

Milestone #5 – Rite of Passage
More Precious than Rubies November 10, 2007

The Calling

Jessica was born to my husband Mark and me at 9:55 p.m. on Wednesday, October 9, 1991. What a beautiful baby God had given us! We were both thrilled and humbled to be entrusted with the privilege of raising this little girl. The year Jessica was born, I attended Bible Study Fellowship every Monday evening, and I left my husband and new baby home for their own bonding time. Mark didn't mind at all, and I often found the two of them "resting" when I came home, her curled up on his chest and him with a smile of contentment on his face. At BSF, I was doing the study "Israel and the Minor Prophets." From the time Jessica was born, I asked the Lord to give me a special prayer to pray over my little girl, a prayer from His Word, just for her. I didn't expect to find it in a book as obscure as Zechariah, but tucked in among such visions as the man among the myrtle trees, the man with the measuring line, a flying scroll, and a woman in a basket (see? obscure!), I found this amazing promise of God to pray over my daughter. In speaking of the future glory of the city of Jerusalem, we can read, "And I myself will be a wall of fire around it," declares the Lord, "and I will be its glory within." From that moment of discovery, I prayed nightly that the Lord would be a wall of fire around Jessica, a wall of protection and strength, and that He would be the glory within her, growing a Christ-like character of love in her heart and mind.

In the fall of 2006, Mark and I took part in our first Parent Summit at Kingsland Baptist Church, and we attended the two seminars that fit the age groups of our younger children. One of the two was "Rite of Passage." The Legacy Milestone subtitle for this celebration was originally "Preparing my Student for Adulthood." From all that I saw and heard that day, the Lord put a desire in my heart to hold one of these rites for my daughter at the time of her sixteenth birthday, a year away. Preparation for Mark and me meant that we model Biblical roles of men and women and that we be very intentional in raising our children to love the Lord our God with all our heart and with all our soul and with all our strength. Preparation for Jessica meant that she be growing in her relationship with the Lord, again loving Him with all her heart, soul, and strength. While none of us was perfect on our part, the Lord was perfectly faithful and gracious in His. I continued praying nightly that the Lord would be that wall of fire around my daughter, to be the glory within. And in looking ahead to her Rite of Passage, I could also look back and see clearly how good the Lord had been. Her Rite of Passage would be a celebration of the Lord's faithfulness in her life and a time of encouragement and exhortation as she moved into adulthood.

The Planning

About eight months before her sixteenth birthday, I began to ask the Lord what Scripture passage He would like me to use as the foundation for this event. I thought I'd find something amazing in Proverbs 31, the passage about the wife of noble character, or in another narrative about a Godly woman like Hannah or Elizabeth. The Lord did indeed take me to Proverbs, but not to chapter 31. It was in Proverbs 3 that the Lord showed me the theme and the text for our celebration.

This passage of Scripture captured all that I wanted to convey to my daughter as she approached adulthood. I wanted to encourage her by showing her how good the Lord had been to her and to charge her to love her Lord and Savior, to cherish His word, and to commit herself to Him and to His ways. In addition, it spoke to my heart of the gift she is to Mark and me, of the trust God gave to us, and of our responsibility and privilege in raising her. Verses 14 and 15 speak of the wisdom of God: "She is more profitable than silver and...gold. She is more precious than rubies..." This is also an apt description of Jessica. And it became the title for our event, "More Precious than Rubies..."

It was also my privilege to create our guest list. I wanted to invite those women who had built into my daughter's life, who had given Godly leadership and service from which she benefited, and who had helped me through biblical example and wise counsel. I spoke to each of our guests and shared with them what I wanted to celebrate and how I wanted them to be involved. I gave them each a passage from Proverbs 3 and asked them to write Jessica a letter of encouragement and exhortation based on their passage. I prayed for these women, that the Lord would lead them to write just what He wanted Jessica to hear. This would be a gathering of the most amazing women!

