

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

2016 SJNH TESTIMONIES VOL. 2



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WELCOME

Looking back on 2016...what do you see?
Ironically, when we look back on the past, we can often gain some insight into the future looking ahead.

This booklet is a collection of true stories from regular people looking back at 2016 when they've seen the light of God's presence in the midst of a dark and broken world. The stories are from people just like you who go through both times of joy and times of challenge.

And so as they share about looking back and seeing God's nail-scarred handprints in their everyday lives, the valuable insight that Jesus Christ is with them fills them with oaken strength and eager anticipation.

Whatever season of life you currently find yourself in, I pray that these true stories will bring you encouragement, strength, smiles, and the eternal joy of Christ as you look ahead to 2017.

What amazing things will Christ bring next year?
You're invited to look back at these stories with us. And then look ahead...

IN CHRIST'S STORY, PASTOR YUNG KIM

I am a selfish person, and am more or less constantly seeking out my own comfort. I am not one of those moms that lays down her life for kids, completely forgetting about herself. No, I always remember myself, and others second. Granted, I am less selfish today than I was before I knew God. I lived for years and years not knowing God, and lived completely unto myself. Despite my best efforts of building my own throne, I just became tired of being so wrapped up in me me me. None of the things I attained brought me true comfort or pleasure, and I realized how worthless everything was. At 25, I came face to face with the life shattering and undeserving saving grace of a King that left His throne to save someone as self-worshipping as myself.

In the years since, I have learned to serve and give to others out of the bounty of love that Jesus first showed me. Yet, even then, it would be out of my space of comfort. Sure I can take you out to lunch and spend time with you. I had no problems spending money, and I was single with all the time in the world! Do not get me wrong, those years were incredibly precious to me, and I would not trade them for the world. But I had no other demands for my time. I did not have a husband, I did not have a child, I did not have to manage a household, and juggle that with work. Now, it hurts to give. It forces me out of the warmth of my own comforts, drawing me to serve when I am downright cold and maybe hungry.

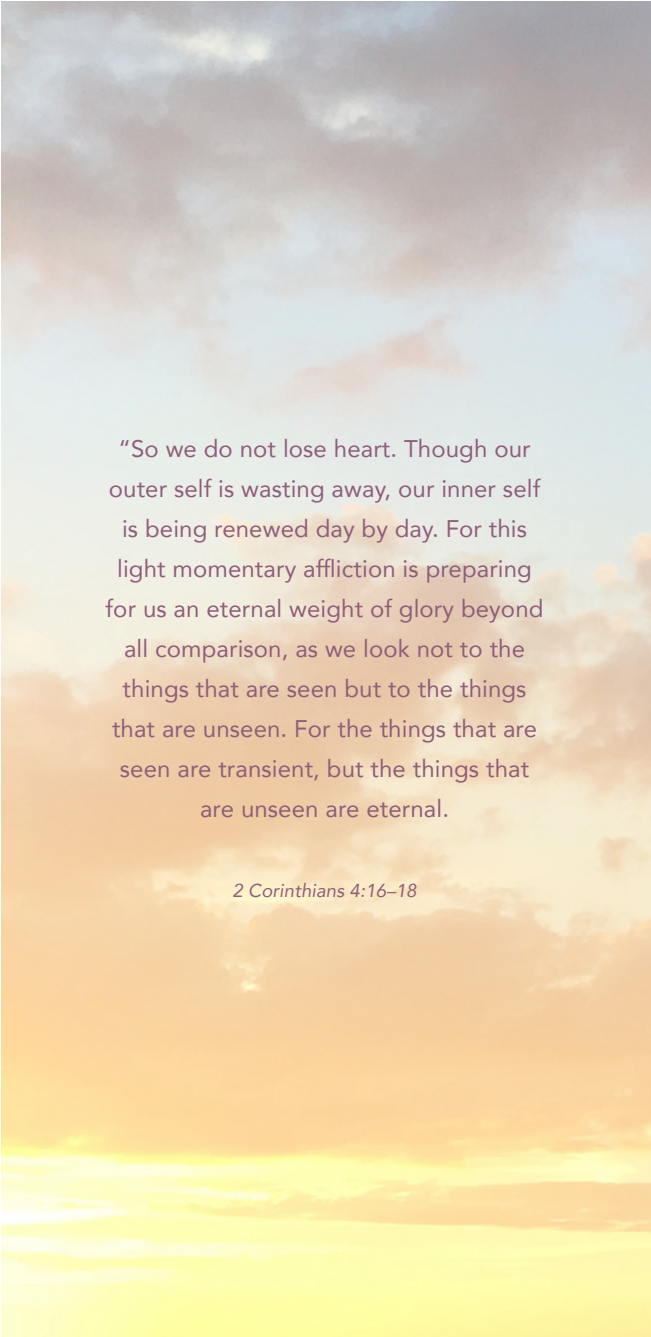
This is the conviction that God has been pressing into my heart in this last year, with a little more pressure with every lesson about giving. I am thankful He hasn't been rushing me through these hard lessons, because let me tell you, it has been an uncomfortable season. I believe we can all freely and comfortably give from our natural gifts, and we should. However, I recall Jesus, and how even He fell to His face and pleaded to God to let this cup of suffering and crucifixion be taken from Him. And I realize that Jesus on the cross is the ultimate example of giving until it hurts, even when you are excruciatingly uncomfortable.

