

Mother's Day- May 13th

Who Packs Your Parachute

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You might be wondering why I have a picture of a war veteran on the screen. I know it's not Memorial Day. I promise this will make sense. That gentleman is Charlie Plumb. He was a Navy jet pilot in Vietnam. With five days left in his mission before returning home to America, he was shot down by a surface-to-air missile. He then spent 6 years in captivity as a Prisoner of War. Years later, after returning to the states, Plumb was eating out with his wife, when a man at another table approached him. He asked if he was THE Charlie Plumb who flew fighter jets in Vietnam. Charlie confirmed that YES, he flew in Vietnam. The gentleman then told Plumb that he packed his parachute while aboard the aircraft carrier USS Kitty Hawk. Needless to say, Plumb was astonished and thankful. Without that parachute, he would not have survived. Plumb, to this day, talks about the importance of that parachute, and the several proverbial parachutes that helped him survive his time in captivity; a mental parachute, a physical parachute and a spiritual parachute. Each of us needs tools for survival, and Plumb inspires us to think about this question: Who is packing *your* parachute?

When I think about who packed MY parachute, I immediately think of my parents. I was raised in a terrific home with an older brother and sister and a mom and a dad who loved and supported us. We were encouraged to try different things, to work hard in school, to write out thank you cards, to use our manners, and to be kind to everyone. And we did all these things. I was a good student, not a good musician, and a decent athlete. When I picture my parachute, I see all these things mixed in there. But the one thing that was a constant was our faith. From my baptism, to my confirmation, to my wedding, my faith was planted, watered, and nurtured. My parents made our faith a priority. My siblings and I never missed Sunday School, we sang in the church choir, we went on family retreats, we were church kids. My mom was director of the nursery school and it seemed that one of my parents was always either a deacon or an elder.

As we got older, my siblings and I were fixtures in Junior High and Senior High youth group. My parents didn't have to drag me to church. I had good friends there, and we did pretty awesome things. I *wanted* to go! I loved the lock-ins, capture the flag, mission trips, and our shared Sunday night dinners at church. And when I entered senior high, I found that church was my safe haven; a place where I wasn't judged, where I could be ME, and where I knew I was *loved* by my peers, by my leaders, and by God. The seed my parents planted, their choice to firmly pack faith in our parachutes, was taking root. Their choice became MY choice. I left their nest with my parachute filled with faith.

According to Proverbs 22:6, we are to "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it". My parents did that. They packed our parachutes and prayed over us that we would continue to walk with Jesus as we became adults. When I left the nest, I

didn't know what lay ahead. My life had been relatively easy to this point. But challenges did lie ahead. And I'm so happy that my faith was firmly packed in my parachute. I had the love, support, and help I needed to get through some difficult times.

The first challenge hit at age 18 when my 23 year old sister Debbie was diagnosed with Hodgkins lymphoma. My family faced this news with optimism and confidence in God's healing powers. We would get through this. We were good Christians and God would see us through. My sister was an incredible person- truly filled with light, beautiful on the inside and the outside. Everyone said 'this is the good cancer to have' and the statistics were always on our side.....until they weren't. We prayed, she battled, the cancer came back. We prayed, she battled, the cancer came back. After 5 ½ years of battling courageously, my sister passed.

My faith was tested. I was hungry to make sense of what happened. God had never let me down like this before. When she passed, I was fresh out of college, working in finance in NYC. I wasn't 'home' and knew I needed help working through this. I considered where to turn, and I took a glance at my parachute and knew the one place I was always loved and accepted was church. I called the counseling center at Fifth Avenue Presbyterian in Manhattan and made an appointment. My counselor helped me work through my grief, allowed me to be angry at God, and opened my eyes to a promise I heard many times in my youth. It is written in John 3:16, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in Him shall have eternal life". This truth that I learned growing up became very real and concrete to me. My sister, because she believed in Jesus, was in heaven for eternity. And I knew that promise was there for me, too. With my counselors help, I learned that bad things exist in our world (like cancer), we live in a fallen place. God didn't want my sister to get sick. But he used her life for his glory. In her short life, she touched so many as a teacher and coach with a beautiful soul and magnetic personality. I believe through each setback with her cancer, she touched more people. She became open about her faith and knew without distraction what was important in her life. In the end, I believe God welcomed her home. I can hear Him saying "Thank you Deb – you have allowed me to use you for my glory. You have shared my light with everyone you've encountered. Come home. Rest with me."