I took Jessica out for ice cream one evening, and I read to her the list of names on my guest list. I asked her what came to mind as she considered these women. She said, "They are people we love and who love us." She said "we" and "us"! These were women with whom *she* had a relationship, not just women who were her mother's friends. I could not have asked for better affirmation! I told her I was inviting them to participate in a Rite of Passage for her, and she just beamed! We talked over the details of the day – where to have it, what time of day, what to eat, – and we quickly settled those questions. We would celebrate at home over the lunch hour, with a meal of her favorites - Stouffer's frozen lasagna (nicely cooked, of course!), Caesar salad, garlic bread, and chocolate soufflés. Together we selected pretty invitations matching our theme, we filled the front room of our home with folding tables and chairs, and we set those tables with our finest china and ruby accents. We anticipated an amazing day!

The Celebration

Ten of our thirteen invited guests joined us that day. After they arrived, we sat together in the family room and the women spoke to Jessica from the letters they had written. The words and the wisdom they spoke into my daughter's

life were so pure and Godly, conveying love, honor, and blessing. Jessica sat quietly, listening intently and with humility. She was much more sober than I thought she would be. I imagine she, like Mary, treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. Several times I had to wipe my eyes and my nose, and I wasn't alone! Some of the words the women shared are copied here:

Jessica, do not forget God's teaching, but let your heart keep His commands, for length of days and years of life, and peace they will add to you. How to "not forget?" Remember! How to remember? Keep God's commands before you by reading His word, thinking, studying, singing, speaking, talking with others about His commands, His Word...The Bible does not say to your mind to not forget; it says for your heart to not forget. The heart in Scripture is a reference to your emotions, reasons, will - the inner Jessica! Everything that you are - that is your heart. And that is how we're to remember God's commands, with all that we are, 100% sold out, passionate, in love. "Love" and "faithfulness" are authentic jewels that adorn the godly woman. The expression "to bind them around your neck" does not speak of a restrictive collar but rather a lovely necklace that sparkles and enhances your beauty to others, a beautiful witness of who you are in Christ. The woman who is sparkling with these gems stands out from all the others! Sadly, most women tend to wear the costume jewelry of selfishness, vanity, and manipulation to get noticed and get ahead. But it never lasts. It tarnishes and eventually breaks down. Authentic spiritual 'bling' that is seen on the outside originates from the inside, and is to be etched permanently onto the tablet of your heart. Cultivate God-confidence rather than self-confidence. The more we understand how much the Lord loves us, the easier it is to humble ourselves before Him. Because we are secure in God's love, we will not be afraid to examine our hearts before Him and recognize the weak areas that need to be pruned. Be vulnerable with the Lord and with godly mentors. Christ-likeness is developed through a community of like minded Christ followers and through honest self examination. If we honor Him with our first fruits, then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. Only God can give you a blessing. All you have or don't have, even when rich, is His. We are not to be idle and sit back and say, "Ah, I am rich now; I don't need to do anything." Not so with God; find the work that He wants you to do. He has given you wealth so that He will bless the work of your hands for His glory. He will supply all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Phil 4:19). Scripture tells us that part of discipline is love. When we don't make good choices, there are consequences for those choices. Those consequences are God's way of disciplining us to learn from the choices that we make. Always remember and never forget that discipline comes from hearts that love and care for you more than you could ever imagine. Wisdom is described as having long life, riches, and honor in her hands. Submitting to the wisdom of God is the way to fulfill God's purposes for our life and be guaranteed the true riches of an everlasting relationship with a loving God. There is a sense of peace and tranquility in our mind and conscience when we are aligned with God and submitting to His wisdom for our life. In Proverbs, Wisdom is personified and is another name for God and His Word. In the New Testament, Jesus is Wisdom and the Word. So the Word and Wisdom go hand in hand. Seek Him and you will surely find Him in His Word. This is not many short sprints, but a marathon through life. The correlation is that the more consistently you seek Him, the greater the peace Wisdom will grant you. Never let sound judgment and discernment out of your sight. Just like a necklace is worn around your neck, always noticeable and present, always "wear" God's Word. Let it be your handbook for everything in your life! Meditate on it, study it, and know it. Never think you have studied it enough. Your life will be marked by joy and wisdom if you live by it. "Then you will go on your way in safety..." Psalm 23 provides another picture of being led by Christ. He guides us to the things we need - places that are beneficial to us. We cannot find the best things on our own. Our flawed hearts will seek what pleases us in the moment, or what appears to be the

best. As you get older, you will have more options for satisfying your desires. I pray you will let God show you what you need, rather than seeking out temporary gain. Allow Him to set your path. When you turn to Him, He will "keep your foot from being caught," but you have to see the trap, know your weaknesses, and keep your eyes focused on "your confidence." He will direct your paths and lead you to do mighty things for His glory.