It might be strange to think of giving as a difficulty or a suffering, but sometimes it is! And what gift is bigger than the difficulty and suffering that Jesus endured. This year, God has been teaching me to not only give from the talents that He has given me, but to learn to give from the talents that He has not given me. He has done this by putting women in my life with talents unlike my own. One thing in particular that is difficult for me is opening up my home and cooking for others. Not because I do not want anyone in my home and I want to keep all my food for myself. But because I want everything to be absolutely perfect. I want my home to be perfectly decorated, I want the food that I make to be absolutely delicious. My father is a hoarder of books. Growing up, I would have to squeeze my way through shelves of books and random stacks of magazines that stood at several feet tall, all of which lined every wall and covered every surface. I also shared a room with my parents until I was 17. These facts combined, rendered me too embarrassed to have my friends come over for all of junior high and high school.

After Daniel and I got married, our home became my sanctuary. Unfortunately, I also began to worship my home. I wanted everything to be perfect, and just, so. God saw this was an area of my life that I was not handing over to Him. He saw the fear that motivated my grasping onto this idol, and so He began to open my eyes to it. He brought women who are free of this fear that I have, into my life. These wonderful and beautiful women that are so hospitable and eager to open up their homes. I love that when I come over their homes are in such a disarray and they are perfectly content. I love that they do not fret over dropped crumbs or scattered toys. I sincerely hope that they do not take any of that as a veiled insult, it is truly humbling to have friends who are always so welcoming and at ease.

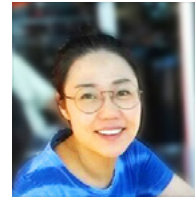
So - little by little - and with good measures of discomfort, I have been exercising this practice of opening up my home as well. I definitely feel the weight of suffering, but I also get to experience the joy of giving more of myself. I desire to not just love others in ways that are easy and natural to me; but also in ways that are exceptionally difficult and unnatural to me, because that is what Jesus did for me in the most costly way ever. And there is a beautiful - if not broken - freedom in that. I still fret over too many scattered toys, but God and I, we are taking this one slightly messier day at a time.





“So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 4:16–18



Because my experience raising our son Josiah was such a difficult task, having another child was not part of my husband and my plan. After having our son, I had gone through postpartum depression which took a toll on my body and mind that I took an oath never to go through this ever again. At first, I thought I would have a career of my dream

and all the glamour after having a kid, but the reality was the opposite, and all the pain and anger I never thought I had seemed to become even more vivid as I was becoming a mother. Many times I really questioned whether getting married and having kids were really a blessing. I felt like my life had stopped and my name didn't exist anymore than being somebody's mom.

