

# Seeds of Hope

April 2009

Newsletter of Mustard Seeds & Mountains

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## ***Then he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son.*** Gen 22:11

Kierkegaard wrestles, in his book *Fear and Trembling*, with this profound account of Abraham obediently following through with the command to sacrifice Isaac, his son, his only son, and the only avenue of the fulfillment of God's promises to him of uncountable future descendants.

We gloss over this text far too quickly, for lurking in its details lies a man's unshakable trust in God, rooted in a deep personal knowledge of God. We are too quick with the summation and application and not patient enough to plumb the very real struggle, the very real personal wrestling which must have gone on in Abraham over the three days' silent journey to the place of the ultimate testing (the silence implying the struggle). **The raised hand, the poised knife, the unhesitating willingness to obey resonates with an understanding of and confidence in the character and nature of God.** Job had his children taken by others; this is altogether different by magnitudes.

**Do you trust Him? Is He trustable?** This issue of trust was at the heart of the evil one's temptation of Eve, and Adam's disobedience. Is following and obeying God really in your best interest? Will the losses you will inevitably incur as consequences of obedience be valued truly as naught? Obedience most often involves loss and sacrifice. Not all sacrifices are spared as in Abraham's case. One must turn from one possibility, sometimes sin, sometimes something not inherently bad in itself, but something which dissipates our love or obedience, and limit ourselves or invest our time, treasure or talent in ways that seemingly offer no benefit now or in the future. The "what's in it for me?" that serves as motivation for most of us is hidden. Still, the knife must fall.

Abraham could have done many things other than bind Isaac and place him on what Isaac knew to be an altar of sacrifice (how's that for a traumatic childhood experience?). Had he done otherwise, he would never have become who we now know him to be. His obedience affected eternity and all humanity.

And now here we are, in the midst of turbulent economic times, perilous international intrigues, and what many see as "the worst time in memory." Fear is in the air and potential solutions our leaders offer carry the aroma of desperation rather than wisdom.

**Are you trusting Him?** There are no guarantees. This isn't some form of witchcraft where if you follow the ritual, say the right words with the right pitch in voice and right manner, you control the future or move the spirit world. The knife must be raised, and possibly fall.

Abraham's happiness, his dreams, his reputation, his hopes for the future rested under that knife. Still the hand rose with unshakable purpose and poised with all his strength corded tight for the stroke. And the stroke would have fallen because...**Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.** Heb.

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## **"When you're praying, you're trusting the Lord to answer your prayers."**

At the end of March, I'm taking my general building contractor's exam. **I have to trust in the Lord to help me pass this test**, because I'm not good with tests. I've been studying off and on for the past year and am praying that I'm able to pass. Once I do, I have to pass another test before I can get my license.



The Lord has provided our ministry with enough interns to get through the summer in the past.

Last year, we were under-staffed with only 1 college intern, but since he was returning from the previous summer, it worked out. Bob and Merilee helped out for a week when it was really busy.

**This summer, we're praying that the Lord will provide for enough home repair staff. I'd like to have at least 4 interns**, especially during our weeks where we have 60+ volunteers. So far, we have hired at least one college intern.

Right now, we're taking home repair applications and I'm starting to do home assessments. We're trusting in the Lord to help us select the right families for the summer. We've already worked on two families' homes early on in March, one young couple and one elderly widow. It was a new team that week, and the Lord worked in the families' hearts, especially with the young couple. The team and that family made a real good connection.

With home repair, we always pray that our vehicles run good and that no one will have an accident. The few small accidents that have hap-

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11:19 NIV

Abraham had to personally sacrifice his son. This wasn't some calamity that befell him from outside. It was a command to obey, a test of loyalty, a ferreting out of a possible idol in his life. It was personal. Conventional wisdom had no place here. It was impotent in this spiritual struggle. Here **only trust in God is fertile**. Only trust in God can birth hope. Only trust in God proves an anchor in this storm.

**Now is the time to act boldly. Now is the time to act with confidence.** Just recently, I began to fret over finances in the ministry. I have always said that I will not allow Mammon to control me. So, to break its power to induce worry, I made out a large check to another local ministry, an amount that was challenging to me. An amount that said, I don't trust money, I trust God, the maker of heaven and earth. By giving money away, I devalued it, broke its hold on my mind. I refocused my eyes on God. Can I trust Him for my future or is my trust for the future in my bank accounts? Whether or not He reciprocates and replaces the money, I know I did the right thing. The knife had to fall. He is pleased. I also know that there will be many more tests. How I fare will be determined by in whom or what I place my trust.

