



*Lecia Retter*

As a former Kansas girl, the first time I lived in Oregon I quickly learned to “look horizontal, not vertical.” I missed the year-round sky of blue, but really love and enjoy the lush green that continuously surrounds me here.

This third Oregon tenure of mine has been full of incredible blessing. My husband Jeff and I currently serve as pastors of prayer at our church, lead a home group, and are very involved in the ministry of healing prayer. I also have the enormous privilege of co-directing Girls Camp at Twin Rocks Friends Camp this year, and serving as the speaker.

Our two daughters, ages 16 and 11, keep us hopping and continually teach us through their relationships with God and the honest, passionate ways that they approach life. Together, we have spent these past four years on a journey of learning to love and experience God more deeply.

In this latest season of my life the Lord has been teaching me to be attentive and look for his lessons in the simplicity of life. One of those recent lessons involved dozens of red roses. Those are the lessons I want to share with you.

*BIBLE READING: Hebrews 12:2*

Arriving a few minutes late for the wedding reception, we stand in the entryway and watch the bridal party go up the stairs as they are introduced to the crowd. The door opens on the white limousine parked directly outside and the wedding couple appears. They giggle as they make their way inside. A friend engages the bride in conversation and her attention turns from her groom. As the conversation ends she is disoriented and, having lost sight of her groom, begins frantically whispering, “Ryan, where are you?” “I’m right here,” he says as he lays his hand on her arm and gently turns her around. Instantly, her panic subsides and her eyes fill with joy.

As I watch this scene unfold, I am thankful for my intimate relationship with Jesus, my bridegroom. Even so, when difficult situations emerge, I often begin having “conversations” in my head that cause me to become disoriented.

Hebrews 12:2 reminds us to “throw off everything that hinders.”

Many times what “hinders” me *is* me. It’s my tendency to analyze a situation and try to search out my own solutions. When I realize the futility of my own solutions, I panic and wonder why I am missing out on God’s abundant joy. Like the beautiful bride in her wedding dress, my eyes fill with joy when I realize my groom, Jesus, is there all along.

*SONG: O Love That Wilt Not Let Me Go*

*PRAAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, keep my eyes fixed on you, my bridegroom. Thank you that when my eyes are fixed on you, I can leave the stress at your feet, stand tall and rest in your presence.*

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*BIBLE READING: 1 Samuel 16:1-13*

After the wedding couple ascends the stairs, we enter. A visual feast awaits us. The large open lobby is full of round tables. Black tablecloths and red roses adorn each table. The tall tables have a glass square vase with a dome shaped bouquet of a couple dozen roses. The other tables have roses encased in a high glass vase filled with water. On the top of each of these is a dome shaped bouquet of six dozen roses. The effect is stunning.

I am captivated by the water-encased roses. I have never seen anything like it before. Or have I? My gaze is drawn to a young woman across the room. Like the roses in the vase, she catches my eye. She has a quiet beauty, the kind that intensifies the longer you look at her. As I watch her, I realize she is unaware of her inner beauty. She doesn't know what she carries inside.

I am reminded of Samuel's experience in 1 Samuel 16. Samuel's first pick would not have been David, yet David was God's choice, for God does not look at the outward appearance but rather at the heart.

Was David aware of what God saw when he looked at him? Is this young woman aware of what God sees when he looks at her? Am I aware of what God sees when he looks at me?

*SONG: Open My Eyes That I May See*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, make me aware of how you see those around me and how you see me. Open my eyes that I may see as you do, not looking at the outward appearance, but rather at the heart.*

—Lecia Retter

*BIBLE READING: 2 Corinthians 2:14-17*

I open the doors to the church coffee shop and am greeted by roses. They have been transferred from the reception location overnight. Our simple warehouse-converted-into-worship-space is transformed by their beauty, and the atmosphere is changed as we prepare for our King.

Again I am struck by the spectacular display of the six dozen roses on the top of each vase. It is as though the ones so beautifully arranged on top bloomed as a result of the two or three roses inside the glass cylinder.

I casually bend over and inhale. The sweet fragrance of the roses penetrates to my core and it hits me. Paul, in 2 Corinthians 2, writes about how God, through us, spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. The few roses inside the vase represent us. The water represents our lives being enveloped by the Lord. As we are encompassed in the life, grace, and glory of God, we are transformed into God's image.

The roses inside the vase truthfully had nothing to do with the roses placed on top. The designer made it happen. It's that way in our life with Jesus, isn't it? When we surrender to a life surrounded and encased in his presence, he works a beauty into and out of our lives that is evident to the world around us. They see it, they smell the fragrance, and the atmosphere is changed.

*SONG: Love Divine, All Loves Excelling*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, Jesus, that a life surrendered to you changes the world. As we rest in your glory, we ask you to create in us, through us, and out of our lives, all that you have in mind.*

—Lecia Retter

*BIBLE READING: 1 John 3:1*

Toward the end of the service, our pastor announces a surprise. There's a wedding—right now! As he calls the couple forward, two women come up and arrange the roses for an impromptu wedding. The women quickly alternate the vases on two steps and then place four on each side coming toward the audience, creating an aisle. The stage area is instantly transformed as though an expensive wedding has been carefully planned.