In the process of all this, many times I wanted to give up & run away, but words from my husband's mouth gave me another reason to go on.

His words were, “Even if this life is too hard, can you please still live, because I know that one day at the end of all this, we will be able to look back and say our life was good.”

And I started to realize that God never intended to make me miserable and painful, but rather He wanted me to be able to see the real me, the person God had created to be and to heal me inside out. Now I know that without this process, I would have never been able to become the person I am today and to really understand God's divine plan for my life. What true love really means and what worship really means would never have been realized in me without this process. God also gave me a heart that “outwardly we are wasting away but inwardly we are being renewed day by day.” (2 Corinthians 4:16) This is where he wants our focus to be in. God truly wanted to transform me into a faith warrior rather than a lowly worm and being bold rather than being afraid. Before becoming a mother, what I wanted to become and what I looked outside meant so much more to me than anything because that's what the world uses to judge us. But God is really the opposite because The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but “the Lord looks at the heart.” (1 Samuel 16:7)

Well, yes raising kids is still difficult and I sometimes still complain how difficult it is. But because of all the treasure that can be found through it, I rather enjoy facing day to day challenges of being a mother. In that sense, our second child, our daughter Kristin is a real star like her Korean name “Biel”.

Pastor SooSang mentioned “Divine Appointments” in one of his sermons this year. Interestingly, those two words made me look for opportunities more carefully in my daily life. One Friday evening, I went to Target with my kids to purchase some socks. Walking out of Target, I noticed a young lady desperately asking for help in the parking lot. She shared that she just got kicked out of her house with 3 of her kids, 8, 6 and 2 years old, by her ex-boyfriend. She wasn’t asking for money, but looking for a place to stay the night and mentioned paying it back the next day.

She was in her mid 20s, perfectly dressed, and didn’t look like someone who should be out on the streets. I hesitated a bit and tried to discern whether this was the “Divine Appointment”. When I told her that I don’t have enough cash for a motel room, I saw tears building up in her eyes. Hearing this, Jiho and Teo pulled out some crumbled cash from their pockets. She kindly refused saying she won’t take it from the kids. I had to do something. Many thoughts rushed into my head: Divine appointments, parable of the good samaritan, brokenness in the family, stories from Bishop, contrasted by the new Apple TV (4th gen) I wanted. I thought if she isn’t a Christian, maybe I can use this opportunity to share the gospel.

Something really moved my heart that night. I asked for her name (Ashley) and suggested to give a prepaid card that could cover her hotel expenses. Ashley thanked me a thousand times at the checkout, but in my mind, I felt no matter how much I gave, it wouldn’t be enough. I felt helpless. So as I walked out from Target with her, I suggested that I pray for her. The four of us held hands in front of the entrance and prayed for provision and protection. When I heard more details of what happened, it was heartbreaking to hear the brokenness in the family due to the boyfriend’s substance abuse. The stories were exactly the same as the brokenness we’ve heard from the reservation in Bishop. Coming back home, I had this weird feeling. It was a mixture of suspicion - “How much of her story could actually be true? Did I naively believe her?”, and compassion - “Poor innocent woman. I feel responsible as a father and a neighbor to help her”. But soon after, I felt like I met Jesus. Not that she was like Jesus, but it felt like I was giving it to Jesus, and Jesus is helping her.

The next day, Joy was preparing for her scripture reading. As she read Matthew 25, I shivered. After hearing the sermon on Sunday, it felt like the sermon came to life through Ashley. I realize that the life that I am living today is not because of the smart decisions I made, the school I went to, and the work that I have done, but only because of God’s grace and mercy. The short encounter with Jesus through Ashley helped me to point to God for what He has done for me. I pray that I can be more generous every year, not because I am a better person, but because I truly realize the grace and mercy that I have received from Jesus.

