

# LIFE IN FELLOWSHIP

SPRING 2016

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**KIM VOGEL**  
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HAPPY BIRTHDAY:  
Kim celebrating  
with sweet friends.

# CONTAGIOUS Joy

BY AMY ALLEN

**Kim Vogel is a 40-year-old married woman with a 15-year-old son in high school, and has attended Fellowship Greenville for several years. She has dear friends and family who love her deeply. However, the similarities between her story and your's or mine likely end there. You see, Kim has a severe form of multiple sclerosis, is paralyzed, and can no longer communicate audibly. Despite her physical limitations, most will agree that Kim is typically seen wearing a big, beautiful smile, full of contagious joy.**

Kim's adventure with multiple sclerosis began when she was 11. Her family didn't realize it at the time, however, because the numbness in her hands was dismissed by the doctor as growing pains. The symptoms went away and life was smooth for the next eight years. Kim's high school years were full of the normal teen stuff, from marching band to babysitting, and dating to youth group activities. After graduation, she met the man who would become her husband, Jim, and began college.

Unexpectedly, the fall of Kim's junior year at the University of Maryland

brought a new round of symptoms. This time the symptoms were relentless, and life would never be the same.

"I was so blessed to have Jim with me, along with great family support, during that time of uncertainty and then diagnosis. My years spent under great teaching at various churches, with wonderful worship ministries, were going to be relied on soon and very heavily," Kim recalls.

As is typical in situations like this, there was a lot of denial in the first few weeks and months surrounding the diagnosis. Kim didn't like to even hear the words or the initials M and S. Nevertheless, she finished college and walked across the stage at graduation using a cane. She remembers thinking, "This isn't what I had planned for my life! Far from it! It is going to mess everything up!" Kim felt confused, and frustrated by the fact that there were no medications, at that time, to help. She may have had a bachelor's degree, but it came with a broken spirit.

"I remember one night when I was about 21," Kim says. "I was driving my car—probably too fast, I had a lead foot—when a song came on about God

being the Potter and me being the clay. I would normally sing along, but not to those words! I knew that I should, but I couldn't."

Kim had a very difficult time embracing that concept, not out of pride or arrogance, but rather from a reluctance to give up control over her life. After years of resistance, Kim finally stopped fighting and submitted to God's plan for her life. At that point, Kim felt, "a huge burden was lifted." She received an incredible freedom and peace from God. She is so glad God was patient with her during those difficult years, "He promises to walk with us through hardships, not keep us from them."

*Fear not; for I am with you; be not dismayed; for I am your God. I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand.*

—ISAIAH 41:10

## In Her Own Words

When asked to share about how her diagnosis shaped her life, Kim shared:

Five or six years ago, one Sunday morning, in a small group meeting, we were discussing spiritual gifts and especially the calling on our lives. We were going around the room, each person sharing what they felt their calling or gifts were, and I was thinking, well, I must have one! Certainly, there is a purpose for my life! God has a plan for me too! I decided right then that I would write my thoughts down when I got home—seeking God and asking him to use me however he wanted.

First, there was a question that I needed God's help with. I was completely confused by what I read.

*Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.*

—JAMES 1:2-4

I cried out to God, asking what that meant and how could that happen... joy in the midst of trials? He answered my concern over the following months and

years. Today, I completely understand and agree with that passage!

He gave me security, peace, and freedom. The Holy Spirit would continually bring Scripture to mind. Praise and worship songs would 'play' in my head. I found that when I focused on repeating the Scripture that I could remember, and praising him despite whatever was going on, joy welled up inside of me! I finally understood what Paul meant. Nothing could ever extinguish the light in me, the joy in my heart, or this wonderful feeling of security. There is nothing more important and more rewarding than pursuing and obeying God's will. I had a major priority shift from my will to his.

