

## TRUST & TRUTH - Joan Rauch

“No man steps into the same river twice. For it is not the same river, and he is not the same man.” Heraclitus (or in our case, “No woman”.)

Just like a river that is constantly moving and changing, we are by our very human nature constantly changing and evolving due to our circumstances, environment, personal relationships, our choices, our thoughts and even the passage of time. When I first read this quote it really impacted me and as I thought about it, it became to me a symbol of baptism.

As we step into the river, we die to ourselves and when we step out, we rise as a new person. Each little bit of dying and rising, stepping in and out of the river of life, **brings us closer and closer to our TRUE self, the person that God created us to be.**

When I took over as Retreat Team Director six years ago, I remember standing up here expressing how I would much rather sing in front of a group of people than talk. Well, here I am six years later after quite a few trips in and out of the river **talking to you about how God has Glorified Himself by my life.**

Preparing for this talk started back in August and was one of the most difficult things I have ever done. I was forced to look very deeply at the whole of my life thus far and try to explain why/how I am who I am. Along with being one of the most difficult, it has also been one of the most rewarding, freeing and transforming. That's where God comes in.

Scripture says: You shall know the TRUTH and the truth shall make you FREE. John 8:32. **This is the story of how I found my truth...**

My whole life I've struggled with fear, anxiety and depression. And there are definitely life experiences that fed or even may have created those feelings inside me.

I was the youngest of six children (Six children in Six years and six weeks). When I was four years old my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. We don't typically have a lot of memories of early childhood before age 7, but I remember that my mom was gone. When she was in the hospital, we had strangers coming in to care for us and sometimes I was sent to other people's houses for a time either by myself or with a sibling. It was a scary time for a four-year old. By the grace of God, with surgery and radiation treatment my mother survived, and she eventually came home. But that experience of fear, uncertainty and even abandonment at such an early age left its mark.

I was a very needy child. I had serious separation anxiety where my mom was concerned. I whined a lot. I needed a lot of attention and that was hard to come by competing with five other siblings so close in age. I often felt lonely and found comfort curled up in the corner by the stereo console listening to music and daydreaming. Being the youngest child did NOT make me spoiled, in fact it made me a target easy to pick on and laugh at. My siblings seemed to get a lot of enjoyment from my anger and frustration. One time, I was about 7, our parents were gone, and they were all picking on me for whatever reason and I was SO ANGRY. I can remember being so frustrated that I screamed at all of them at the top of my lungs the WORST possible thing I could think of. I told them all to, “GO TO HELL!” What do you think they did? They laughed at me! So, I ran away from home, in the rain, in my first communion shoes, running down the street until my sister caught me and brought me back home. Inside I was sad.

My parents had a strong Catholic faith and we went to church on Sundays and Holy Days. We went to Catholic schools. I believed in God. I knew He was there. My biggest struggle was that I couldn't see Him. So,

whenever I prayed, I wasn't really sure He was hearing me. But He was. As a child, I couldn't comprehend the way those prayers were being answered. But my trust never wavered. God has a plan for calling us closer to Him and closer to becoming the person He created us to be. And yes, that involves going in and out of the river of life. Dying and rising. There's no escaping it. In my case, God used my imagination to show me who I was. Who He wanted me to be. In my daydreams I imagined a girl. She was older than me, but strong and confident. That girl could stand up and speak up to anyone who picked on her or others. She wasn't afraid, and I wanted to be like her. God had given me the vision of who He created me to be so that I had the desire to change—to keep stepping in and out of the river. And as I grew older, I became that girl.

My teenage years were wonderful. Fear was replaced with excitement, loneliness with great friendships, uncertainty with hope, and sadness with Joy. By the time I was 18, my friends and I thought we had the answers to all the problems in the world. Ha! I had a great relationship with God at that time. I'd had a life changing senior retreat and belonged to a Life in the Spirit group. We talked about our faith with one another and sang songs. It was just a wonderful time. I graduated, went to college, started working in the medical field, fell in love with a cute, wonderful boy and got married at age 23.

My husband was also the youngest child in a large family, but his closest sibling was 10 years older, so where I was struggling for attention, he had the undivided attention of both his parents. He got to go to Hawaii at age 10. He ate his dinner in front of the TV with his dad while his mom waited on them. He grew up with a lot of privileges and I grew up with the bare necessities. He was used to doing things his way. When he didn't get his way he got angry. In the early stages of our marriage I was on the receiving end of a lot of that anger. I felt that whenever I asked for something, I was throwing a wrench into whatever he had planned. I felt like what I needed and wanted were an inconvenience. I felt like I was his biggest source of frustration and annoyance. What I did wasn't good enough. When I challenge him it made him angry and defensive. I felt stupid. I started to feel smaller and smaller as a person and he was oblivious to it all.

