

This tagline may not be familiar to you, but if you’re a boomer like me, I’m fairly sure you can remember this phrase used for Virginia Slims cigarette ads. It’s a fitting phrase for me today, but for so many other reasons. I can say I haven’t had a cigarette for over thirty years, so I’m proud of that as well. I really have come a long way... I have overcome many obstacles and barriers, and as I write this, do I dare say that I am in the best place I’ve been in a very long time?

This summer God has been working on me in ways that I would have never imagined, and probably wouldn’t be aware of until I reached the other side of the valley from where he carried me through. It is amazing that I’m able to say this now. The valley has been deep and wide and has taken quite a while to get through. All I can say, my dear friends, is to hang on to God, because I promise he is hanging on to you. He will not let you down.

To help you understand how far I have come I need to touch on where I’ve been. I have shared much of this journey in previous blogs before my site needed to be revamped. I think that was a God-thing as well, because in addition to healing, He makes all things new.

Very briefly, I was married for thirty-two years, but all was not as it appeared, and I was not happy. I struggled greatly as a Christian woman as I contemplated divorce. About a year and a half ago, I made the decision to end our marriage. Of course, there is more to this story than anyone could ever imagine. If you’ve ever had to go through this, you know how difficult it can be, and I wouldn’t wish it on anyone. But now, I can say it was necessary.

In addition to divorcing, my ex-husband and I were raising our grandsons due to our adult daughter falling victim to the opioid epidemic. I’m so humbled and thankful to report she is doing very well in her recovery but is still not ready to be a full-time mother. Most of the care for the two boys has fallen on me alone. It has not been easy I can assure you. But God is so good.

The last two paragraphs sum up the reason for the valley that I have finally passed through. But as He does, God had much more to show me about myself, to allow me to make it to the other side. Through events, Bible studies, podcasts, the trials and victories of my friends, God has taught me so much about myself.

I grew up in an extremely dysfunctional family, including a mother with a low self-esteem who passed her baggage on to me. I had a father who was an alcoholic who eventually abandoned us for a new family. My father passed away at forty-seven and my mother died ten years later when she was only fifty-seven. My brother and I are the only two who remain from our original family of six. We also have two half-brothers, one from mom, one from dad.

When I write these things on paper, it is extremely hard to leave out the emotions and scars that were a result of these events in my life. I turned fifty-nine years old this year...I have outlived both of my parents now. I am just now coming to a place where I can look at myself in a mirror and not cringe from self-loathing. Do you know what I mean? Are you feeling this way?

Life is hard with the natural order of things. We humans can make a mess of our lives, can’t we? It wasn’t until recently that I became aware of my own abandonment issues due to my father’s leaving. I was twelve, when he left. Right when a girl needs her daddy. In my mind, I was completely unlovable. I was one of the chubby girls so if you’re in that group, you know exactly how painful the high school years can be. And those mean kids we went to school with just grow up to be mean adults, most of the time. I was sure God hated me too, because of my miserable family and to add insult to injury, he didn’t make me beautiful like my friends, or so I believed.

It’s amazing that my marriage lasted as long as it did, bringing this kind of mindset into a relationship. I had no business getting married because I was a pitiful mess. I was expecting my husband to take all the hurt away, to fix what was broken. When he didn’t/couldn’t, I was sure it was that same curse God placed on me when I was very young. I was unworthy.

Of course, I know God did not put a curse on me. I know that now. To be honest, God has been nudging me my entire life. He has sent me moments of knowing, a word, a song, so many things like this to tell me he wanted to know me personally. The answer was in my learning to seek and find my truth. Unfortunately, finding my truth included me realizing how unhappy I had become, and it was time to change. He had more for me to do.

This summer I received a new name after God made me see myself in the story of Jacob wrestling with God until his hip was thrown out of socket. Jacob told God he wouldn't stop fighting until God blessed him. Jacob received his blessing and a new name that day, Israel. When he went on his way, he stood upright, but he now walked with a limp. God made sure 'Israel' would never be able to run away from him again. Is it ironic that I had knee replacement surgery while in the valley? I am walking, but I have a constant reminder of the struggle.

More recently, God has placed me in isolation, just as he did Elijah, to prepare him for his big moment at Mount Carmel. I don't think I have a Mount Carmel on my horizon, but God knows my struggle with codependency, due to my low self-esteem all my life. Isn't it just like a loving Father to show us what we can do, simply by leaving us to our own devices? That is just what he has done in my life. I have been lonely, fighting the need to call on those who aren't the best for me. Through his word and in prayer, God is showing me that he is enough. He will sustain me while I wait in the desert.

May I share just one more victory? Almost immediately after our separation, my ex-husband met a woman online, and he married her in March of this year. You can imagine the conflicting emotions that come with that kind of news, after such a long marital history. The enemy used this against me often, knowing my self-doubts, my insecurities. He would make those old voices tell me that I was right all along, that I was unlovable and not worthy of anyone else. He almost had me, and I almost hit the ground, hard.

But then it occurred to me, that over these past two years, I have had men show interest in me, and have even gone out on a few dates. I assumed the problem was me, as I always have. By God's grace, he has reminded me that he knows the desires of my heart, and that if I continue to trust him with all I have, he will bless me, in a better way than I could ever imagine. He showed me that I could have 'settled' for one of those men. I have been choosy. I know what I want, and what I don't want. I am a child of the King of Kings, and I don't have to settle for anyone, or anything.

I have the freedom to choose.

I am loved dearly, just as God Himself created me.

I have a new name by which he calls me.

He will never leave me or forsake me.

I have come through a very deep and difficult valley, and I stand on the other side.

I have come a long way, baby!

Blessings,

Lisa Jo