Why is it taking so long to buy a pair of socks? I was getting anxious while waiting for Damon and the kids to come back from Target. They came back maybe after an hour and half. As the kids rushed in, they shouted, “Mommy, don’t be mad at us.” “What are you talking about?”, I replied. They shared what just happened at Target. Jiho, my young daughter, was worried that Dad spent more than the usual amount to someone on the street. I asked, “Why do you think I’ll be mad at this situation?” But inside, I thought, “Oh, naive Damon just got scammed by a made up story.” I asked Damon, “Did she sound truthful?” But what I should have said is “You did what was right” even though I was not fully convinced.

I even shared the story with my mom the next day over the phone. My mom and I admired that Damon has a warm heart, but at the same time we were concerned that he tends to be too generous to people on the street. I was concerned that his love and willingness to help could be manipulated and abused by people with bad intentions.

Early Sunday morning, I received the scripture passage that I would read in the first service. When I started practicing and reading out loud, I got goosebumps. The passage was from Matthew 25:31-46.

*³⁷ ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’
⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’*

...

⁴⁴ ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to you?’ ⁴⁵ Then he will answer them, saying, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.’

Damon and I were left speechless looking at each other. This was when I felt like Jesus was telling me, “Yes, it was me. Damon and your kids met me that night, and I was happy that they didn’t ignore me.” Even through the sermon that day, God gave me peace in my heart and confirmation about what we experienced over the weekend.

From this incident, I also realized that it is not my job to judge the truthfulness of why people are asking for help. That is simply between God and that person. My job is to remember Jesus and show my love to others, because Jesus never ignores me when I am in need.

³¹ “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. ³² Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. ³³ And he will place the sheep on his right, but the goats on the left.

³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, ³⁶ I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’

³⁷ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? ³⁹ And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ ⁴⁰ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’

Matthew 25:31–40





*One day, I will be in heaven singing with my “arms held high”
to the loving savior who sacrificed himself to deliver me...
and my children and wife will be right there with me, arm in
arm, singing and rejoicing too; for-ever.*

It had been a long day. Actually if I’m being honest with myself, it had been a long couple of months. There were some things going on that weren’t according to plan in the lives of our family, and it was starting to wear us down. I’m sure you’ve felt that way sometimes.

One of these things was our home getting burglarized in August. It was a shock. We lost a lot of valuable possessions...some replaceable, most of it was not. That was painful. On top of that our 4 young kids felt unsafe. Our 8-year old son couldn’t wrap his young mind around why a stranger would just break into your home and walk out with your stuff. Sobbing, he asked the policeman if it was because maybe they wanted to “come back and kill us”. Afterwards whenever someone knocked on our door, his eyes would get wide, he’d cling to me, and I could feel his heart thumping in his chest. Our older son walked around the house for weeks wielding his Easton baseball bat...during the day. Losing years of valuables was painful. But seeing my kids lose their sense of safety and innocence was even more painful as a Dad. Interestingly our neighbors had surveillance video capturing images of the burglars and their Mercedes Benz getaway car. But the police department told us there was probably nothing that could really be done. Now add anger to the pain. And why would God bring me and my family to San Jose and then this happens? Other things were going on. It had been a long couple of months.

Well a few weeks later, I found myself one night driving to church with my family - my wife and our kids. Though it's a large minivan, the car felt cozy with everyone packed in. Maybe it was the cool autumn air that made us huddle closer. Or maybe it was the hearty dinner we had just enjoyed. Whatever the case, there we were, the 6 of us chatting, joking, laughing, trucking along the 101, trying to recover some normalcy.

Then realizing that we don't often find ourselves all together in the same car anymore, I thought it'd be a good opportunity to play a song that I'd found online and really liked. I had shared it with my kids a few weeks prior and they liked it too. It was a worship song about Jesus' sacrifice for us. And like any good song, it had a catchy melody supporting really meaningful lyrics.

So we pulled it up on my phone and before long the whole family was singing along. I listened as my kids' voices blended together into a beautiful mass of heart and melody. Sometimes the younger ones sang a little off key, but that made it all the more precious and real. I looked over at my wife Christy, and we smiled in a way that only your children can make you smile. Our hearts were full.

