

## ***Introduction: Song: Rescue by Lauren Daigle***

**Rescue, Lauren Daigle song played at the beginning of my talk.**

### **Personal Transformation through Surrendering to His Plan**

Lauren Daigle. Can she speak of His plan in our struggles and suffering any more eloquently?

I hear you whisper underneath your breath  
I hear your SOS, your SOS  
I will send out an army to find you  
In the middle of the darkest night  
It's true, I will rescue you

These words pretty much sum up my entire story. But I would be remiss if I did not actually share with you how God rescued me, a good girl, yet one who struggled through the desert looking for answers to a why that could never be answered to my satisfaction. I became the Prodigal daughter who went home to God for visits, but then headed out again to seek my own answers to the why of suffering.

All of us have pain and suffering. Some more than others. Some through their own choices and others thru no fault of their own. When I discerned sharing this part of my story with you, I found it very challenging. My life and the life of those I love have been touched by suffering in so many ways. I have cried out to God from the time I was a little girl as to the why of suffering. So much pain, so many silent SOS being whispered in what looks like the darkest moments. When asked to think of when do I cry out to God, my first response is when do I not cry out to God. It seems every day, I am shouting His name for mercy and grace and strength and love and forgiveness. We are told suffering has redemptive power. But when? How? When thinking of how I have been personally transformed through this suffering, I realize that my true transformation to being His Child came only after I was willing to give up control and surrender to His Plan willingly.

Sometimes I have wondered if God got me confused with Job. Seriously, as in the Book of Job, was God and satan sitting around Starbucks and satan says "Come on, let me just tweak that one a bit?" And God says "Joan Marie," cause you know, God always uses our middle names just like my mom did when I was a kid in trouble. He says, "Joan Marie, her faith is strong. I don't think you'll shake that one." And so it begins.... Satan sets out to prove he certainly can shake me up a bit. And yet, here I am, totally outside my comfort zone trying to figure out how starting out agreeing to be on the retreat team to decorate some tables and purchase the wine has me sharing my story to all of you. And honestly, it's a bit daunting and shows my tremendous trust in each of you as this is something in my husband's words, when he heard I had this assignment, said to me, "yeah, you stink at that. Good luck." So I'll try to share this story with you in the hopes that you understand even in the midst of suffering, we can still learn

to stand tall and trust God, surrendering to His plan and evangelizing for him not with words but with simple trust and worship so that our life would not make sense without His long standing presence, steadfast love, and tender mercy.

**Joshua 1:5-6 I will not leave you nor forsake you. Be strong and steadfast.**

I am the mother of five awesome children. And if you don't believe me, just check out my FB posts.... My eldest daughter, Justine, is a beautiful, loyal, spunky 33 year old who dreams of being married with children some day. She also is fully disabled with a myriad of diagnosis. Her first diagnosis at the age of two was epilepsy. I remember the morning of her first seizure vividly... the fear and anger and searching for answers. The tears. I also remember Jesus reaching out to comfort us in that moment of great need through the kindness of those around us. The neighbors who watched Justine's nine day old brother while Jeff and I went with the ambulance to get her to the hospital to stop the seizure. The nurse who was working in an adjoining room that came out into the hallway and handed me tissues as I wept in my husband's arms after the technicians took Justine for a CAT scan. The lay director of our parish who came to the hospital to visit a lowly baby and support her grieving parents. An older woman in our parish who connected us with her niece who lived down the street and also had a disabled daughter the same age as Justine. Sometimes when we are at our lowest, God sends human angels to cover us in love and carry us along. For God is in the details: a tissue, a hug, a new friend.

During those days, I was in shock. I had planned on her being the first woman president of the United States, not someone with a disability. As a speech pathologist with a medical scientist for a husband, we both knew the ramifications of a diagnosis of epilepsy. We knew that our plans for her, our hopes for her would change. We would have to let go of so much. And it was hard. I was angry that the child I expected to raise was gone. And in her place was this very, very sick toddler. I wanted to blame God and to beg Him for her healing all at the same time. I screamed WHY over and over and over. And yet, I fell on my knees constantly begging for strength to get through this and find a way to cure her.

