

“Focus on Joy”  
Mother’s Day: May 12, 2019  
Rachael Tresch

Good morning! My name is Rachael Tresch and you may recognize me from the praise band... I sing and lead worship. But it’s very different to be up here speaking my own words! But I’m thrilled to be here today! Actually, I don’t know who is more thrilled... me or my mom?! I promised her, “Don’t worry mom, I’ll let everyone know how awesome you are!” It’s true, I have an incredible mom. She made parenting look so easy! Not to mention, she is the most creative, loving and empathetic woman I know. She is my number one cheerleader and always taught me to go after my dreams. Actually, I come from a long line of amazing women. Heck, its true...the men are pretty amazing too! My Dad used to say that we are direct descendants of Alexander the Great... which is not true.

My maiden name is Spiropoulos, which is Greek if you couldn’t tell. I actually grew up not far from here, right near Bowman’s Tower. My brother Johnny and I, my cousin Cher, who also lived with us, enjoyed one of those fairytale childhoods... filled with imagination (I loved the Wizard of Oz and insisted my parents call me Dorothy for a short time)! We had adventures, fun, vacations, laughter, TONS of family and cousins (because we’re Greek) and more love than stars in the sky.

From as far back as I can remember, I’ve always been a Christian. I’ve always felt a spiritual connection to God. I can remember being four years old... I was in my aunt’s wedding and my grandmother, my Yiayia, had picked me up from the reception early. I was in my beautiful dress and it was pouring buckets. I was so upset at the thought of ruining my fancy hair and my beautiful dress... And I remember my Yiayia are telling me, “You know God listens when little children pray. Maybe if you ask God to stop the rain, just so we can get safely into the car, he might listen.” They don’t call it “child like faith” for nothing. I had no doubt that God would hear my prayer. So, I so boldly asked Him to please stop the rain, so that my pretty dress wouldn’t get ruined. Don’t you know it? The rain stopped. To me, this was bigger than the Red Sea parting! And from that day on, I never questioned who God was, or that I was special to him (as we all are, but sometimes need reminding).

Fast forward to life in my mid 20’s... I had finished college at Northeastern University, bounced around to a few different jobs and finally landed at Clear Channel Radio. I hated the job, but loved the view! I had met the man of my dreams... the incredible Jamie Tresch! Smart, handsome, sarcastic and witty, loved adventure and music and had so much love and respect for his family. Most importantly, he put just as much effort into his Halloween costumes as I did... So I knew he was the one! Five years later, at Union League of Philadelphia, on October 30<sup>th</sup>, 2010, a string quartet played “Somewhere over the Rainbow” and I wore ruby red Swarovski crystal heels, as my Dad walked me down the aisle to become Mrs. Jamie Tresch.

The next year quickly became the year that birthed so many new beginnings. I had decided to open my own studio (which was really just taking over my husband’s recording studio Man Cave) to start *Sing Voice Studio* and give singing lessons... A complete leap of faith, which at the time I thought was my idea, but now I know it was God connecting all the dots for me. Then in November, we had our first little monkey Colten William. And he was the happiest ball

of love and chub that I could have ever imagined! We were totally in love with this tiny human and life was really happy. We would go to Zsazie and Papou's house (my parents). They lived at the Waterview in New Hope. And we would sit on their beautiful balcony that overlooks the river and watch the fireworks in New Hope as a new family. This was my new happy place... until one day, everything changed - like a switch. Life was in color and then black and white. In June of 2013, my father died very suddenly.

In life, we all have these moments. Those moments that pull the rug out from under and knock the wind out of you. This was ours. Losing someone so close to you is the strangest thing. That word... "died", I couldn't even say it for the longest time. It was like a piece of all of us, had disappeared too.

My Dad was one of the smartest people I had ever met. I had always respected that he was never handed anything, but had to work very hard for everything he had accomplished. He decided not to finish college, because he was offered a job on Wall Street... and built an empire of success. He had worked tirelessly and was a financial mastermind. In 2006, he started his own Registered Investment Advisory group. He appeared on CNBC and Bloomberg and was well respected in the financial community. He would always strive to give us the best of everything. The best house, the best vacations, the best cars, the best boats... we literally had it "ALL"... Little did I know that all that "stuff" that he had worked so hard for, would eventually lead to the stress that took him from us.

That next year after losing my dad was such a roller coaster. Jamie and I, along with my Mom and brother, were so blessed to have an amazing network of family and friends. Also, our little boy, Colten, was 18 months at the time and had so much love and energy. He kept my husband and I focused on the beauty and wonder of life and about 6 months later, we learned we were pregnant with our daughter Lyla. We decided to name her Lyla Grace, because she was our gift of Grace and our gift of Joy during a time that was so painful. Still, it made me sad to look at my son's big brown eyes and know that my father was missing out on watching him grow up and now, missing out on ever meeting his granddaughter.