And then the song got to the climactic chorus of the song. The 4 kids sang the words with full gusto and conviction. In the rearview mirror, I could catch glimpses of them singing their little hearts out, eyes closed with furrowed brows, necks straining:

*With arms held high,
Lord we give our life!
Knowing we're found in Christ,
In Your love for-ever!*

My eyes captured this moment. My ears heard the kids' voices proclaiming this line. God was giving me a sneak preview into heaven. Just a few weeks ago, I came home to a burglary and 4 scared weeping children looking to me for answers. And now here they were singing with joy and strength. You ever have one of those moments where even as it's happening, you know this is going to be one of those memories that'll flash before your eyes right as you pass away? This was one of them. Bliss filled my heart. Then it filled my eyes as tears. Wet eyes, driving down the 101 highway on a Wednesday night; it was like a loving nudge from Jesus that as down as I might be feeling, to keep trucking along His way toward this destination of destinations.

One day, I will be in heaven singing with my "arms held high" to the loving savior who sacrificed himself to deliver me...and my children and wife will be right there with me, arm in arm, singing and rejoicing too; for-ever.

Thinking about that moment now, God was showing me a preview of what is really important in this life. It strengthened me and compels me to live this life with this Jesus-moment as a prize worth enduring for, obeying for, running for, conquering the bumps along the way. It isn't easy. But Jesus overcame for my family and for me. That night I was gifted a picture of my family, me, and Jesus all huddled together in His house. I don't know that a man could ask for much more.

After the song ended, we got off the 101, pulled into the parking lot, unloaded, and we walked into Jesus' church.

"Jesus said... 'In my Father's house are many rooms... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also... I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.'"

- Gospel of John, Chapter 14



This summer I had the opportunity to go on a short term missions trip to Thailand. When I signed up for it, I wanted to be trained spiritually for my work life but what God taught me through that mission trip was how much I needed to hunger after Him. I think going on this trip, I wanted to seek out validation as a Christian and worker, that I

would be both trained but affirmed in my ability to outreach. But when we started to meet with students, I quickly settled into a place where I was comfortable, building relationships and having fun with the students.

It didn't hit me until one of our morning meetings how much more I should be shooting for. As I happily settled to have surface level conversations with many of the students, somewhat oblivious to the fact that I would only be seeing these friends for a few more weeks and my window of time to share with them was closing. As I saw the short window of opportunity I had with them, I realized how complacent I had been even in the past year. I had many opportunities in my small group to reach out and to meet with members, but so often I settled for what I felt comfortable with. I would sacrifice the precious time to encourage and pour into the lives of fellow small group members.

As I thought of leaving the campus I realized how much more I could have blessed my fellow brothers and sisters at church and I was filled with regret. I was happy with doing what I thought constituted as my "job" as a Christian, but God was reminding me that there was so much more in store if I dared to seek Him in faith. God reminded me of Luke 6:21 "Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied." Which for me was a reminder that there was so much more of God to experience if I had the guts to pray in faith for it.



And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said,

*"Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.
Blessed are you who are hungry now,
for you shall be satisfied."*

Luke 6:20-21

This year, God challenged me to step out in faith in a big way during our mission trip to the Bishop reservation. During the training I was drawn to do what I am comfortable with such as leading praise or teaching about computers and programming. I would have thoroughly enjoyed those activities. But as I watched others joining those teams, God spoke in that still, small voice and said, “There are plenty of laborers for those - choose the one that needs laborers.” So I waited.

One of the teams that wasn’t getting volunteers was visitation. I think most people are afraid because it feels like a “pastor’s job” or for someone who is a “mature Christian.” For me, it was the fear of reaching out to people who don’t know you or aren’t expecting you, and the fear of not knowing what to say. I am comfortable carrying on a conversation or answering questions if asked, but I’m uncomfortable starting one with strangers. I could hear God saying, “choose this and you will grow.” I was wrestling inside because this was my last choice for a team, but I signed up. I had seen God being faithful when I obeyed in the past, so I trusted Him.

