

“Just a South African Girl Living in an Alabama World”

No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Romans 8:37-39

Fling Open the Blinds

I hear the birds chirping, dogs barking, lawns being mowed, and the neighbor kids playing outside. There is such life! Yet today, my body feels heavy. I have so much to do today, but I long to just shut the blinds, crawl under the covers, and fall asleep as soft tears run down my cheek.

This past month, 15 years ago, my father took his life. It's that love/hate feel. I want to punch him in the face for leaving, yet I'd give anything to see his face again, to feel my father's embrace, or to have him walk me down the aisle one day. As I write, I desperately want to share something that would encourage others, but today I feel empty. I have no words. My heart is sore.

I am one amongst thousands.

The hurt across the world is heart breaking. I think of a time in Zambia, shaving the head of a young one's life, affected *and* infected by HIV. She is so little. Her life expectancy is dependent on her mother and father's decisions. Will they care for her correctly? Will they love her well? Did they remember to give her medication? The hurt in the eyes of an abandoned child is hard to swallow.

Struggling to get out of the hole I allowed myself to crawl into, our family offered to help collect the Trader Joe's shares one night; a good way to get out of the house and clear one's mind. Boxes of bananas filled the car. I laughed quietly as I remembered a prayer our family prayed roughly a year ago, for banana's, to make sweet bread as a treat for others. The Lord for sure heard our prayer and has continued to provide bananas, in abundance! This particular evening we decided to take the abundance of bananas downtown and distribute them to those living on the streets. Here's what we saw:

A man passed out at the front door of a shelter, possibly drunk, belly showing, vulnerable to the world. A lady sleeping on a street bench, with all her belongings tucked close by, reeking of urine. Another man searching the streets for a half smoked cigarette. Men sleeping on the stairs of church buildings, others on park benches, another in the back of an abandoned truck.

What struck me was a man, approximately in his 50's, pushing himself across a four way intersection, in his wheelchair, with his feet, going backwards, with his hands full. Herb was his name. I climbed out of the vehicle to give Herb some bananas and ask him where he was headed. The streets were his home.



He proceeded to tell me about his life as a veteran, his studies, and how he'd had his first good night's sleep in a long time after being booked into the ER the night before. Herb enjoyed my "British like" accent, and made sure to tell me that he only mimics people he respects. Herb is confident, incredibly intellectual and so respectful. I don't know how life brought him to the streets, but he has no shame, and no regret. He's a man whose hope is in the Lord.

I needed to meet Herb that night. I needed Herb to remind me that **God is faithful**.

Whether my earthly father chose to protect me or desert me, whether we have cases of bananas or none, whether I have a home to run to or live with all my possessions in the middle of a park in downtown Birmingham, my heavenly Father does indeed love me and loves all of us. His love is not contingent on our choices, whether my dad felt despair, whether He gives me exactly what I pray for or whether my heart feels sad or happy. **Jesus loves all of us** right now, right here where we are, whether we feel on top of the world or lost under the world's cares. He loves that little child affected *and* infected by HIV. He loves Herb and the simple thankfulness he has for a comfortable night in the ER. He loves us in our heavy and when we want to hide under the covers.

Jesus is our safe place and He is the refuge to which we all must run. "Woe is me" gets all of us. We wonder "why" and "if only," but the minute we break, He is there, catching us, holding us, comforting and strengthening us. The truth is... we will all grieve "what wasn't that we wished was," our to-do lists will never end and sorrow will still try to suffocate joy in this world of pain and suffering. But God. But Jesus. But the Holy Spirit. **We have hope**, a hope that does not disappoint. We do not have to fear. We do not have to worry about tomorrow. Our God is for us. **Our God reigns**. Jesus conquered death and His dying and resurrection gives us life. The Spirit is in us and advocates for us. Fling open the blinds and run to Jesus my friends; I am running there too.

"We have this hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure..." Hebrews 6:19



Can you get on your knees for me?

As I write, I worry about how friends may perceive my letter. I wanted to be real and vulnerable. I'm tired of pretending.

This is my heart, it hurts, and I know I am not alone. As you pray for me this month, let's think about those around us.

When last have you asked your neighbor if they have a need, gave a friend an unexpected and much needed hug, or invited a stranger over for dinner?

Let's love as Christ has loved us.