

Soul Scout 28: One small leap and one big catch

Contributed by Rick Lubbers
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“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

— Psalm 23:4

While Caisee slowly regained consciousness, she dreamt.

She was a little girl, maybe 7 years old, standing in the hayloft of her Grandpa Joe’s big, red barn, peering through a large opening many feet off the ground.

She and Wakeman spent many summer weeks at Grandpa Joe and Grandma Marian’s house when they were little. She loved helping feed the cows, chickens and horses, eating Grandma’s delicious — and big — home-cooked meals, sitting on their large porch swing drinking lemonade and frittering the hours away, and wading in the creek that wound its way through their farm. But one of her favorite activities was when Grandpa Joe and several other family members and friends collected hay bales and stuffed them into the barn.

Caisee enjoyed sitting on the back of the wagon while Grandpa drove his old John Deere tractor slowly through the field and the helpers tossed the heavy bales onto the wagon, and watching the stray strands of hay slowly fall to the ground, many of them sticking to her clothes or landing in her hair. Wakeman tried his best to help out, but the bales were too heavy and he needed another boy to help wrestle the cubes into place.

When the wagon was full, bales stacked neatly several rows high, Grandpa Joe, wearing his favorite overalls and straw hat, turned the tractor toward the barn. Once he backed the tractor and wagon into place, some of the men stood on the wagon and began throwing the bales through the large door near the top of the barn, the other half climbed stairs to the hayloft and stacked the bales that were accumulating.

Caisee and Wakeman almost always watched this process from a corner of the hayloft, safely out of the way. It was a hot and humid July night, their clothes were drenched with sweat and collecting hay and dust, but they were fascinated with watching the empty hayloft fill with countless hay bales, the men and bales a blur of motion.

Caisee’s long, dark hair soon became a nighttime sky full of golden shooting stars.

It didn’t take long to empty the wagon. Many of the men took the stairs to leave the loft, but some of the younger ones jumped out of the window and onto the wagon. Wakeman, too, loved to take the fun way out of the barn, but Caisee was scared of heights and of getting hurt. She didn’t know how far to the ground it was, but to her it was like standing on the rim of the Grand Canyon.

Everyone else had exited. She was the only one left, standing in the opening, wondering if she had the courage to jump. Many of the men encouraged her. Wakeman was less encouraging, calling her a “big chicken.” Then Grandpa Joe, standing on the back of the wagon, looked up to her, strands of hay still stuck in his white beard. He held out his big arms and said, “Come on, Caisee, I’ll catch ya. One small leap and one big catch.”

Part of her wanted to run to the steps. Grandpa Joe seemed so far away. The drop was too much. Maybe next year she would have enough courage to jump. But then she looked her Grandpa in the eyes and saw his love for her. She suddenly felt safe, comforted. He always gave her big, strong hugs with those arms; he definitely could catch her with them.

“One small leap and one big catch.”

So she closed her eyes, held out her hands and jumped. The world suddenly turned white.

And she fell … and she fell … and she fell … and she fell out of her soft, white dream and directly into a harsh, black nightmare.

That impenetrable darkness allowed not even a hint of light. She wanted to cry for help, but she couldn’t open her mouth or move her tongue to make much more than a groan. She tried to run, but something held her firmly in place.

Am I still dreaming? Why can’t I wake up? I want to wake up!!

But then Caisee’s muddled senses joined the conversation, all five shouting that she already was awake and

her nightmare was not a surreal movie scene spit out by her subconscious.

Why can't I see anything?

"Your eyes are blindfolded."

Why can't I talk or scream?

"You have a gag in your mouth."

Why can't I move?

"You are tied to a chair."

That's when fear and its bloodthirsty brother, panic, began coursing through her like a slither of snakes. Any light trying to find its way to her eyes was eclipsed by a tight blindfold that sealed her eyelids. A coarse gag that smelled and tasted as though it was recently used to change the oil in an automobile rendered any attempted scream to sound no louder than a whisper. A heavy, prickly rope bound her legs to a chair and her arms behind her back, and was already cutting off her circulation. Any movement just seemed to tighten them. Her head throbbed with a major-league headache as well. The dank room gave off a strong smell of mold, like a large piece of cheese had been placed in there, rotting away for weeks.

Giving in to the dreadful feelings welling inside her, Caisee struggled with all her might against the ropes, tried belting out her best scream and rubbed the side of her head against her shoulder in an attempt to work her blindfold off.

All did nothing but expend useless energy. She wasn't going anywhere at the moment. She began trembling slightly as reality set in that she had been kidnapped and her future was now as dark as the space between her eyes and the blindfold.

Seemingly a million thoughts and questions began flooding her mind and vying for her immediate attention: What am I doing here? And where exactly is here?

What is going to happen to me? I have to find a way to get out of here. Oh no, is somebody in here watching me? Hopefully Tate has called the police and they are busy looking for me right now. What's the last thing I remember? Hmm … it was getting into the car after my shift at Perkins. After that … I don't remember anything. They'll find me, right?

Caisee's fears continued to grow darker by the minute, as if a revolving door full of horrifying questions kept turning and churning out increasingly horrible scenarios, until another line of thought momentarily stopped the maddening carousel.

I need to pray to God … He's the only one who can help me right now.

Caisee was ashamed she didn't begin praying the second she woke up and felt her bonds. If there ever was a situation that demanded prayer, a sharp plea for help, this was it.

Instinctively, she bowed her head to pray. But her mind went blank — or more accurately was overloading from the myriad thoughts bouncing around her brain. She felt the urge to send a bloodcurdling cry Heaven-ward, but stopped short. Her mind felt like it was going to burst if any more thoughts were shoehorned in. How could she even begin to pray under these crazy circumstances?

But then a piece of Scripture floated silently over the din of her noisy thoughts. A verse she memorized when she was a little girl and could easily recite now — perhaps one of the most memorable passages in the Bible. A Psalm written by David when he was in trouble and seeking God's hand to rescue him.

It worked back then … God, please hear it now.

Caisee took a deep breath, collected herself somewhat, although she was still shaking, and began reciting Psalm 23 in her head.

"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack …"

Caisee stopped, and rethought her prayer.

Maybe I'll skip right to part that seems the most pertinent Lord. Is that OK?

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.”

She stopped short of saying “Amen.” That didn’t seem long enough.

Maybe she would pray it once or twice more. So she prayed … and she prayed … and she prayed … and she prayed ... and then she stopped.

Quelling her fear was going to take a lot more than simply reciting Psalm 23 in her head repeatedly, Caisee thought. She needed to express to the Lord that she trusted Him completely, that even though her circumstances were terrifying, she knew He would be close to her no matter what happened. His strength would drive away the horror and replace it with pure courage.

She needed her prayer to be a statement of faith, not a memory verse. “One small leap and one big catch.”

She wasn’t standing in a hayloft, wondering if she had the courage to jump into her Grandpa Joe’s arms. But the situation wasn’t that much different. She couldn’t see God, but she knew He was there with her, arms stretched out and ready to catch her. She only need take that one small leap.

So Caisee bowed her head, and with the first wordless prayer of her life, visualized herself making that small leap of faith, of trust, of commitment.

And she fell … and she fell … and she fell …and she fell right into her Father’s waiting arms.