It wasn’t easy when we got to Bishop. The visitation team consisted of Grace Park, Joy Moon, and myself. We were all fairly new to this; at best, we had followed others in the past but never led visitations. On the first day, we received a list of names for us to visit. As we called some of them to schedule a visit, many didn’t answer. One gentleman was furious that someone would give his name to be called and hung up. That was tough, because I felt like I fumbled my words and was rejected. But I remembered that Jesus was rejected even by God the Father on the cross, so I was encouraged that Jesus could empathize with me even though my rejection was far less severe than His.

Later that week, I followed Pastor Yung on a visit to a woman, Katherine, who was severely ill for unknown reasons. When we visited her at her home unannounced, we met two of her sons. One was welcoming, one was not - and he was big. However, as we talked with Katherine and her two sons over a couple visits, we saw God opening the doors to their hearts. We prayed for the older son who broke down crying, delivered Korean BBQ and bread when they were hungry, and prayed for Katherine who was fearful of passing away soon. Most of the time, Pastor Yung led the conversation and prayers. When I asked him how I was supposed to pray for people, he simply said, “Jesus has endured everything that we face as human beings, so He can identify with us. Encourage them with that.” That was an “aha” moment for me. I had been focused in the past on recalling specific Bible verses for the prayers, but what I need first is to remind people of Jesus. My fear of not knowing what to pray for melted away.

That isn’t to say, though, that Bible verses aren’t important. One of the last people that Grace and I visited was a gentleman, Don, in the hospital who had been dehydrated. He was fearful of death as well because the dehydration has delayed an important surgery. As Grace and I prayed for Don, we were both moved to pray for healing. We declared God’s promises in the Bible and recalled how Jesus is the Great Physician. Don was so encouraged that he thanked us several times for praying powerfully for him. When I went back the next day to follow up, he was still encouraged and thankful. Even one of the nurses noticed, and she said that she knew about our church’s ministry every summer and was very glad to see what San Jose New Hope is doing. That was such a blessing to hear!

As I returned to San Jose after our time in Bishop, I thanked God that He prompted me to choose a different path. Instead of serving in the ways I felt most comfortable, He took this opportunity to push me in a new direction. In doing so, I grew in confidence in ministering to others. He taught me that we need to direct everyone to the Word, Jesus, and recall God’s Word, the Bible, to pray with power and authority. I got to see first hand how God wants us to be more active as His “ambassadors” and “salt and light” on earth.





Year 2016 was a special year for my growth in God. I started to give up hope in finding a woman in Christ who I could share a relationship and grow with. After being single for over 13 years, I became comfortable with being able to do exactly what I wanted whenever I wanted wherever I wanted and however I wanted without worrying about the opinion of another person. Single life became quite comfortable.

At the end of last year, I was blessed to meet my newly wedded wife Tiffany. We were very intentional in our plans to meet someone and marry. Throughout the course of our dating, we were challenged in our marriage courses to learn what it means to be married. We learned that couples need to learn to be selfless, give unconditional love to one another, and sacrifice our own needs and desires for our spouse. The most challenging thing we learned is that we'd still fail at doing all of these things, which is why it is most important to keep Christ at the center of our marriage. We'd have to learn to be unselfish, we'd fail, but we'd also have to learn to forgive. Tiffany and I have had smaller opportunities to learn some of these things across this year, but we know that many challenges lie further ahead of us. God has brought us together, and I am challenged to diminish the most selfish parts of my heart through our relationship.

This year, one of the many ways I witnessed the wonder and goodness of Jesus came through walking with the women in my GopeLife Family (GLF). Despite the differences among us including our ages (ranging from 20s-40s), various life stages, and the very different life circumstances we experienced this past year, I saw the Lord's hand at work in bringing this group of women together to care for one another and to carry each other's burdens.