I was going to meet a new group of doctors in the coming weeks. The Holy Spirit told me, in the middle of the night, to give the new doctors the testimony that I was going to write. Back then, I didn't have this computer (I'll get to that in a minute) and my voice was stronger, so I recited to a friend what I wanted typed out. I didn't get much sleep that night as I wrote the testimony in my head. God has continually provided me with a fabulous network of friends and family to essentially 'be my arms' when I need something done and much, much more! The following morning, one of my 'God-appointed' friends did just that.

It wound up being a three paragraph paper. It was initially read to a small group, then to the Precepts Bible study that I was part of, and then at a church back in Maryland. They proceeded to publish it in their weekly bulletin. By this time, a few thousand people had read it. God was showing me that my life will bring him glory, by sharing my story and displaying Christ in me! A whole mission field was opened up to me, telling others that their life is precious too.

**God wants you to join him in navigating your life, together. God can turn weakness into strength and use the meek and unlikely, in human eyes. He wants to use each of us!**

The paper was shortened into a note card (shown below). I did, indeed, give one to each of the new doctors. One was sniffing after reading, some said amen, and lots of hugs followed. Interesting thing: every time I go to that office I am asked, "Did you bring any of your cards?" My doctor has asked me to give some to the interns that are shadowing her. All the various health professionals are so intrigued and amazed by Christ in me. I get to boast about him whenever I go to the doctor!

It was at this time that one of the new doctors introduced me to this communication device (computer) I am using to type this. I was her first patient to have one! It has been (Kim's story continues on the next page.)



### The Reason for My Smile

I was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis in 1996. I have known for many years the battle that was ahead of me. Through the years I have gone through a range of emotions including denial, anger, resentment and bitterness. But, thankfully, over time my emotions have turned to include indescribable joy, overwhelming peace and unbelievable freedom. This is all thanks to my Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave me undeserved grace and who loves me, keeps me, protects me and guides me. I know that he has a plan for my life and he has equipped me to carry it out. So while I continue the battle in this earthly body, I will do it joyfully, for joy overcomes fear and sorrow.

Blessed beyond belief - Kim

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 - Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

Kim shares these note cards with the many people she meets each week.

## GroupLIFE

# LIFE IS BETTER CONNECTED

**K**im's story also highlights the way in which group life is so integral to our faith walk.

The group of people surrounding her at Fellowship Greenville have, quite literally, become the hands and feet of Jesus to Kim and her family. We want to create as many opportunities as needed to make sure you are connected with others in the church body. So, we have small groups for all ages and all seasons of life.

- » **Men's Groups** – small and large groups meeting at church or in other locations, throughout the week
- » **Women's Groups** – small and large groups meeting at church or in private homes, throughout the week
- » **Mixed Community Groups** – small groups meeting in private homes, throughout the week
- » **Adult Bible Fellowship Groups** – small and large groups meeting at church, on Sunday mornings
- » **Senior Groups (Caleb's Kin)** – large group meeting at church, monthly on the third Thursday (April 21 and May 19) from 10:30am - 1pm
- » **Growth Groups** – short-term, content-focused small group studies that meet at church on Sundays mornings
- » **College and Early 20s Groups** – connecting college-age and post-college people in community, meeting in various locations throughout the week



Visit our web site to learn more about the groups that meet your need:  
**FELLOWSHIPGREENVILLE.ORG/GROUPLIFE.**



a wonderful addition and a tool to regain some independence!

A few weeks ago, I went to meet a new neurologist at the same practice. I got such a kick out of what he did. After meeting me and talking for two minutes, he left the room, came back with three of his staff members and proclaimed, "I've never seen anything like this! Her attitude! Her smile!" He then said, at the end of the appointment, that he is going to put me in the next MS Newsletter. As I was leaving the appointment, he took a picture of me with his cell phone. We'll see what happens with this opportunity. I have learned to see every opportunity to glorify God. My life is his to use as he wants.

I can say that because of what Jesus has done for me, I live expecting great things. I am full of hope and I will keep singing and worshiping him no matter what lies before me. He is worthy to be trusted and praised! In fact his word commands it.

