING: 2017 SO FAR

LIFE UNEXPECTED

What is even going on?!

Okay. If there is one thing that I have learned in these four months of 2017, it is that I have very little control over my own life. This year has so far been one unexpected road block, after another, and honestly? I'm kind of getting sick of it! Even this newsletter has had three different starts, three different writing locations, and although it had direction initially, I have no idea yet where we'll be by the end! Kind of like my life this year.

It's hard for me to believe that it is already the end of April. This year has felt like both a blink, and a lifetime. Isn't it funny how we experience time? Time itself is constant, methodical, fixed. We can never go back or stay still, but are forced to march ever onwards, and we have just one second of the present in our grasp at a time. Truly, we are helpless to control time, and it is only what we choose to do *with* our time, that we have any power over. Even then, the things that we plan rarely turn out quite the way we hoped they would.

'Come now, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and make a profit"— yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we will live and do this or that."

James 4: 13-15

When I started this newsletter, I was sitting in my living-room, laptop on my coffee table. Fast forward almost a week, and I was working on it in my hospital room, laptop on my tray table. Finally (I hope!), fast forward almost another week, and I am now finishing it while sitting in my office, laptop on my desk. What was I just saying about time and not always being able to control what happens to us?

A few weeks back, I was babysitting my friends' kids, and was having a chat with one of them, who

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was turning five the next day. She was having trouble sleeping, and I was saying to her that if she would lay down and close her eyes, soon she would be asleep, and she would have good dreams, and wake up happy to be five years old! Now, I had expected a smile, and a hug, and a happily dreaming almost-five-year-old, but that's not what happened. The little one turned to me, with her big brown eyes wide in the dim light, and said "But Aunty, don't you know that plans don't always go how you want them to?" In fact yes, yes I do. Out of the mouths of babes, hey?!

Now, you may be thinking, "But wait, aren't you a YWAMer? Isn't one of your foundational values to hear God's voice and do what He says? Shouldn't that mean that you follow His step by step instructions and then see His plans in your life fulfilled?"

Well, yes, that is true, but it is so much more complicated than that, in my experience. Or maybe I just complicate it? I do tend to overthink things... The truth is that God speaks to me lots of different ways; through His written word, as an impression in my mind, in my dreams, through other people, through circumstances. Sometimes He is silent, and through the silence He may be asking me to make a decision using the mind that He has given me, step out in faith, knowing that He is with me even if I take a wrong turn. Factor in also that I make bad decisions sometimes, and that those around me sometimes make bad decisions, and life is just messy, and I am a messy human.

Many are the plans in a person's heart,
but it is the Lord's purpose that prevails.

Proverbs 19:21

So, do I over complicate things sometimes? Yes, but also life is just over complicated sometimes. A good friend of mine, who passed away a few years ago, loved a particular quote from Chuck Swindoll which says:

"The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. Attitude, to me, is more important than facts... It is more important than appearance, giftedness, or skill... The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude ... I am convinced that life is 10% what happens to me, and 90% how I react to it. And so it is with you ...

we are in charge of our attitudes."

I may not be able to control time, or circumstances, or other people, but I can absolutely control my attitude. And here it is, the lesson and challenge for me this year, and my prayer for you: to choose joy, to have a sense of humour, and to hold on to our plans lightly. I pray that we will be able to choose a thankful heart in every situation, that by the grace of God, we will navigate life with some levity, and approach each challenge with peace in our minds, knowing that we serve a great God, who is with us through every success, and through every failure. Amen.

Plans A Through D:

Back in December, I made plans to return home to BC for a visit over the holidays. Originally, I was planning on being in BC for just two weeks, before going on the YWAM United outreach to Greece at the end of December, to work with Syrian refugees. Unfortunately, the funds just didn't come through. I was initially disappointed, but I got over it fairly quickly, deciding to spend a bit more time visiting family and friends in BC, before heading back to California the second week of January.

While I was back up north, I was staying with my mother, and just as I was looking at flights back to Fresno, she developed a severe mystery pain in her side. Even after several emergency room trips, a dozen tests, and many consultations, the doctors had no idea what was wrong with her. This pain left her unable to walk more than short distances, and she became essentially bedridden. Thankfully, my job here at Gleanings is flexible, and I decided that I needed to stay and help my mom out while her doctors figured out what was wrong, and how to fix it.

Unfortunately, the doctors never figured it out. January, February, and March went by with visits to doctors and specialists every few days, and still no answers.

Despite being clueless to the cause of the pain, the doctors did have some success in treating my mother's symptoms, and she slowly began to improve. Come mid-March, my mother was able to walk again with the help of a walker, and she was off of the strongest pain medication, allowing her to drive as well. She also got set up to have Home Help come in during the week to assist her with light chores, which gave me peace of mind as I made plans to return to my life in California.

On April 5th, I finally got to fly back here to Gleanings, and it has been so good to be back. Although it was frustrating having my plans change over and over due to circumstances beyond my control, I knew that God was working in me and through me during that time. I am so glad that I was able to stay with my mom to help her during a difficult time, and that I got extra time with my loved ones back home.



Left: grabbing coffee with two of my sisters and my niece over Christmas.