Our group met on Wednesday nights which just happened to be the worst night, schedule-wise, for me to meet. Wednesday is the busiest day of the week for me and my kids, which also made it the most exhausting for me. God only knows the constant grumbling that was in my heart and the countless excuses I would try to come up with each and every single Wednesday for why I should give myself a break and stay home. But seeing as I was the "facilitator" of the group, I could never seem to come up with a good enough reason to justify staying home. (No offense to my GLF sisters btw - it had nothing to do with you!)

Yet every single week, the Lord was faithful and I would come away feeling so thankful that I had gone.

My GLF group was a place I could go to remove my masks, be vulnerable, share my weaknesses, and not be judged. There was one night I asked for prayer because I was having such a difficult time with a relationship in my life and feeling emotionally drained and discouraged. To my amazement, hearing my story prompted another sister to share that she had been experiencing a very similar struggle. It was so comforting to know, first of all, that I was not alone in this particular battle, and then listening to another sister's heartfelt prayer over us refueled me with just the strength and hope I needed to get through another week. There was no doubt that night that God was at work.

Week after week, I saw this happen. There was a special joy and energy on nights when the room was full because we were genuinely glad

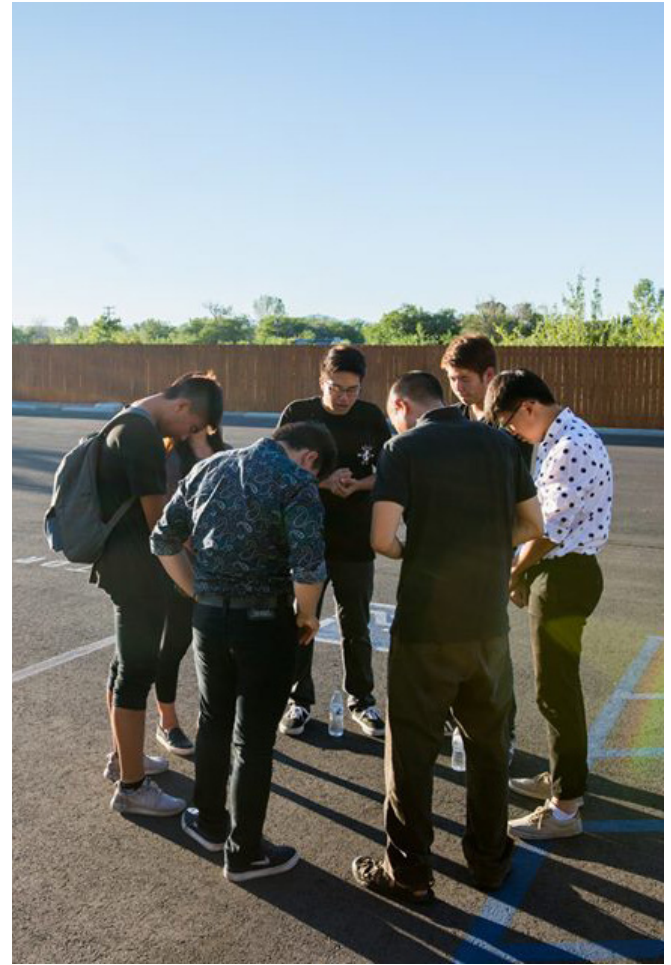
to be together. But the Lord was faithful even on nights when attendance was sparse. There were several meetings when it would be me and one or two other sisters, yet the sharing on those nights seemed to be even deeper and the prayer times even more powerful.

For some in our group, it was a difficult, painful year and their faith in God's goodness came under attack. But I saw how the Lord graciously increased the faith of others so that we could carry our sisters' burdens and boldly lift up prayers on their behalf as they faced their trials.

And finally, I'm reminded of God's goodness and faithfulness when I hear about the many prayers, big and small, that were answered this year. I had several moments in recent weeks when something would happen to me and the Lord would remind me, "Do you remember asking for this 2 years ago?" or "Remember you asked the sisters to pray about this last month?" Life gets so hectic that at times I even forget the things I've asked for, but the Lord is teaching me that He is faithful to answer in His perfect timing and this makes me excited to see how He will answer the many other prayers that are being prayed in our group.









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Looking ahead to 2017...
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