**The times call to us to rise up and be the people of God.** The wringing of hands in the world, the terrors in the night, the remorse over the loss of luxuries and comforts should not be our demeanor. We serve YHWH, the maker of heaven and earth. He is able to keep and deliver us. We are His hands and feet in the world. We are His voice. We are His people. Because of this He can work through us, comforting those who suffer, helping those in need, providing hope to those whose source of hope has taken flight. **Can it be that He has placed us here for such a time as this?** Will you bind the sacrifice and raise the knife? The whole world is watching.

Randy

### You find what you are looking for.

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

This portion of the promise that God gave to the Israelites when they were in exile is just one demonstration of God's faithfulness we find in Scripture. **When it seemed like they were at their lowest, God reminded them that he would not forsake them.** God did bring them prosperity; He did give them a hope and a future. Jesus, the long-awaited Messiah, was sent to do what neither they nor we could ever do – perfectly fulfill the law of God. This hope and future has been extended to all who call on Him, whether they are Jew or Gentile. This encourages me because it reminds me of the



faithfulness of our great God. Long, long ago, God made a promise to Abraham that one day his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the sky and that all people would be blessed through him. Even though Abraham's descendants strayed from their loving Father, and even though God had to punish them (more than once!), He still kept his covenant to be their God. He also kept the promise to bless all peoples through them, the promise that was fulfilled in Jesus. This is the great news that we are to share with the world.

**In His word, God has demonstrated over and over that He is faithful and trustworthy.** This is especially comforting in times when promises are made and then broken, when the events of one day cause concern over what may happen the next day, and when people want a quick fix for a symptom while ignoring the root of the problem. It's easy for one to become cynical and lose heart. However, I don't have to look far to see reminders of the faithfulness of our unchanging God.

**I see God's faithfulness in the eyes of a boy who has recently put his trust in Jesus.** The excitement he shows when he's learned something new about the Lord in His word and the joy that shows on his face, even when other kids pick on him, remind me that God is faithful. God is still adding to

His family; He is still working in and through us.

**I see God's faithfulness when kids who were once involved in our children's ministry and are now young teenagers continue to come to our house or drop by the center just to visit. Some want to work with us this summer.**

Somewhere in their past, a seed has been planted in them, and the seed is beginning to sprout. They have experienced the love of Christ as our staff has developed relationships with them and their families and has shared the good news of Christ with them, and they have a glimmer of hope. Join me in praying that the Holy Spirit will make the soil of their hearts rich and productive, so that seed will continue to grow and flourish.

Every child that comes through the door of the Empowerment Center needs to know that God is faithful. Every person who stops to talk with me in the neighborhood or "up on the hill" at Northfork needs to know that God is faithful. We all need to know this. The best form of encouragement comes when we are reminded of God's faithfulness to us as He provides for our day-to-day needs, and the great love and mercy He has shown to us through Christ. May we echo the words of the hymn written by Thomas Chisholm:

*Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Great is Thy faithfulness!  
Morning by morning new  
mercies I see.  
All I have needed Thy hand  
hath provided;  
Great is Thy faithfulness,  
Lord, unto me!*

Bob Hammond

### We Need New Stoves

We must purchase 3 stainless stoves for use in our team housing. These will cost, due to the quality we seek due to heavy use, at least \$2000 each.

**Please make a donation to help us with the cost.**

pened have been minor, and **the Lord has protected everyone from injuries.** With young college interns driving our big home repair vans with little or no experience, we have to trust in the Lord to keep them safe in the summer. They're driving from 8 in the morning until about 5 in the evening, running from job site to job site.