*Clap your hands, all peoples!  
Shout to God, with loud songs  
of joy! —PSALM 47*

### In Community

Kim's story does not end with her touching testimony. "Loving others" is one of our core values here at Fellowship Greenville. As a community of grace, we want to take opportunities to care for one another in practical ways.

Kim has all of the normal mom responsibilities that come with being a wife

and mother, but needs help to accomplish tasks she would love to be able to do on her own, like cooking and cleaning. God has raised up a network of people who support this family, and his love pours out of them as they address the various needs Kim has.

Pat Moyer, Kim's mom (shown right), describes it like this, "As Kimberly's parents, my husband and I have walked this journey with Kim and her family. Kim was still living at home at the time of her initial diagnosis. We were greatly concerned. The disease progressed and we continued to pray for healing. But God's ways are not our ways. We all moved to South Carolina about nine years ago. Kim's new next door neighbor told us about this church and we began to attend. While we continued to pray for healing, Kim gradually lost her ability to move her legs and arms and more recently, her ability to speak audibly. But she continued to come to Sunday services and women's Bible study and then Bible Precepts.

"Kim made friends in these studies and the women began to walk out Jesus' life in Kim's. They organized and came to Kim's to help her with Precepts homework. They came and helped with household chores and physical therapy. They did laundry, meals, and even helped in the morning to get their son off to school. They spent



precious time with her, pouring into her life. They were, and are, great witnesses to family, friends and neighbors, saved and unsaved, of what following Christ should look like to give oneself without expectation of return."

Mary Wilson (pictured below) shares how she has witnessed God's community of grace showing this love in action, "God brought a blessing into my life six years ago, her name is Kim Vogel. This blessing is just a small part in the beautiful tapestry he is weaving, and I had the privilege and joy of watching it unfold. The first time I met Kim was in a Precept Bible study, which I happened to be leading. A friend, Lisa Mallory, brought Kim to the study, and Kim's face shone with joy in the anticipation of studying God's Word. Lisa shared with the group how she had gone over to check on Kim one morning and saw tears running down her cheeks. These tears were not due to sadness, but because she had something in her eye and was unable to get it out, because of her paralysis.



"After sharing this with our group, one of the ladies exclaimed, 'she can't be left alone every morning, we will just have to do something about that.' So began a group of organized volunteers who would go to Kim's each morning after her husband left for work and before her mother, father, or

aunt came in the afternoon. Within a short time there were enough volunteers to cover the week. Some of the things we do for Kim include: doing the laundry, cleaning the refrigerator, and helping her order and pick up things to decorate her house. One friend, Caroline Kruithof, drove Kim's son to Langston Charter Middle School each morning for three years, and put on Kim's makeup. One of the ladies, whose husband was a contractor, was able to get a new cement patio installed at contractor's pricing, so that Kim could be rolled out to enjoy the beauty of her backyard. But out of all the things Kim enjoys, her favorite is Bible study and talking about her Lord," explains Mary.

**"Shortly after we began helping Kim, she began to go to physical therapy. She was told it would be wonderful if the therapy could be performed at her home on a regular basis. Who should God bring into the Bible study, but a physical therapist who had recently moved to Greenville!"**

Mary continues, "There are other threads of blessing that God is weaving into this tapestry. If anyone asks why people keep coming to help Kim so faithfully, Pat and Kim always have the same response, 'they love Jesus and are doing what he asks them to do. You see, they work for him.'"

Kim still attends the Precepts Bible study, where one of our ladies sits next to her to act as her hands and feet. She has been a true blessing and a joy in my life, as I watch God calling women into his service, and see their willing obedience. These women are not just studying God's Word, but living it out in their lives. When I am feeling discouraged, I know that it is time to visit Kim. I always come away filled with joy, for being with Kim encourages me in my walk with the Lord. I could go on and on about how I have observed God work in meeting Kim's needs, but suffice it to say, he is enough.