And life continued... She got older, but she did not get better. There were challenges and struggles and new health issues and profound learning issues, and then growth issues. When at the age of 12, Justine was diagnosed with short stature, being 4'7", I began in earnest to search for an answer from God. My cry and determination to answer why, but I was unwilling to accept that God's answer might simply be "why not.". I was just tired of the struggle of raising a child who was different looking and behaving than other kids her age.... than even our other children. I ached seeing her struggle, to deal with the seizures and health issues she had, to try to help her learn only for her to lose the information while she seized in her sleep at night. I wanted God to tell me why or to heal her. I was desperate....

When some are faced with suffering and pain, they grab hold of God and trust in Him to get them through. Sadly, this was not what I did. Like the Prodigal Son, I wandered deep into the

dark night searching for answers to my Why. If I could not trust in Him to heal my daughter from all the suffering she was forced to endure, I would find a way to heal her myself and so my wandering the desert began in earnest.

### ***Good Girl to Bad Girl:***

We had been raising our children in a traditional Catholic home. We took our kids to Mass regularly, were active in parish activities, and participated in all the appropriate Sacraments at the appropriate time. On the outside I looked like the perfect Catholic mom. But God knew in my heart, I had turned from trusting my faith, trusting Him to help me through this struggle and had begun to “lean on my own understanding” instead. I was just tired of hearing over and over that the reason for suffering was “a mystery” that we should offer up. I wanted answers and “mystery” and “offering up” were not the answer I was looking for. So I entered the New Age Movement in earnest. God stays true to His Word and never forsook me, despite my trying to fit my New Age learnings into a Catholic mold. God never let me go as I was His child. So even as I wandered looking for answers outside my own, personal faith, God was ever protecting me and calling me home. Please be aware as I share this part of my story, that I hold no judgment towards anyone who may be searching for answers in a similar way. We are each called to discern where God is leading us in any situation. I am simply sharing my story as to what God is specifically calling me to and how my surrendering to Him brings Him the glory.

It's funny that though these practices were definitely New Age and not Catholic based, God was true to His word and uses everything for our good and His glory. I was practicing things in a way that was wandering away from Him by appearances, but trying to adapt them to fit in my Catholic faith and would be honoring to Him. He answered with tender mercies and steadfast love throughout all of it. He pursued my wandering from Him and showed me that He yearned for me to come home to Him.

1. Reiki Master: I became a Reiki Master, which is a form of prayer that moves cosmic healing energy through your hands to the recipient. However, I was uncomfortable doing it the prescribed, right way. So I adapted it. I simply placed my hands on Justine's head and prayed for healing for her. I asked God, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Blessed Mother, Angels and Saints and loved ones long gone to pray for her healing. A year of praying every night, and she began reading against all odds. I still pray by laying hands on her when she asks, though we now call it Jesus Juice. We give Jesus all the glory!
2. Psychics: I went to see psychics. I took her with me. They told me things which did not come true. I stopped going. In the end, God doesn't have to roar like a lion, he can simply whisper like a still, small voice and help you realize you are not where you belong. Perhaps some of you have been involved in something you should not be

involved in and have heard that whisper as well, telling you to come back to Him and stop looking at false idols....

3. Yoga: I became very involved in the yoga community, went through the teacher training program and taught classes. During this time, I participated in the Yoganda worship service in one of my yoga classes. I held on to yoga for a very long time. I can tell you that at that time, yoga was one of the things I engaged in that I attribute to saving my life. It was during my yoga years that I was diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder. This diagnosis was partly from the stress and trauma of having a chronically ill child and partly from childhood issues that had been unresolved. But that is another story for a different witness. Those days when my symptoms were severe and I struggled with severe anxiety, I would go to a yoga class. There on the safety of my mat, I would connect my breath to my movements as I flowed through the poses and I would calm. I would be in that place where it was God and me and there was peace. I can tell you though that I know without a doubt that God's mercies are tender and He provides for us when we whisper our SOS, but He also provides for us when we are too traumatized to even think to whisper an SOS in the night.... He holds onto us and makes everything work for our good and His glory. There came a point where some of the yoga practices I had been involved in created such a feeling of guilt within me that I walked away from yoga. It is only recently that I have begun to heal from some of these experiences and considered that maybe someday I will practice a Christian based yoga. But for now, God has called me to let yoga go and to learn other ways to be with Him to calm my anxieties. And so I go to Daily Mass, pray the Rosary, attend Adoration whenever I am able. My focus for now is to worship in Him and to live my life in such a way that I am showing my faith in Him by all that I do. I fall short often, but I am faithful and that brings me peace.
4. Sai Baba, a prophet who heals. Jeff's refusal to take our daughter to India. "If God wanted to heal her, we would not need to go to India for it."

