

Plan to Live Believing

by Julie Hoekstra-Birtch



"Reaching Today's Teens" columnist Dr. Marsha Boyd-Mitchell (L) invited her friend and former college roommate, Julie Hoekstra-Birtch, who resides in Brookville, Ontario, to write the April RTT column.

Jeremiah 29:11 was our wedding text: "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" (NIV). Sometimes it's hard to see God's plans to prosper us, especially when things are difficult. Jeremiah was talking to people going through hard times.

I am a mother of five (plus one bonus child). Our world was rocked by addiction a few years ago, an addiction that led my husband down a dark path. The journey included him doing 42 months of jail time. This also led to a path of redemption and making our family stronger. In June 2021, in the middle of COVID, I was diagnosed with cancer and prescribed chemo

every three weeks. I am on medical leave from my job, which was a calling to me. My life has changed a lot. And, it is not just me on this journey: guiding teens and young adults through this is tough, with no magic answers. What has helped is focusing on today—whether that is COVID-19, cancer, money issues, or relationship problems—and doing what we can do.

Faith is trusting that God's plans for us are good. Corrie ten Boom is my heroine; my birth family is Dutch, as Corrie's was. Her family lived in Holland and hid Jews during the Second World War. Corrie survived being in a concentration camp, but her sister, father, and other family members died. In her book, *The Hiding Place*, she tells a story of her father, who was a watchmaker. He would travel to Amsterdam to get the correct time for her city, and sometimes, as a little girl, Corrie would get to go with him.

She would want to hold the train ticket, but her father would not give it to her. He told her he would not

give her the ticket until she needed it. Corrie compared this to our struggles and worries, saying that God gives us the faith we need when we need it.

If we believe our future is in God's hands, we just need to do the right thing in the present. Living in regret over the past and worrying about the future really just makes today harder. When I can focus on today, I'm grateful for my many blessings. Is it easy? No, but gratitude leads to positivity which makes life a lot more enjoyable.

So, what positive things have come out of cancer? Well, I had been needing to change my career for some time. My stress level has been reduced by being put on sick leave. I am working on emotional healing that I didn't even know I so badly needed. I am finally able to be a stay-at-home mom. This is part of God's plan to prosper me.

Some days I think of my life as a very dark comedy show. I was recently in Quebec City and my hat went flying off in the wind, and there I was, a bald woman chasing my hat with my 14-year-old daughter, only to rescue it in the nick of time. Another day, as my daughter tried to style my wig, the hair stuck to the curling iron, burning the bangs. At one point in my illness, I had to leave home to stay with my parents to avoid COVID, leaving my husband in charge of four teen girls. We have good days and bad days, but we laugh and laugh together.

I am blessed with a great family, amazing friends, and a church family that prays for me. One of my doctors asked me if people were praying for me. Yes, I told him, the list is long. He replied, "It shows." I am going to do my best to live believing Jeremiah 29 for my life. I want my children to know that while we can only choose for today, God has the plan for our future in his hand. ♦



Julie (L) and Marsha (R)