You remember That Girl? The one God wanted me to be? She was afraid. **She lost her confidence.** She HID. **For years.** I focused my attention on raising my children while walking on eggshells. I listened to country music and daydreamed about how I wished my life could be. I escaped by reading romance novels. Lots and lots of historical romance novels. Is there anyone else out there besides me who's ever wished they were married to a Scottish Highlander? Where was God in all that? I looked for Him. I found Him once in a book I read during that time that gave me comfort. It was "Hinds Feet on High Places" by Hannah Hurnard. I felt like it was written about me. The main character's name was "Much Afraid". She was lame and had difficulty walking and she was trying to get away from being forced into marriage with her cousin, "Craven Fear". Chased by her cousins, Self-Pity and Resentment. She went to the village one day and met the Chief Shepherd who said he would help her. He told her to make her way to the High Places at the top of the mountain and everything would be alright. When she said she was lame and couldn't possibly make it on her own, He sent her two companions to go with her on her journey. Their names were "Sorrow and Suffering". Of course, the story has a happy ending and I clung to that hope in trust while on my own journey with my companions "Anxiety and Depression".

It seems to me looking back that I had stepped into the river (dying to myself) but I got stuck there and couldn't step out. Those of you who have struggled with depression can probably relate when I describe it as being "under". Your feelings are just kind of "dead" you can't feel anything deeply. It was like the river was over my head and I was helpless. I was chained by my fear under the water. And where was God? In truth, He was right there in the water with me. He was holding me close until I could remember the courage He had given me, so that I could step out. He kept giving me opportunities to be brave. You know they say never to pray for patience, because then you will be bombarded with opportunities to practice it. This was the same

thing. I felt like I tried to be brave but kept getting beaten down. One day, Jesus presented me with another opportunity...

It was riding in the car with my husband and daughter who was about 13 at the time. My husband asked me for directions and then didn't like the directions that I gave. My daughter told me later that night, "Mom, if my husband ever talks to me the way dad talks to you, I'm gonna let him have it!" When I heard her say that, I was horrified! What was I teaching her? What kind of role model was I? I think that statement from my daughter was God's wake up call to me. Because although I couldn't seem to summon the courage to step out of the river for myself, I could for my children. I was finally able to step out of the river and rise again.

And the first thing I did was go to a therapist. She was wonderful. Everyone needs a therapist.

I took medication. It helped me feel better physically so that I could work on the emotions. Don't ever let anyone try to shame you if you need help, or if you need medication. Sometimes it's exactly what you need, be it temporarily or for a lifetime.

With that help, I stepped in and out of the river a little more freely. I quit my medical job to homeschool my kids and during that same time was blessed beyond measure to get a job at Christian Light Bookstore. Surrounded by a loving God, in Bibles, books, art and music I was gifted with so much insight, help and encouragement that I will never be able to express my gratitude. One book that made a huge impact on my life and marriage was "The Power of a Praying Wife" by Stormie O'Martin. I had always been praying, but this book taught me how to really pray well with scripture. The prayers were all right there, perfectly worded, and my heart was so sincere and ready. I prayed every prayer in that book for my husband many, many times. And you know what? It worked. It worked. One of the most important prayers in the book was not a prayer for my husband, but a prayer for his wife, Me. The prayer was to help me be the wife that my husband needed, to help him be the man that God wanted.

I give credit to my husband for growing. He really did, and life was much better. But I was still struggling.

That girl? That girl was still hiding. Why? Even after many years had passed without incident, there was still so much fear (like PTSD) that I never wanted to risk disagreement. So, I pretty much denied my own feelings and truth by agreeing to whatever my husband wanted -- and then preceded to resent him for it. Anxiety and Depression gave way to Loneliness and Resentment. I kept praying. I went to confession and confessed the resentment and it just wouldn't go away. One particularly difficult day I actually went to Adoration up at St. Francis. I looked carefully throughout the church before I walked into the adoration chapel to make sure there was no one around and when I got in there, I let Him have it! I yelled, I cried, I begged and pleaded. I told God I didn't like it here, that I was done, I'd had enough. Then I calmed down and I told Him I needed Him to help me.

In case any of you are appalled or shocked at my behavior, I can tell you that He took it very well. I'm sure that He viewed me as a child throwing a tantrum and probably got quite a chuckle out of it.

I kept stepping in and out of the river. I died and I rose, but I still knew I wasn't the woman that God wanted me to be.

So, I continued searching, reading book after book, gaining a little wisdom and knowledge from each one until finally...Joan Cutlip suggested I read Brene Brown's "dare to lead". This book actually contains a little bit of every other book she's written and was exactly what I needed. \*\*If you've heard or read something that really helped you and you feel the prompting of the Holy Spirit to mention it to someone DO IT. That is God working through YOU to others. Thank you Joan.

I downloaded the “Dare to Lead” workbook and one of the exercises has to do with finding out what your core values are. Our core beliefs tell us where our heart is. To be the person God created us to be, we have to recognize (name), claim and live those values. So, I’m working through the list of over 75 values, gradually narrowing and narrowing and narrowing it down to two.

