



MARY SOUTHERLAND

The Stress-Buster and Women's Ministry Motivator



I Shall Not Want Mary Southerland

Just as the Shepherd takes care of his sheep, God takes care of us. We need to understand and dwell in the truth that God is our source. Psalm 23:1 says, "*I shall not want*" (NIV). In this verse, "want" literally means "lack". God will see to it that His children will lack nothing. God will provide. God will take care of us, supplying every need, and not just material needs. God meets every emotional need, every physical need, and every mental need. A loving Father meets the needs of His kids. He is our source! Our mate is not our source. Our job is not our source. Our children are not our source. God is our source.

Christmas is my favorite time of the year! One of my favorite family traditions is the buying of our Christmas tree. It must be purchased on the day after Thanksgiving and it must be purchased from the nice man who runs a tree lot just down the street from our house because he has the best Frasier Firs in town. The whole process is something to see and steeped in Southerland tradition.

We all pile into "Old Blue", my husband's well-worn truck, and head for the tree lot. It is a 2 minute drive - but it is a tradition. When we arrive, my husband and our children fan out in search of "the tree". Yes, I believe that there is one particular tree just waiting for us to claim it. Over the years, many people have tried to change that opinion, but I am standing firm. As tradition demands, my husband, Dan, immediately begins muttering, "Bah, humbug" under his breath but just loud enough for us all to hear him. That is the cue for our daughter, Danna, to begin rolling her eyes and correcting her Scrooge father. Our son, Jered, ignores them both and carries out his steady search in quiet contemplation. He usually spots "the tree" first. "Found it!" he will shout, which is another verbal tree-finding tradition. We all gather to inspect Jered's find, immediately dismiss it as unworthy, and spread out once again in search of our tree.

The owners of the tree lot now recognize us, understand that there is a non-negotiable Southerland step-by-step process and stand back, waiting for the curtain to fall on the tree drama, content in the knowledge that we will eventually buy a tree from them. I consider and dismiss almost every tree on the lot before going back to the first tree Jered picked. Afraid of losing it to another customer, Jered faithfully stands guard over his tree until we come to our senses and realize that he, once again, has found the perfect tree. After what we consider a respectable search time, we once again gather at Jered's tree, looking for "holes" in the branches, evaluating each side to make sure it will display well and finally, examining the top of the tree to make sure our angel tree-topper will be comfortable there.

The moment of truth arrives when Dan, Danna and Jered all look at me and ask, "Well, what do you think, mom? Is this the one?" Savoring the moment, I take my time. My husband and children know that, at this point, their only job is to remain silent. Finally, I turn to them and say, "Let's get it!" I am almost certain I hear applause at this moment, from my family, from other customers and certainly from the tree man. My husband writes the check as Jered loads the tree in Old Blue and we head home where the Christmas tree stand is ready and waiting. Jered, the hulk football player, unloads the tree, cuts off an inch of the trunk, places it in the stand and transports the tree to its new home for holidays.

The smell is delicious. The needles are green and fresh...for about a month, and then, every year, the same sad process begins. Although I faithfully water the tree, the needles grow more brittle with each day that passes, the smell is less powerful and eventually, the limbs begin to wither, dry out and turn brown. Why? The tree has been separated from its source. The same is true in our lives.

I am convinced that a great deal of our stress is born in wrong priorities and is fed by inadequate sources. As a result, we are never quite satisfied, struggling with greed and fear while looking in the wrong places for

our needs to be met. We desperately try to squeeze life out of lifeless places, people and things. God is our source, our sole provider. Yet, I often find myself afraid to let go, refusing to give back to God what really belongs to Him in the first place. *“The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want.”* When it comes to the resources that we need for life, this promise from the 23rd Psalm is staggeringly important to remember.

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