I was The Prodigal Daughter, who came home for visits. I would wander, lost in the practice of New Age trying to find a way to heal my daughter. Then I would head back to Mass and prayers and trying to adapt whatever I was dabbling into His plan. I was the lost sheep whom Jesus pursued through the desert. Jesus knows the desert. After His baptism, He spent forty days in the desert being tempted by satan. I am convinced He followed me into the desert and He carried me to safety. He knew my temptation to be in control of what was happening to my daughter and what was happening to my family as we dealt with the stress and chaos and grief of a child who was medically fragile and showing global delays and was now going to always look physically different than those around her. He knew that in that desert I was still searching for Him. I was still wanting an answer and the answer that I yearned for was her healing through Jesus. But ever so slowly, I was realizing that Justine was more than her disability and God's plans are perfect. That His perfect love could be trusted to cast out all my fears.

Maybe some of you have wandered the desert. Maybe some of you are still in the desert. You might be the Prodigal daughter, leaving in your own way, the Church, your faith, God... Maybe you are trying to find your way back to God and our faith. I would encourage you to hold on... my story is not finished and neither is yours....

Moving here to Centerville and finding St Francis

First Women's Retreat in 2016: Confession with Fr Brian and knowing that God had truly forgiven me for leaving Him to search for the answer I wanted wandering the desert. Through this confession, Father Brian told me, "I am going to absolve you now from this sin. After this, I do not want you thinking about this sin again. Your sin has been forgiven. You are wiped clean."

### **Conclusion:**

Have you been wandering the desert looking for answers? Are you wandering far from our Lord, thinking you can find the answer on your own without Him?

Maybe, like me you have a special child with special needs and you are grieving and questioning why.

Maybe you have a Prodigal child or sibling or parent, who's left you behind to tend what's left of your family and you're filled with longing just to hear their voice or be with them again.

Maybe a loved one is substance abusing or addicted to porn or having an affair. Maybe it's you having the affair.

Perhaps you've gotten yourself involved in things you shouldn't be involved in and you don't see a way out.

In the desert you are hot and hunger for God; you thirst for the living water. But how do you find your way home?

Many of us remember Oprah Winfrey from back in the day. She had a trademark question that she would ask her guests: What do you know to be true?

And so I ask you, in suffering, what do you know to be true? (pause)

For me:

I know that in suffering, I can focus on myself and become bitter over it or I know that I can surrender to suffering, embrace it and trust God with it... trust His plan over mine, as the Prodigal Daughter, running into His warm embrace as He greets me returning home to him.

And now, In September of this last year, Justine was once again given yet another diagnosis. Last August, she was complaining that she could not see well enough to drive. She could not see well enough to read her cell phone. Headaches were constant. She was diagnosed with severe, fast growing bilateral posterior subcapsular cataracts at the age of 32. We went for eight weeks with her being essentially legally blind before her first surgery followed by three more weeks before her second surgery. It's a simple surgery, usually done in the ophthalmologists office. However, for Justine, due to her many serious health issues and risks, the surgery was done at the Miami Valley Hospital in the OR under general anesthesia.

This time around, unlike all the times before when she would receive a diagnosis, yet again, I was not filled with fear... anger.... The need to control... the ever present need to ask "why?" This time, I listened calmly. I briefly wept with her. I encouraged her to hold on to her faith as I believed, I trusted that God was going to get her and me through this. Yes, there were rough times: before, during and after her surgeries. But I was strong and bold in my faith. I did not turn, as I had before to New Age practices. No Reiki. No psychics. No yoga. No false prophets and false healers.

Beautiful, simple surrender to God's will in this. Reaching out to my sisters in Christ, asking for prayer to accept God's will and for healing for my beautiful daughter, in God's way and His timing. When we are no longer blinded to Him by our need to control that which we truly have no control over, when we let go of the illusion that we are controlling our destiny, we come to that place where we meet God in our suffering and find that His grace, His mercy, His love is sufficient for us. For his power is made perfect in our weakness.

What do I know to be true of God? I know Always, His promises never fail. His love endures... Always.

**Song: Building 429, Always**