On the roller coaster of 2013 & 2014, we had the lowest of lows and also some of the highest of highs. I can remember a particular morning about five days before my due date with Lyla. We were so excited to meet our little girl and so happy to have something joyful to focus on. My husband should have been on his way to work already, but the three of us were having such a fun morning, eating breakfast together, playing guitar and singing. I can still picture it so clearly in my mind, Jaime was sitting in his favorite chair, playing a One Direction song to his very pregnant wife and his son... when all of a sudden he had a full-out Grand Mal Seizure/stroke. The stress of that year, coupled with a tiny hole in his heart actually caused MY husband to have a stroke. But, by the grace of God, Jaime had not been driving, like he should have been. After some medical attention, he was ok.

To say that year was a roller coaster, would be an understatement. I had always had a strong faith, but we had experienced some major traumas. And my outlook on life had really been turned upside down. The little things didn't seem to bother me anymore, and yet, at the same time, the smallest thing could set me off. I knew first hand that tomorrow **was not and is not** promised. So, I was determined to live each day to the fullest and determined to find joy wherever I could. I decided that I was going to say yes to as many opportunities that came my way as possible.

When you experience a life altering event, I think you either shut down for a while, or speed up so fast so don't have to think about what's happened. For me, I needed to completely fill my plate and keep myself busy. So, I surrounded myself with family and friends. I made sure I had lots of activities and play dates planned for my son, and I threw myself into my work. To boost up my business, I started going to a Women's Networking group called *Heartlink*. I actually just really liked the name of it, so I thought I'd give it a try. Well, I'm so glad that I did because it was hosted by Karen Webb. God was again connecting the dots for me. Karen and her daughter Jaime had been attending Woodside for some time and she suggested that I come and check it out. Now, I live down the street from Woodside, but it wasn't until someone invited me that I gave it a second thought. I had to ask her where it was! I had driven by countless times, but it was the invitation that made all the difference.

The first time I came to a service, I came alone to see what it was all about. In the bulletin, I saw there was a group called Grief Share and these things called "Growth Groups". Again, I was on a mission to say yes... but what I DIDN'T know, was that my heart was really on a quest for a deeper relationship with God. I realized, I **didn't** need to say Yes to EVERYTHING, I needed to say yes to the RIGHT things. I needed to say YES to God. I needed to FOCUS, a word I tell myself a lot. FOCUS, for a person who gets distracted easily and excited often! FOCUS! To kids who aren't listening. FOCUS! Stop... and FOCUS.

For so long I was a "baby Christian". Walking next to the light, but still doing things my way. The moment I walked through these doors I could feel that was going to change. I'd like to share a few areas of FOCUS that brought everything into light for me.

The word FOCUS, can be used in many different ways. The first way I want you to think of it would be as in a concentration, or a major... or a direction. What is your focus? Or WHAT are you doing to focus the spiritual direction of your life?

Prior to Woodside, I would go to church on occasion and I would read the Bible, starting at Genesis, over and over and over again. I would read Christian books every now and then, like the Love Dare, but nothing consistent. I was a "go with the flow baby Christian". When I saw the post in the bulletin for Grief Share, I didn't hesitate. Again, I was on that mission to say "yes" to the RIGHT things. I was scared out of my mind, but I talked to someone and signed right up. I figured that this way there was no backing out. The same thing happened with the Growth Group. I felt awkward and I was expecting to be bored, quite honestly. In my mind, I had imagined a bunch of women just sitting around reading from the Bible...(starting at Genesis!) Just sayin', "Bless your heart!" (I don't know why in my mind they're always Southern, but they are.) I had no idea what to expect. BUT I so desperately wanted to find God's path for my life! I can remember the first meeting I went to, I thought "wow" these are real people! These are people I want be friends with! No one is sitting around and acting "Holier than thou" or making me feel inadequate for not having the biblical knowledge that they had. I remember meeting Jill Condon for the first time and seeing her bright rosy smile and feeling completely at ease. I had found my tribe. We laughed together, cried together, created a sacred space where God showed up every time.

In the beginning, I DID NOT want to pray out loud! And when Jill would ask if anybody wanted to pray, I would put my head down and **pray in my mind** that she *wouldn't* pick me! Five years later, I'm co-leading that group and I am happy to pray out loud. I don't schedule anything for Thursday mornings because *this is my focus and it's such a gift*. Going to church on

Sunday was great, but only God could have known that I needed to dive in deeper. I needed to be pushed out of my comfort zone, ask questions, hear my tribe wrestle with questions I hadn't even thought of. I needed to get dirty and do the work! God has grown me in ways that only God can grow a person. It was exactly what I needed at that moment and funny enough, it proves to be exactly what I need each week!