As the women work, our pastor tells the story. When this couple became Christians two months earlier, she moved out of the home they shared. As our pastor shares this decision, the church applauds. He hands the microphone to the bride who shares how the Lord miraculously healed her back two weeks prior. Again, applause breaks out as we celebrate together.

While they share these stories, a woman brings up a small bouquet she made from the bounty of roses and places it in the bride's hands. She puts a single rose in the groom's pocket. With each placement of roses, the radiance of the Lord mixes with the radiant faces of this transformed couple. When they are pronounced man and wife, a spontaneous standing ovation occurs as they walk down the aisle showered with even more rose petals.

I find myself weeping as the lavish love of the Lord is so evident. He has not only transformed their lives, but has celebrated with them by providing a wedding they could never afford. It's just like the Lord.

*SONG: It's Just Like His Great Love*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, God, for the lavish ways you love us. Open our eyes so that we notice them every day.*

—Lecia Retter

*BIBLE READING: John 10:10*

As I listen to Dave Ramsey on the Financial Peace University (FPU) video that evening, my eyes are riveted to the roses. “If you live like no one else, later you can live like no one else,” he says. When I reach that point, I’m going to have roses in my home.

I text the mother of the bride asking if I can have a couple of roses. She replies that I can take some out of the top. After the video, I try to figure out how to pluck a couple of roses from one of the tightly packed domes. As I fear, when I take them the remainder look like a partially scalped hedgehog, or a “chia” pet that missed having some seeds planted in one area. I resign myself to the fact that she told me I could take some and decide to enjoy the roses.

The next morning I get a text asking if I know what happened to the roses. She can’t believe that someone has scalped them. My heart sinks and I confess. But her intent was that I take the entire dome! I couldn’t imagine that she would want me to have all six dozen roses.

Jesus promises us life to the full, but we settle for much less because we can’t believe he wants us to have it all. The glorious, abundant bouquet of the life he intends is ours for the taking, but our perception of what we deserve limits what we are willing to grasp.

*SONG: All That Thrills My Soul*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, help us to “live like no one else”—understanding, receiving, and celebrating the complete fullness of life you have for us.*

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*BIBLE READING: Hebrews 10:19-25*

I enter the sanctuary and easily retrieve the scalped bouquet of roses. “What do I do with these, Lord?” The faces of three fellow travelers instantly pass through my mind.

The first is a woman we began praying for three years ago. We continue to walk through the trenches of our spirits together, inviting Holy Spirit to heal, cleanse, and transform. A single mom, she doesn’t receive roses often. My heart leaps at the opportunity to bless her.

Four years ago a friend formed an accountability group of women “who love Jesus.” We meet weekly, sharing our stories, prodding each other on toward love and good deeds, listening to Holy Spirit together.

As I stand at the sink preparing individual bouquets, God reminds me of an extremely lonely time in my life when he first taught me the importance of deep, spiritual friendships. I was standing at a different sink, tears of loneliness pouring down my face, when the phone rang. “God told me you need a flesh and blood friend.” A spark of hope ignited in my soul and we began to meet.

God doesn’t want us to persevere alone. My determination to walk in intimacy with God is personal, but the reality of walking it out is not.

Draw near to God...hold unswervingly to hope...spur one another on...encourage one another. It’s a package deal. True intimacy with God is enhanced and enriched by intimacy with others.

*SONG: Blest Be the Tie That Binds*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Jesus, show us the ones with whom we can journey in true intimacy. Draw us out of our isolation and into the richness of the kind of deep fellowship that draws us closer to you.*

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*BIBLE READING: Psalm 141:1-2; Revelation 8:3-4*

They arrive in our home at 6:30 and are greeted by the sweet smell of roses. Even after giving many away, bouquets of roses are scattered throughout the room. Our home group has been meeting for about a month and we love these precious friends.

During prayer time, we gather around one who is a cancer survivor and has recently learned that her mother's body is filled with cancer. I listen to the intense prayers of the others as my spirit draws near to God.

I take a deep breath and am enraptured by the scent of the roses. My mind is in the prayer time, but my spirit is carried away, thinking about how the throne room of God must smell. I lift my hands in praise to Jesus and pray that this beautiful woman and her mother will be embraced in his arms, feeling his comfort, smelling his fragrance, resting in his presence.

We set our prayers before God like incense. The fragrance in the room, and the sweet scent in my spirit, remind me that Scripture says that the prayers of the saints and the incense in heaven mix together and come before God. Oh how God loves us, that our prayers—whether agonizing cries for help, pleas for mercy, shouts of joy, heaps of thanksgiving, or loving conversation—are a pleasant aroma.

*SONG: 'Tis the Blessed Hour of Prayer*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Thank you, God, that you hear our prayers. Surround us with the fragrance of your Spirit today.*

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