Right: my mother enjoying frozen yogurt with me in March.



CLOSING A CHAPTER

"Until we meet again."

The house that I live in here at Gleanings is a duplex, with a shared laundry room serving as walkway between houses. When I first arrived on staff last year, my neighbours were my very good friends Wes and Jenny Bruce, and their sons Eli and Finn. We became close when I was serving as school staff during their Discipleship Training School here at Gleanings back in 2012.

This past September, I dropped Jenny off at the Fresno airport so that she could join Wes and the boys, who were already up in Canada, for a much-needed post-summer vacation. The plan was that they would all be back at Gleanings in just a few short weeks.

Unfortunately, due to unforeseen immigration issues, the Bruces were unable to re-enter the United States long-term, and a few short weeks turned into many long months.

While I was still back in BC helping my mom, the Bruces came back to Gleanings to pack up their home and make the move back to Canada. It was quite difficult for me, knowing that finally they were back, and I wasn't there to see them off. When I had said goodbye to them at the end of the summer, I was expecting to see them again shortly, and to continue serving here at Gleanings together for some time. It was quite a shock to realize that our time here together had suddenly run up.

Thankfully, the Bruces' Canadian home is less than a day's drive east of my mom's house, so in March, I was able to take a few days to go and visit them.

My time with the Bruce family was absolutely amazing; it was refreshing, and full of laughter and good conversation. Most importantly for me, it was healing. Having the chance to say a proper "until next time" allowed me to grieve the time we had lost, and gave me the ability to move forward with my life at Gleanings without my very close friends by my side.



Jenny and I during my visit.

An Easter Weekend Emergency

My first Sunday back here at Gleanings, I was excited to finally be going to my local church again with some of the other staff. However, I soon realized that I had developed a bladder infection (I had never had one, but I knew the signs). I spent that day feeling quite miserable, and in considerable pain.

The next day, I went to see a doctor in town, and he agreed that it was likely a urinary tract infection, gave me a prescription for three days of antibiotics, and that was that. He had asked me if I wanted to send my urine test to a lab to confirm his theory, and although I had travel insurance, I wasn't sure what it covered, so I declined. That proved to be a huge mistake.

The following days, I began to feel somewhat better, and signs of infection began to fade. However, on the day following my last antibiotic pill, signs of infection returned worse than before, and I was in indescribable pain. That day is a bit of a blur, but by the afternoon, I was sweating and sobbing, delirious with pain, and was driven to the hospital. Some ladies came over to pray for me while a vehicle was pulled up to my house, and although the pain didn't leave, a sense of calm and peace came over me, making the short ride to Reedley Hospital bearable.

Upon arrival and initial assessment, I was quickly seen by a doctor, and given strong narcotics for my pain via IV. A few blood tests and a CT scan later, and they admitted me, planning to keep me until Saturday (it was Thursday at that point). That night a doctor came by my hospital room to tell me that I had a urinary tract infection that had invaded further in to my body, causing a severe kidney infection.

The next day (which was Good Friday) is a bit hazy, but they kept me on IV fluids and antibiotics, with lots of pain killers to make me comfortable while my body healed. At some point, a hospital chaplain came by to pray for me, and brought me a bouquet of Easter lilies. By the second morning there, I was able to go for short walks around the hallways, IV stand in tow. Over the next few days, I had lots of visitors, attentive nurses and care aids, surprisingly good hospital food, and another chaplain who prayed for me.

As it turned out, they needed to keep me for five days; they had to let the IV antibiotics get my body to the point where oral antibiotics could take over the fight at home. Easter Monday came, and the doctor finally cleared me to go home. I had been treated so well by the staff at the Reedley Hospital (Adventist Medical Center), but I was sure glad to get out of there! Although it was not how I had ever expected my Easter to go, I am so thankful for skilled doctors, kind nurses, loving friends who visited me, and for a God who gave me peace throughout.

"And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:7



Not quite how I expected Easter to go!

THANK YOU!

Thanks so much for taking the time out of your day to catch up on what's been going on in my world. Please feel free to contact me any time to let me know how you are, and if I can pray for you about anything. To hear more about what is going on around Gleanings, you can see updates on the Gleanings' Facebook and Instagram pages, or else visit the website, www.gleanings.org and sign up for the monthly newsletter (which I help to write!). Have an amazing Spring my friends!

HOW TO HELP

Ways you can participate in my ministry

- **Be me friend!** Keep up with me via social media, emails, snail mail, or smoke signals. It is so nice to know that people care about my life, and what I am doing here in California.
- **Pray for me!** Get in touch with me, and I'll tell you more specifically how. ;-)
- **Donate!** As with every YWAMer, I receive no salary or financial remuneration whatsoever for my work here at Gleanings. This means that all the finances I need to pay for life comes from individuals like you. You can donate via the YWAM Canada Funding Office (<http://ywamcanada.org/donations.html> or email them for information at admin@projectfunding.ca) using my name and special donation code: Kathryn Pepper | PK16.
- **Come for a visit!** If you would like to come for a visit to check out Gleanings for the Hungry in person, let me know, and we'll make it happen!