I discovered that my core values are Faith (being my belief in and relationship to God) and ...HONESTY. HONESTY. Remember the scripture that says don’t try to take a spec out of someone else’s eye until you get the LOG out of your own? I expected honesty from others, but was blind to my own dishonesty. How can I value HONESTY while hiding from the truth and living a lie? I denied my husband the opportunity to really know me because I couldn’t be honest about my feelings. How many times did my husband ask me, “are you okay?” and in fear, I lied, “yes”. There’s a quote from the book that I copied and put on my desk that says, “Daring leaders who live into their values are never silent about hard things”. It was a challenge that I needed. It was calling me to come out of hiding.

I stepped into the river and died to myself...

One day I was feeling really bad, desperately lonely, like I was invisible and broken. I had just been outside on the swing crying out to God in my loneliness and asking Him why? Why can’t I feel better? Do I have to live like this forever? Is this just the way my life is going to be?

When I came in, my husband took one look at me and asked, “Are you okay?” I started to turn and walk away like I always did with a backhanded “yes” when I felt all kinds of things going on in my body, pulling and twisting. It was as if God Himself turned me around, reached inside me, pulled “that girl” out and told her to speak honestly. And finally, I was able to say, “NO” No I’m NOT OK! I’m unhappy and lonely and I’m tired of lying about it. I was actually able to sit on the couch with my husband and talk honestly about my feelings. Even though I was still having the fight or flight response inside, I was able to sit there with a calm resolve. **That strength could have only come from God.**

What a transformation took place after that! From the moment I spoke my truth, **the 200 pound weight of resentment that I had carried for all those years was lifted off of me.** (Now THAT is miracle weight loss!) And the logs fell from my eyes. I was amazed at how my husband seemingly changed overnight! Then I realized the change was just me being able to see him as he really is without the logs distorting my view. And at last, I allowed him to see the real me too. There’s a beautiful song from the movie Tangled called, “I see the Light”. The words describe our transformation. I asked him to sing it with me at the church picnic. But he would get all choked up when we were practicing and said he didn’t think he could do it in front of everyone. So, my friend gave us the Disney Dolls of Rapunzel and Flynn Rider to “act it out” so he could sing it through doll. And I tried really hard not to look at him and keep smiling. I’d like to share it with you. Listen to the words....

[Video short]

I SEE THE LIGHT (from the Disney movie “Tangled”)

All those days watching from the windows  
All those years outside looking in  
All that time never even knowing  
Just how blind I've been  
Now I'm here blinking in the starlight  
Now I'm here suddenly I see  
Standing here it's all so clear  
I'm where I'm meant to be

And at last I see the light  
And it's like the fog has lifted  
And at last I see the light  
And it's like the sky is new  
And it's warm and real and bright  
And the world has somehow shifted  
All at once everything looks different  
Now that I see you

All those days chasing down a daydream  
All those years living in a blur  
All that time never truly seeing  
Things, the way they were  
Now she's here shining in the starlight  
Now she's here suddenly I know  
If she's here it's crystal clear  
I'm where I'm meant to go

And at last I see the light

And it's like the fog has lifted

And at last I see the light

And it's like the sky is new

And it's warm and real and bright  
And the world has somehow shifted  
All at once everything is different  
Now that I see you

Now that I see you

Ps. 145 says, "The Lord is near to all who call on Him, to all who call on him in truth. He fulfills the desire of those who fear him; he also hears their cry and saves them." I stepped out of the river and rose again. My life gives Glory to God because I have received and am witness to his saving power and grace.

The Truth has set me free to continue on my journey stepping in and out of the river of life. I still have the tendency to want to hide. I still have fear and I still have sad days and worries like everyone else. But I also have the knowledge and experience that ("with God all things are possible" in His time) and He is holding me close. I can now say with confidence that I am "That Girl". I can forgive myself for wanting to hide. I can forgive others. I can speak my truth and share my feelings even though it is still difficult. I am that girl who is blessed with a husband who challenges her to live her truth with faith and honesty. I am that girl who knows who she is, as you all are: A Beloved daughter of God.

## THAT GIRL

Who is that girl?

The one inside?

The one who hides in fear and sadness from her life?

The loneliness, the bitter pain

The fear of being hurt again keeps her in chains.

All the painful words and anger  
Have changed her deep inside.  
Her resentment and her brokenness  
Hold the tears she's never cried.

Oh, Jesus do you hear her  
As she calls to you each night?  
Will you reach inside and save her?  
Will you help her win this fight?

I know that girl.  
You let me see  
That I'm the one who's hiding from  
Who you created me to be.  
Oh, you taught me how to name it. Pulled me out and helped me claim it.

I am that girl.  
I speak my truth.  
There is no fear and hiding  
When I trust in You.

You are the one  
Worth living for.  
I am that girl  
And with your Grace  
I'll hide no more.

I am that girl  
And with your Grace

I'll hide no more.            *J. Rauch 2019*