#### **Personal reflection and gratitude**

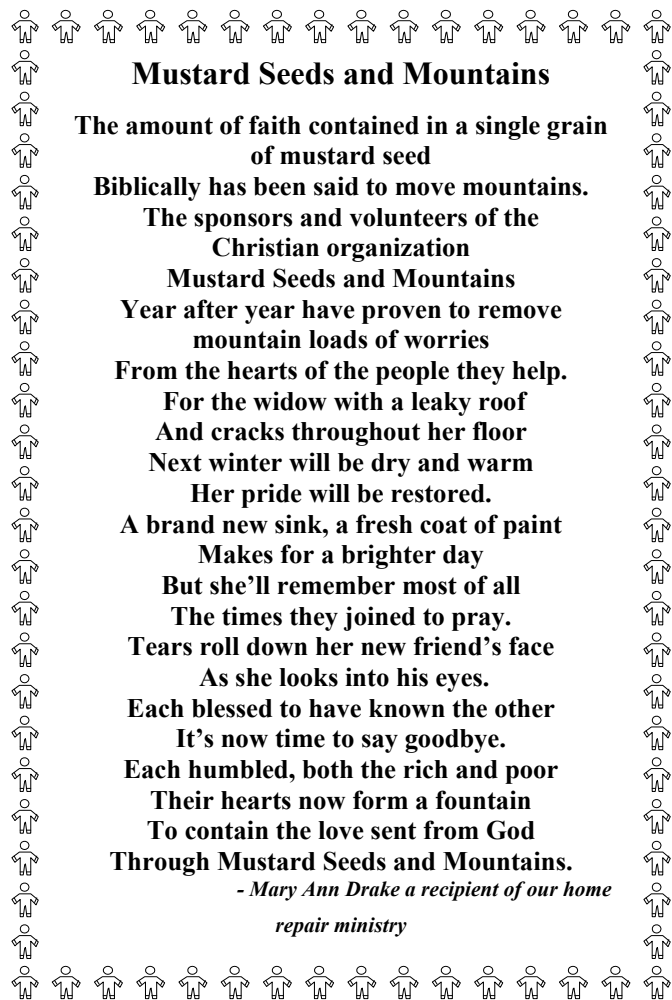
I've been with the ministry for 9 years now, and I enjoy the people that I work with and also serving the Lord as I work. I've had other job offers, but I'd rather stay with the ministry. By working with Mustard Seeds and Mountains, I've had a chance for my son to come work with me as a junior high home repair intern. He wants to work for the ministry again this summer.

**Mustard Seeds and Mountains worked on my house nine years ago in the spring.** Dan Hunt, who ran the home repair, wanted to have a Bible study with me. I didn't want to, but I couldn't tell him no because they had spent 6 weeks working on my home. So we started having Bible study and hanging out. I started helping him with some projects of the ministry. I came on part-time for the summer in home repair, and ended up staying on staff and coming to know the Lord during the summer of 2000. I worked with him a year and a half, and then he went back to Minnesota and I took over the home repair part of the ministry.

About 6 or 7 years ago, Shawna had surgery and the medical bills were really expensive. **She couldn't find help anywhere, so we prayed about it.** Shawna was volunteering at the head start and was talking with a woman there whose husband worked at welfare. The lady talked to her husband and got him to set up a meeting with Shawna and **they cut the medical bills from \$20,000 to \$2000.**

Through the ministry's Learning Center, **my three kids have been tutored after school and they've improved in their school work.** Lacy was in a learning disability class a few years ago, and now he's in all regular classes and wanting to become a teacher. Shawna has been running Sunday School class in church for a couple years now. My son and two daughters are getting to grow up in a church environment, where my wife and I didn't go to church growing up. I'm thankful for Mustard Seeds and Mountains working on my home 9 years ago, and the opportunity to work with the ministry.

*By: Lacy Blankenship*



### **Mustard Seeds and Mountains**

**The amount of faith contained in a single grain of mustard seed**

**Biblically has been said to move mountains.**

**The sponsors and volunteers of the Christian organization**

**Mustard Seeds and Mountains**

**Year after year have proven to remove mountain loads of worries**

**From the hearts of the people they help.**

**For the widow with a leaky roof**

**And cracks throughout her floor**

**Next winter will be dry and warm**

**Her pride will be restored.**

**A brand new sink, a fresh coat of paint**

**Makes for a brighter day**

**But she'll remember most of all**

**The times they joined to pray.**

**Tears roll down her new friend's face**

**As she looks into his eyes.**

**Each blessed to have known the other**

**It's now time to say goodbye.**

**Each humbled, both the rich and poor**

**Their hearts now form a fountain**

**To contain the love sent from God**

**Through Mustard Seeds and Mountains.**

*- Mary Ann Drake a recipient of our home repair ministry*



### **Trusting God to do what we can't do.**

I have been building a relationship with a young couple who has moved into my neighborhood. They are expecting their 1<sup>st</sup> child here soon. She is 17 and he is 19 and I have been

coaching them on parenthood, on what to expect, and things to do and to look out for. She hasn't seen any doctors about her pregnancy. Pray that I can help her get her medical card, prepare for the birth and challenges that come after. This is a young couple immature in many ways. We placed teams to work on their trailer this spring and that's been good. Most of the team members were around their age and that opened them up to talking about Christ. Neither the husband or wife have a job, but he is doing odd jobs and pick-up work in the area when he can.