From Deuteronomy 32:46 and 47: "Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day...they are not just idle words for you - they are your life." There will be things in your life that will try to distract your heart. When that happens, pour out your heart in honesty before the Lord. As you are honest with the sin, hurts, and concerns of your heart, it gives God room to pour into your heart. You will be able to "take to heart" all these words. As you follow these words that are life to your heart, you can pass these on to the next generation you will influence.

And from Deuteronomy 10:12-13: "And now, O Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all his ways, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?" The passage goes on to remind us that God the Creator sets His affection on us, loves us, and chooses us individually. For this, He is our praise and our God, and His great desire is to make us a blessing.

We then gathered around Jessica to pray over her with more words of blessing. What an honor for me to give this gift to my daughter!

Jessica and I wanted to present these women with a gift to thank them for their role in her life. Proverbs 3 speaks of love and faithfulness – that we are to bind them around our necks; and of sound judgment and discernment – that they will be an ornament to grace our necks. A gift of jewelry seemed appropriate! We gave each of our guests a bracelet of clear and ruby colored crystals, with a touch of silver and gold, designed just for our celebration. I asked each woman to pray for Jessica whenever she fastened it around her wrist. Then I gave Jessica a necklace of ruby crystals designed just for her. She knew about the gifts to our guests, but not about this gift from Mark and me. She smiled and said, "I like!" We then ate lunch together, enjoying sweet fellowship and fun conversation. And I took pictures of Jessica with each guest – mother's privilege!

Reflections

When Mark and I were new parents, we participated in a parenting class that drew from the Word of God in its philosophy and practice. I often reflect on the things I learned in that class. The one teaching that comes back to me more than any other is that there are two people the Lord will call to account for the responsibility of raising children - the father and the mother. Yes, I am raising a daughter, a young woman, not for my glory or my name's sake, but for the glory of God and for His name's sake. This calling is from the Lord, and Mark and I answer to Him alone, the One who is Creator, Savior, and Lord over all. The Lord has given us everything we need to fulfill this calling - His Word and His Holy Spirit in our lives. And He has given us a church with a vision, a heart, and a mission much like those we embraced several years ago. Mark and I are so thankful to have the Legacy Milestones ministry here at our home church. Through it, the Lord is equipping us for the parenting task to which He has called us. I trust also in this promise of Scripture from 1 Thessalonians 5:24: Faithful is He who called you, and He also will bring it to pass.

Proverbs 3:1-26	My son (my daughter), do not forget my teaching,	but keep my commands in your	
heart,	for they will prolong your life many years	and bring you prosperity.	Let love and faithfulness never
leave you;	bind them around your neck,	write them on the tablet of your heart.	Then you will win favor and a
good name	in the sight of God and man.	Trust in the Lord with all your heart	and lean not on your own
understanding;	in all your ways acknowledge him,	and he will make your paths straight.	Do not be wise
in your own eyes;	fear the Lord and shun evil.	This will bring health to your body	and nourishment to your
bones.	Honor the Lord with your wealth,	with the first fruits of all your crops;	then your barns will be
filled to overflowing,	and your vats will brim over with new wine.	My son, do not despise the Lord's discipline	
	and do not resent his rebuke,	because the Lord disciplines those he loves,	as a father the son he delights
in.	Blessed is the man who finds wisdom,	the man who gains understanding,	for she is more profitable than
silver	and yields better returns than gold.	She is more precious than rubies;	nothing you desire can compare
with her.	Long life is in her right hand;	in her left hand are riches and honor.	Her ways are pleasant ways,

and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed. By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place; by his knowledge the deeps were divided, and the clouds let drop the dew. My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment, do not let them out of your sight; they will be life for you, an ornament to grace your neck. Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble; when you lie down, you will not be afraid; when you lie down, your sleep will be sweet. Have no fear of sudden disaster or of the ruin that overtakes the wicked, for the Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared.