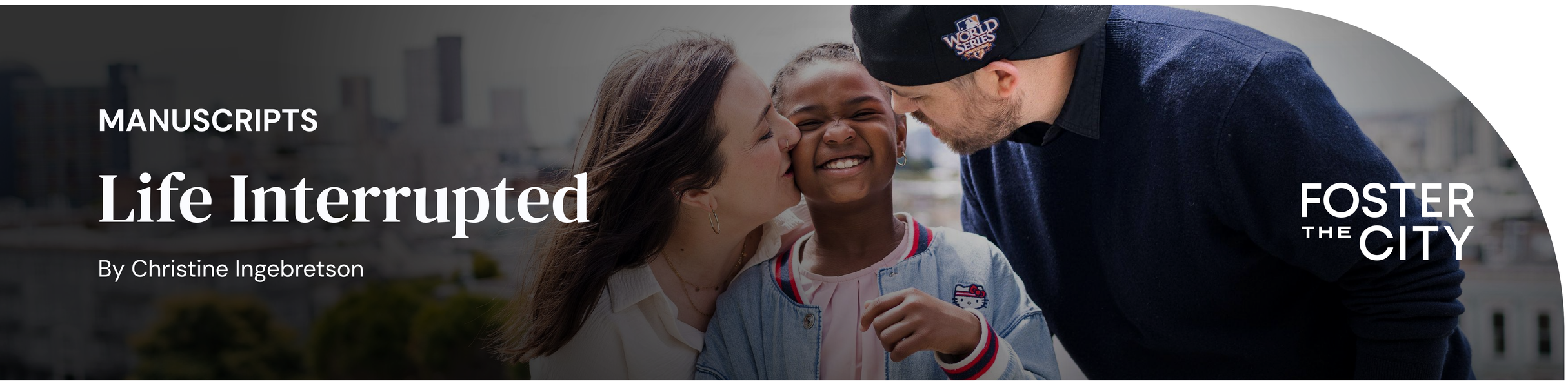


MANUSCRIPTS

Life Interrupted

By Christine Ingebretson

Good Morning!

I am humbled and honored to stand before you in the spirit of Proverbs 3:8-9 **8**Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves; ensure justice for those being crushed. **9**Yes, speak up for the poor and helpless, and see that they get justice.

This has become the cry of my heart, and the work of my life, to give voice to children and families experiencing foster care. So I am so deeply grateful to be with you this morning.

It seems to me that much of why we gather together on Sundays is to remember. To remember who God is and to remember who we are...So I just want to start by reminding you that: You are the light of the world. You are the salt of the earth. You are a city on a hill. If you woke up this morning, then God has an assignment for you! You get to be a part of what He is doing in the world...You get to partner with the LIVING GOD every day of “your one wild and precious life” in bringing a taste of the kingdom of heaven to earth into the context where God has planted you like a seed to bear good fruit.

We all long to live with purpose, to know God’s calling on our life and to live into it! But "How do we find God's purpose for our life? Oddly enough, one of the surprising ways God directs our paths is by interrupting our plans. BUT how many of you just LOVE to be interrupted?

As we follow Jesus, we long to become like him and all through the Gospels we see Jesus was interruptible and He interrupted!

We see this not only in the life of Jesus, but all throughout the stories in the Scriptures... people going about their daily business when God shows up and interrupts them and DISRUPTS their plans to invite them into the adventure of a life time–getting on mission with Him!

The story that God has written through my life has been shaped by foster care and adoption, but it started with heartache. You see I had a plan for my life that was severely that was interrupted by infertility. After giving birth to one child, my deep desire to have four children, two years apart, became a broken dream as months turned into years, and I was never again able to become pregnant. There is a lot I could tell you about that season of my life...and how God met me there in that deep, dark place.

But here is the beautifully redemptive truth: Through those years of struggle, confusion, and grief over not being able to mother more children, God begin to awaken me to His heart for the vulnerable children in my community in need of a mother, whether for a few months or forever.

This led us to foster care. It has been both a beautiful and heart-wrenching experience, as we have loved little ones in our home for a few months and then released them back to their forever families and as we have had the privilege of adopting our two youngest children (picture of family).

The Holy Spirit often uses interruptions as invitations into what God is doing in the world. It's often God invading human history with his presence and purpose through his people.

This morning, I want to dive into one of my favorite stories in the Scriptures, found in Exodus 3:

Exodus 3:1-12
Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. 2 There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up.

3 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up."4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!" And Moses said, "Here I am."

5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." 6 Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7 The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt."

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" 12 And God said, "I will be with you…

PRAY: Thank you God for your Word…

I believe Moses's story can help you see the way God wants to work through the story He's writing in and through your life as he invites you to co-redeem with him in his work in the world.

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Exodus 3:1-2 The story picks up as Moses has settled into his father-in- law's family business—tending sheep. Acts 7:30 tells us that Moses had been in Midian for 40 years at this point. 40 years since he'd left Egypt as a young man of 40. So now he is 80. I imagine that Moses thought this is how he'd spend the rest of his life. He'd settled into the rhythm of life in Midian and his time in Egypt was becoming a distant memory...

But remember what brought him to Midian where he met his wife her family? It was his passionate turned violent concern for his people who were in slavery. He was devastated by the way his people were being treated, and clearly he longed for freedom for his people from his oppressors. His passion had led him to kill an abusive Egyptian (Exodus 2:11-13) which had forced him to flee because when Pharoah found out about Moses killing the Egyptian slave driver, Pharoah came after HIM!

But here Moses is, 40 years later, tending sheep, and it seems to me this passion, this concern had subsided, perhaps it had even died. I'm certain he didn't think he could do anything about his people who were still enslaved. He'd resigned himself to the hopelessness of that situation and was focused on where he'd landed...tending sheep in Midian. What once had been a fire in his belly was a distant memory.

I wonder if this might mirror your story? Can you relate to Moses? Is there something that you used to be deeply passionate about–a righteous cause? A creative endeavor? A deep desire? A unique call you felt to address the brokenness, the pain, the disorder in this world? Is there a group of people you feel uniquely called to support, to lead, to invest in? **And then LIFE HAPPENED, and here you are, years later, thinking that it's over for you?**

God knows Moses's heart, and what felt like 40 years of wilderness was actually 40 years of preparation. And God interrupts his simple life with a burning bush!

When God is about to do something amazing, He interrupts his people!

Notice the phrases in verses 3 and 4 So Moses thought, "I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up." Moses paused and leaned in!

4 When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, "Moses! Moses!"

When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look...WOW! Because Moses turned toward this interruption with curiosity, God then was able to communicate with him!

Is it possible that there are burning bushes all around, where God is seeking to reveal himself, seeking to light up our path....Is it possible that these interruptions might be invitations, God showing us His pathway and we don't notice?

What are some ways God interrupts?

- You may be interrupted by the Gentle Whisper of the Holy Spirit who invites you to reach out to someone in a way that you don't think you have time for, in a way that seems silly...

- You may be interrupted by deep compassion or indignation as you see something broken in this world. This strong emotional reaction is an invitation to do something. Compassion may be waking you up to your purpose.
- You may deal with interrupted sleep. What if this is an invitation to prayer—the spiritual practice of VIGIL...

- You may be interrupted by an invitation to care for someone you hadn't planned on having to care for—Isaac!

The surprising interruptions are often the invitations of God into His plan for our life, but so often we are too busy holding on to our plans.

(verses 5-6) God reveals himself as the God of your father Moses, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. I love the fact that he speaks to Moses's identity, to his biological Hebrew father...he speaks to his origin story, reminding Moses who HE is even as God reveals His own self to Moses.

It's as if God is saying, "Remember who I am! Remember who you are!"

God wanted to **resurrect the passion** in Moses for the purposes that God intended for Moses's life.

Has some of your passion faded because of life? God wants to resurrect things he's planted in you that you thought were dead and buried! And he does this in the most unexpected ways, at the most surprising times!

Notice that God was answering the cries of his people through interrupting Moses.

Check out Exodus 2:23-25

"... The Israelites groaned in their slavery and cried out, and their cry for help because of their slavery went up to God. 24 God heard their groaning .... 25 So God looked on the Israelites and was concerned about them.

This is how God is answering here in verses 7-10. 7 "The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. 8 So I have come down to rescue them ... 9 And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. 10 So now, go. I am sending you...."

What if God is interrupting you because he is moving on behalf of someone else's desperate cries? What if YOU are the answer to someone's prayer?

God handpicks you to answer his call based on the story he has written through your life!

Remember Moses is uniquely equipped to do what God is asking him to do! He had been raised by Pharaoh's daughter, and therefore he had education and ability to communicate in a way no one else would, in this unique call to deliverance.

Often God's purpose for your life will include tapping into things you've had no control over! (like your family of origin, the trials of you had no control over –your wounds, your grief, your personality).

But Moses does what so many of us do when God invites us in to his work in the world!

11 But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" Exodus 4:11

Moses is more focused on his limitations than on God's power. The whole conversation is really Moses wondering how on earth he will be able to do this.

This is what we do! It is so common that, when God interrupts our lives with an invitation into his will, we focus on how we are not up for it. We don't have the resources—the talent, the money, the time, the gifting!

And look at God's response:
12 ...God said, "I will be with you..."

God offers us His presence. He invites us into things that are literally IMPOSSIBLE without him!

When was the last time you followed the Spirit into something that required faith–somewhere you knew would be impossible without the presence of the Living God?

As the conversation continues, Moses keeps pushing back and God says, you do know who you are talking to, right? Moses argues with God and tries get out of this whole thing, God says: I gave you your mouth. You are mine! If I ask you to do something, I will be with you and I will show the way. Now go! I will help you! (Ex. 4:12)

When God interrupts you and invites you to be a part of His work in this world, He promises that he will be with you and that his grace is sufficient, that his power is made perfect in weakness.

The reason I stand before you today is because God took the painful interruption and grief and loss and faith-shattering experience of infertility and in his beautifully redemptive hands, he shaped a story through my life that I could have never dreamed.

"What weakness in your life do you feel is too great for God to overcome? What painful parts of your story might God be ready to redeem and use for his glory? How might God be inviting you to be a part of the redemption stories He longs to write in the lives of the most vulnerable among us, children whose lives have been terribly interrupted, as they are removed from their parents due to abuse and/or neglect and find themselves in foster care.

Followers of Jesus have always been on the front lines fighting for justice for the oppressed, protecting the most vulnerable since the very beginning because they've been **interrupted by the cries of the vulnerable** within their own communities.

In fact, two thousand years ago, as the kingdom revolution of Jesus begin to spread throughout the Roman world, Christians became known as the ones who would love people no matter what it cost them.

In Ancient Rome, there was not a high value on life. In fact, it is documented that when a baby was born, he or she was placed at the feet of the male head of the household, and he could decide whether he deemed this life worthy of living. If the baby had any problems or deformities or if they baby was the wrong gender, typically meaning if the baby was a girl, he could order her to be tossed outside the city gates, left vulnerable to wild animals, traffickers, exposure to unthinkable suffering.

This is where Jesus followers would step in. They would go outside the city gates, listen for their cries, go to them, and gather these babies into their arms and welcome them into their families as beloved sons and daughters.

Psalm 68:6 : God places the lonely in families.

He does this through his people.

Over 40% of Napa youth who enter foster care are sent out of County due to lack of foster homes - not only to neighboring counties like Solano, but also to Amador, Lassen, San Joaquin, Placer and Sacramento. Of Napa County's 54 licensed foster families (some inactive) only 16 are affiliated with a church.

I also MUST name the profound racial disparity in Solano foster care. Although African Americans make up 13.6% of the child population, approximately 40% of children in foster care in Solano County are Black.

Just last year, we had the pleasure of being a part of Child Welfare Services & The Faith-Based Community Roundtable where the county communicated the desire to remove all obstacles for the Church to be a resource for the families and youth it serves.

Solano County Child Welfare Services would love to see the churches much more engaged in foster care. The people of Jesus are being INVITED into the lives and families of children experiencing foster care!

This slide shows the tragic long term effects of children growing up without a loving and stable family. About 50% will fight addition, 1 in 3 will become homeless. About 70% of the girls who age out will be pregnant by the age of 21, often finding themselves and their children in the same cycle of foster care. One of the most heartbreaking realities is the vulnerability of these kids to being targeted by traffickers and sexually exploited because pimps see the foster care system as a pipeline for recruitment.

These aren't just stats to me...And I know they aren't to many of you as well.

Every number has a name. Every name has a story. Every story matters to God.

Just like when the Israelites cried out to God, and He answered their cries through asking Moses to GO!, we are invited to go!

Foster the City's vision is simply: A Church for Every Child

Are you interrupted by compassion when you hear about babies, children, teenagers whose families are not able to care for them? Do you feel righteous indignation when you think about pimps targeting young girls and boys, grooming them to be sex workers on the streets in YOUR county? Behind closed doors in your communities?

Empty nesters? What if God is calling YOU? Single women? Young families? Families with teenagers? Retired couples? What if he is calling YOU to consider stepping in and welcoming a child into your family?

What if he wants to INTERRUPT the plans you've made with a calling he has over your life!

If this isn't a season where you can foster, then what about considering being a Support Friend for a Foster Family? A support friend is someone who would says, I care about these kids experiencing foster care, and even though I can't personally foster, I can support someone who can. I can bring a meal once or twice a month. I can babysit. I can help with transportation. I can pray, I can send encouraging texts.

Several years ago we said yes when we got a call about a very troubled little 3 year old boy, who turned 4 in our care. His mother had been trafficked and exploited and he'd witnessed unspeakable things in his little life. To say that our lives were interrupted is an understatement...but our disruption didn't even compare to what he had suffered. It was the hardest thing we had ever done. **We had a lot of support, but we didn't have this structure in place.** When you are in a tough season of life sometimes it's hard to know what you need...Caring for the little boy was the hardest thing we've ever done, but it was also beautiful. Because through all the hard, we got to be a tiny part of the healing that God was doing in him and his family, and we got to see him go to his forever family... When we follow Jesus we are not guaranteed outcomes that will match our expectations. Often things do not go the way that we want them to go, but we learn a new level of trusting Jesus, and hoping in him regardless of circumstance, believing that he IS doing something, even if we can't see it.

If you're interested in hearing more about taking steps to become a foster family, a support friend, I'd like to invite you to our next Virtual Interest Meeting on DATE. I will also be at the back table and would love to continue our conversation there!

So where do you find yourself in your life with God this morning, your journey with him? Are you noticing burning bushes? Are you looking for Him to come to you in unexpected ways? Are you leaning in to interruptions? What does the Holy Spirit want to give birth to through your life? Is he reminding you of a call that has long been dead and buried and he is wanting to resurrect a dream you thought was long gone?

When God is about to do something amazing, He interrupts and invites His people. And remember, that just as he assured Moses, he assures you this morning...Whatever he is calling you to, he also says, I WILL BE WITH YOU!

PRAY