I am still working with a lady on Celebrate Recovery. We are on our 2<sup>nd</sup> book now. I have been trying to find other women to join in, but I know it's got to be God's timing not mine. So I am trusting him to open the doors to the women he wants be in it. I do have a couple of women interested in it but they don't want to be in a group setting. I do understand how they feel about telling others your problems and fears and secrets. So if the women do decide they want to go through the CR, I may have to do one on ones for a while until they can build trust up or feel as if they can be in a group setting.

Please pray for our youth here in our area. I was doing a weekly Bible Club for over 2 years in Elkhorn and here about a month ago, I put a hold on it. The parents were not sending their kids, so the only kids coming there at last were just my 2 girls. I had asked the parents in the area if they could transport their kids and pick them up and if possible if 1 parent could help out once every 5 to 6 weeks. If they could I would have enough adults to help out and after this the numbers of the kids started to drop fast. One family moved away. I will try to start back up this spring or close to summer again. The kids will be able to be in walking distance and I pray that they will all return.

I also have another prayer request. My girls and my ex-mother-in-law and I were hit by a drunk driver on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February while I was parked in a parking lot at a gas station. She didn't have insurance or a drivers license and it was her 3<sup>rd</sup> offense of revoked DUI. Thankfully no one got hurt real bad. But I am having some trouble with my back.

*Angie Caskey*

Prayer Requests	Answers to Prayer
<p><b>Jacque, Randy and their family.</b> Continue to pray for Jacque as she continues with her cancer treatment. Pray she has a restful time as she visits WV from March 28-April 22, then returns to CA for the remainder of her treatment through July.</p> <p>Pray for Jacque's heart. Her cardiologist reported that her heart is showing signs of weakening which may be related to her chemotherapy</p> <p>Pray for Seth who is a first year teacher. Pray too that he finish his Masters Degree. Pray for his wife Melissa and his son Caleb.</p> <p>Pray for Jeremy, Monica, Lourdes and Emmanuel (Superman) as they handle busy lives while also hosting Jacque. Pray Monica's eye heal completely and that she have a healthy pregnancy.</p>	<p>Praise God! After the staff anointed her with oil and prayed for her in Nov. Jacque has not taken one of the medications for myasthenia gravis that she has depended upon for over 40 years. She feels stronger than ever!!</p> <p>Praise God for His provision for all the traveling and speaking Randy has done over the winter and spring.</p> <p>Praise God for sparing our son's jobs in the latest round of layoffs in CA schools.</p> <p>Praise God for His provision for Jacque to return home for 3 weeks in March and April.</p>
<p><b>Empowerment Center and Bible Clubs.</b> Pray that the new mentoring collaboration be successful and God raise up responsible youth to be mentors.</p> <p>Pray for the new Bible club at the Empowerment Center.</p>	<p>Praise God for how He is working in kids, especially for Micah who received Christ and is insatiable in his desire to learn about Jesus.</p>
<p><b>Speaking opportunities for Randy in churches, small groups, Sunday Schools or Christian Business groups.</b></p>	<p>Praise God for opening doors in FL, GA, NJ, and MD.</p>
<p><b>Staff Needs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Male Youth Workers</b>-We need men to work with young men.</li> <li>• <b>Director of Volunteer Ministries</b></li> <li>• <b>Bookkeeper</b></li> </ul>	
<p><b>New Supporters.</b> We need at least 50 supporters at \$50 a month and 7 churches at \$100 or more. <b>As we bring local people on staff, we need more outside supporters.</b></p>	<p>Thank God for new supporters who have joined us. Pray as Randy continues to travel, raising support.</p>
<p><b>Pray for Randy as he embarks on a number of writing projects which will hopefully advance the Kingdom of God.</b></p>	<p>Praise God for providing clarity and helping Randy prioritize his efforts.</p>
<p><b>New Board Members.</b> Pray that we are able to recruit new members, especially a fundraiser. Pray for current board members.</p>	
<p><b>Mission as Life Trips.</b> Pray that we fill our schedule for 2009 spring, summer and fall.</p>	<p>Praise God for each week having at least one team. Pray now for the weeks to fill up!</p>
<p><b>Staff Needing Further Support.</b> Lacy and Angie (local staff), Bob and Wendy, Randy and Jacque, and Merilee.</p>	
<p><b>Summer Interns.</b> Over nine people have applied for internships. Pray God guide us in our selection.</p>	<p>Praise God for great opportunities He opened at Trinity College in Florida and Life Pacific College in CA.</p>
<p><b>Lacy Blankenship.</b> Pray for Lacy to pass the general contractors exam. He's studying for it now.</p>	