My next area of FOCUS has to do with how God makes all things clear... but we have to be listening! I can remember many times thinking, "God can't you just tell me what to do? "To just hear your voice right about now would be amazing." But it doesn't work that way. I think becoming a parent has really helped me to understand the love and patience God must have for us. Our son, Colten and our daughter, Lyla are my pride and joy... but also drive me bananas! When they want something... they are SOO persistent! When we don't give in...they think we're just not listening or that we're mean parents by not giving them what they want RIGHT THEN AND THERE! But as parents we know what's best for them! And at 7 and 4, that's hard for them to understand. Our kids wanted to go to Disney World in the worst way! For about a year and a half they would constantly say everyone's going to Disney World but us! Jamie and I had been planning a trip... but didn't want to ruin the surprise! We knew what was coming and were dropping little hints, but all they could hear, was that we weren't going. We could see the big picture and kept saying just wait, your time will come.

I think God works the same way. He sees the entire picture. I think if we really lean in and listen ...we can feel God talking to us. Giving us God winks and letting us know He is here and has never left us. Just as we talk to our children differently, to try to get on their level and relate to them in a way that they can understand, I think God does the same thing....

After coming to Woodside for a couple of weeks, my mom had come with me and after the service, we both felt this electricity. We were so moved and energized. And she said, as a typical stage mom, "You need to sing with the band. Come on let's go up and just get some information." Well I knew what that meant. Sure enough we marched up to the front, she introduced herself to Darlene and she said, "My daughter is a vocal coach and she can really sing. I'm sure you're always looking for singers." I roll my eyes, but I'm so glad she did that. The problem was I didn't know any Christian music other than 90s music that I had learned in youth group. I was about 6 months pregnant with my daughter, and convinced that this was not the right time. Again God had other plans. I went home that night and started to check out Christian songs on YouTube. Then I stumbled upon a little band called Hillsong. This was not the kind of Christian music I had remembered from Sunday school. Then *Oceans* happened. As I sat in my Studio... the music turned up as loud as possible. I let that song wash over me. I must have listened to it 10 times. It was as if God were speaking directly to me. As I heard and felt the words...

*"Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders  
Let me walk upon the waters where ever you would call me  
Take me deeper than my feet could ever wander  
And my faith will be made stronger in the presence of my savior"*

I just sat there and balled, cried so hard. Big ugly cry. But also a big cry and plea to God to say yes, I will step out of the boat and I will follow you. Since then I realize that music is the way that God works through me and speaks **to** me. I had been a Christian my whole life, but this was

my awakening! My moment where EVERYTHING made sense and became so clear. What's funny, is that it had been that way ALL ALONG! I just wasn't listening in the right way.

The last area of FOCUS has to do with our perception. How we see things. It has to do with our emotions... and more specifically, Joy. I think Steven Furtick of elevation church said it best when he said, "*Joy is a focus before it's a feeling.*"

We can't tell someone who is grieving to just be happy, But we can choose what we focus on and what we put our energy into. Joy is a gift from God that cannot be taken from us. With that said, nothing robs joy like comparison. We need to stop looking around at what everyone else has. It's exhausting! Comparison can be the joy killer. We had a charmed life, full of all the stuff you could ever want, but when we leave this earth... we don't get to take it with us. For my Dad, I think he felt such pressure to keep up this picture that he created... I certainly don't want to portray him as shallow-minded, because that's certainly not true. He was very complex! But having him here would be worth more than anything.

So the question becomes, what are you Focusing on? Are you seeing the joys of your life or are you weighed down by the pressures of the world?

Psalms 16:8 says,

*"I will keep my eyes on the Lord. With Him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. You make known to me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy. In your right hand there are pleasures forever."*

In God's presence there is fullness of JOY... What an awesome gift! It's about finding joy when life is out of focus, for a life of contentment regardless of circumstance. Life is hard and full of so many trials but when we choose to follow Christ, where trust is without borders, he will lead us to joy and life.

In the words of Glinda, the Good Witch, "*You've had the power all along my dear*". That power is Jesus Christ and he has never left us. If God is in us, and joy is the fiber of our soul. We just have to take the Yellow Brick Road and FOCUS our eyes on Jesus Christ.

*Will you pray with me?*

*Lord, I thank you for being a lamp to my feet and lighting the way to Woodside. In our congregation, we have those who are grieving... and today might be an especially hard day for them... I ask that you be with them and help them to find the Joy in this life. Lord. I lift up all of the mothers, grandmothers, sisters, friends and women in our lives who have helped to shape us! Those who have held our hand and who have been there when we needed them! Thank you for working through them Lord. You are our strength and our Joy! We lift this all up to you in Jesus name. Amen*