Chris Gibbs puts it this way. "Helping Kim blesses anyone who gets to do it and one who helps walks away much better than they were. This is not simply a result of becoming aware of all the things that you take for granted, but rather because someone who seems to have far less than you in reality has so much more... thanks to her nearness to God. You desire the relationship she has of total surrender."

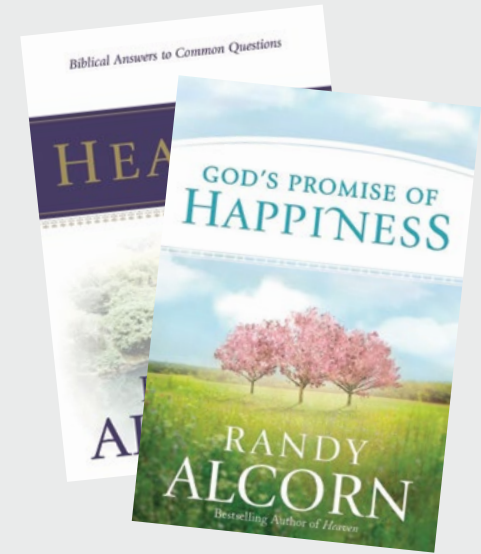
In addition, Fellowship Greenville began organizing meals with our Taste of Grace Ministry for the Vogel family, which has been a blessing to the family. There are currently 15 ladies who help with this schedule and it has been continuing each and every Tuesday for the past four years!

Maggie Rexford, one of our Taste of Grace volunteers comments, "It has been my joy to be part of the meal rotation for the Vogel family. I look forward to when it is my turn. Walking in their front door and being greeted with the most beautiful smile from Kim is awesome! I love visiting with her. She has taught me so much. When I first read her testimony a few years back, I tucked her written story in a place where I could easily get to it. On the front it says *Psalm 23:5... my cup overflows*. She is a prayer warrior! I have grown to love Kim and her precious family so much, and I thank God for the privilege of serving. I am the one who is blessed."

Kim's mother, Pat, adds, "I recently read an article by David Jeremiah that said 'If there is one thing we can always expect in walking with God, it is to expect the unexpected.' I would pray for healing and see a miracle happening before my eyes every Sunday I brought Kim to church. My precious daughter, who can't move or speak, would just smile and friends and strangers alike would walk up to her and give her love and say how much she blesses them with her presence and smile. They give her encouragement and she gives them joy.

"Again, God's ways are not our ways. Even though I still pray for healing, I can now praise him, thank him, and give him glory for what he has done, in and through Kim. Can God work all things together for good for those who love him and are called to his purposes? Kim is proof... expect the unexpected!"

## BookREVIEW



### HAPPINESS

Randy Alcorn, author of *Heaven*, has recently released his second book *Happiness*. In it, he makes an effort to take us back to the foundation of what Scripture says about happiness and joy. Often times, it seems to me that Christians become very cautious when people start talking about their happiness. After all, our culture worships happiness and demands that we pursue our own happiness, no matter the cost. Alcorn reminds us, however, that happiness is actually a biblical idea that comes from the character of God, and that our culture shouldn't define it for us.

After three years of study and writing, Alcorn has put together a comprehensive and theological book on what happiness truly means. He explores themes like the universal desire for happiness and how true happiness is actually rooted in the character of God. He helps redefine our idea of happiness from a biblical perspective and explores how we can grow, practically, as Christians in our God-centered happiness. In a world where happiness is idolized by the culture and viewed with suspicion by the Church, Alcorn's book is a needed remedy.

BY JONNY BRUSH

One of the ways we can live on mission with Jesus is by meeting the needs of those around us, as Jesus so often did. Delivering a meal to a grieving family, encouraging someone with a listening ear, and providing a ride for someone unable to drive are just a few of the ways we can offer tangible expressions of grace.

Let us know when you or someone you know might benefit from physical, emotional, or spiritual support. Also, visit our Facebook group dedicated to sharing and meeting practical needs: [FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/FGCARE](https://www.facebook.com/groups/FGCARE).



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