I still struggle some days, and get angry that she's not here with me, and upset that she's forever 29 in my mind while I get older. But I am very happy that I can view her life through the lens of eternity. And THAT brings me peace and hope. I am so thankful for that promise we all have as Christians.

A few years later, I was again thankful that my parents packed my parachute so carefully and diligently. As newlyweds, my husband and I moved to Atlanta GA for a job opportunity. We literally were married for two months when this opportunity came up. We didn't know a soul in Georgia, but we went. I wasn't sure how I'd make friends in a new neighborhood without a job and without kids. My husband started working, and I was lonely. One day out walking, I was invited by a lovely woman to join the neighborhood bible study (this was down south, remember). Without hesitation, I said YES. I knew I'd be surrounded by women filled with love that would support me and grow in faith alongside me. These women went to different churches, were of different denominations, but all had a love for Jesus that was contagious. These women were by my side as I welcomed our first two children into the world. They filled my fridge with meals, prayed over my deliveries, and offered a helping hand so I could get some rest. When we were so far from our families, these women, these *sisters* helped me survive a tiring stage in life.

And not only survive, but thrive. It was with these women that I experienced my first growth group, that I discovered Beth Moore, Max Lucado, Tim LeHay and other incredible authors. I can't imagine missing out on the blessing of knowing these women. Because faith was intentionally packed in my parachute, I was open to joining this incredible group of sisters.

Since our time in Georgia, I still rely on the faith that my parents packed so carefully. Another challenge I've struggled with is raising a child with anxiety and admitting that I struggle with anxiety myself. It isn't easy, and sometimes my mind gets stuck in a spin cycle worrying about the same thing over and over. I see it in my child as well. We have sought out therapy which has helped give us tools to manage our anxiety in the moment. But the Bible has given me a perspective on this challenge that I wouldn't be able to find anywhere else. As Paul wrote in his letter to Philippians "I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength". Paul LEARNED to be content in ALL circumstances and he was in some pretty rough places (including prison!). If Paul learned to be content, than surely I can too. When anxiety is flaring up, I can stop and lean on God. And I am thankful that He is there to lean on. I can be content even when the anxiety is swirling. I know He's in control, and I know the anxiety will pass. I'm not perfect at being content, but it's getting easier with practice. In Thessalonians, we are told to "Rejoice always, pray continually, give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus". It's not easy to rejoice and give thanks when panic strikes. But in those anxiety filled struggles, like at 2:00 in the morning sitting with my daughter while she's in the grips of anxiety unable to sleep, we *really* seek His peace. There's a closeness in our relationship with Jesus that comes during these times that I am so thankful for. And I know that our struggles with anxiety will be used for good. I know that we can be a guide for others working through anxiety. I know my child has developed a compassionate, caring personality because she is so aware of her feelings and the feelings of those around her. I know God has an amazing plan for both of us. I'm thankful for His peace and the promise that ALL things, even the messy, sad, imperfect things, will be used for good.

And now I find myself thinking about packing OTHERS' parachutes the same way my parents packed mine. Obviously, I'm very intentionally packing faith in my own children's parachutes, but I'm not stopping there. I'm trying to squeeze as much Jesus as I can into all the kids' parachutes at this church. Even if I only have them for 30 minutes at Adventure Club or 45 minutes at Sunday School, I'm very intentionally planting seeds, letting these kids know that Jesus loves them, and praying that the seeds take root. I am making sure that when these kids face challenges like the loss of a loved one, or finding themselves alone in a new place, or facing anxiety or other illnesses, they will know where to turn. Where they can find peace, and hope. Where they can feel content no matter their circumstances. I want these kids to know that there is a safe place, a place they will always be loved and accepted. And I want them to know that there is more than this life. There is the promise of forever for all those that claim Jesus as their savior.

When I think of packing parachutes, I think of this scripture from the book of Matthew. "You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify you father in heaven" (Matthew 5:14-16). I want my light to shine so I can glorify my

father in heaven. I don't want it to be dimmed. I want to pass it along. And I can do this by packing the parachutes of those I encounter.

So how can you pack parachutes? Invite a new neighbor over for a meal. Pray for those suffering loss. Offer company to those that are lonely. Schedule a time to grab coffee together! Share your walk of faith with the youth here at Woodside by teaching Sunday School or volunteering at VBS. If you're nervous to teach, I'll join you! Show your love for Jesus by loving everyone you come in contact with. When you leave here today, I hope you'll think about the parachutes you can fill each and every day. You never know who might need it the most.