

# Life Saving! Hope Recovering!

**“This is what I shall tell my heart and so recover hope.  
The steadfast love of God never ends.  
His mercies are never exhausted.  
They are new every morning!”**

The words for this call to worship were drawn from the prophet Jeremiah in Lamentations 3:21-23. We used this call to worship every Sunday morning for twenty-three years. Each time I called the congregation to worship, I was also calling myself to worship with these words from Scripture.

I heard those words used for the call to worship for the first time in April 1979 when Sue and I were being interviewed for the Associate Pastor position. I heard them for the second time on June 24, 1979 during the morning service, knowing I would be installed as the Associate Pastor during the evening service.

When I was installed as Senior Pastor in September 1987, I continued using that wonderful call to worship every Sunday. It never became boring or routine for me. I proclaimed that call to worship every Sunday morning with joy, conviction, and passion.

I didn't fully understand at the time how significant those words of scripture in our call to worship were going to be in my own life, during a very dark and painful time much later in my pastoral ministry.



I had no idea I would need intense professional counseling to help me believe the truth of the words of scripture in that call to worship for myself. It happened when Sue and I had to work through our intense hurt and deep wounding which happened during a special congregational meeting in the church fellowship hall, on May 10, 1999, just a few weeks before my twentieth anniversary as pastor of the church.

Sue and I sat there and listened for over two and a half hours to one person after the next, after the next come to the microphone and verbally express their list of complaints and grievances and things I didn't do well enough as their pastor.

After the meeting was closed in prayer and everyone was dismissed, Sue was one of the first to leave. I lingered and talked with people and I was one of the last to leave. Sue was so wounded, hurt, and angry that she completely shut down. She would not leave the house, go to the door, or answer the phone. She said she would never trust another person again. It took me longer to understand how angry, hurt, and wounded I really was. The cumulative impact became worse over time.

As I was preparing to write this Newsletter I looked through my file of letters, cards, and notes I received during this time for the first time in twenty-three years. I didn't have time to read all of them. But it was encouraging to remember how many written expressions of love and support I did receive. One envelope from my Mom caught my eye. She was always a Godly, loving, encouraging, and affirming influence in my life and ministry.

Mom rarely put a date on her letters. I'm glad I saved the envelope with the postmark date June 3, 1999.

*Dear John,*

*It's midnight. I had to take a fleet enema for a sigmoidoscopy colon test tomorrow and I can't sleep so decide to catch up on some Bible reading. Reading in 2 Chronicles 18-20 where Jehasaphat called for a nationwide prayer meeting and proclaimed a fast throughout Judah. He stood in the midst of a great congregation in Jerusalem and began to pray "We have no might against this great company that cometh against us, neither know we what to do, but our eyes are upon Thee." and God responded to their prayer by saying, "Ye shall not need to fight in this battle" (2 Chronicles 20:17). Even before the battle was won, Jehoshaphat began praising the Lord for the victory. Jehasaphat didn't close his eyes to the impending disaster, nor seek help from other nations. He was trusting God's wisdom.*

*If we commit ourselves in prayer to God's care, He will use everything that comes into our lives for our eternal good. So - John - rest assured that every unfair treatment, every unkind word, and every thoughtless deed that came your way will ultimately be for your good.*

*The hardest part is giving thanks in everything, for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you (1 Thess. 5:18). My heart still aches at the cruel treatment you and Sue have received — yet I am trusting God to use this evil for good (Gen. 50:20).*

*I admire you son, for sitting there as they plunged their knife into your heart. While your pain makes me ache, I hear your laugh (at Willow Creek) and know God is with you in your joys and your sorrows. And he will mold and shape you into something so special and beautiful. I'm truly trying to pray for those who hurt you and Sue — for only God can change them, if they'll let Him.*

*Keep us posted on your feelings on this pastor from Washington — for Associate. When does Consistory meet to address the hurtful comments you received? Keep us posted. Love you, Mom*

A letter from the consistory, dated June 14, 1999 was mailed to the entire congregation. The first three paragraphs reveal the heart of the communication.

*Dear Church Family Members and Friends:*

*On Monday, May 10, 1999 an open meeting was held to address concerns raised by some of our family. The Consistory Response to these issues is attached. In preparing our response we reviewed a transcript of all of the discussions that took place at the meeting and grouped all of the issues that were similar in content. We then addressed each of the grouped issues for response. The order in which the issues are addressed does not reflect any ranking but only the order in which the first comment fitting into that grouping was made.*

*The meeting unfortunately started with a vicious assassination of Dr. Smith's character. The consistory vehemently disapproves of this type of behavior, which is neither scriptural nor acceptable in the church of Jesus Christ.*

*Despite our differences of opinion we need to strive for unity within the body of Christ. We recognize that the concerns expressed at the meeting were meaningful. The Consistory has been chosen to give vision and direction to the church. If we try to satisfy everyone we will get nowhere. As a church, we cannot be all things to all people.*

I could not have asked for better support or leadership from the Elders and Deacons of our church. They addressed all the issues that were raised directly, biblically, and responsibly. I continued to preach through the end of June. Then I took my vacation time and some of my unused sabbatical time to heal and restore my broken and wounded heart.

I heard a song several years ago that describes what and how I was feeling at that time. The first time I heard it, I embraced it in my heart and spirit as my theme song.

## Save My Life

Song by Sidewalk Prophets

### Lyrics

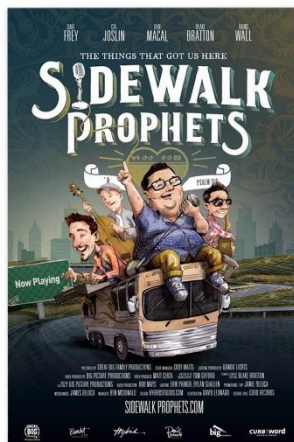
We've met half a dozen times  
I know your name, I know you don't know mine  
But I won't hold that against you  
You come here every Friday night  
I take your order and try to be polite  
And hide what I've been going through  
If you looked me right in the eye  
Would see the pain deep inside  
Would you take the time to  
Tell me what I need to hear  
Tell me that I'm not forgotten  
Show me there's a God  
Who can be more than all I've ever wanted  
'Cause right now I need a little hope  
I need to know that I'm not alone  
Maybe God is calling you tonight  
To tell me something that might save my life

I'm the pastor at your church  
For all these years you've listened to my words  
You think I know all the answers  
But I've got doubts and questions too  
Behind this smile I'm really just like you  
Afraid and tired and insecure  
If you look me right in the eye  
Would you see the real me inside  
Would you take the time to  
Tell me what I need to hear  
Tell me that I'm not forgotten  
Show me there's a God  
Who can be more than all I've ever wanted  
'Cause right now I need a little hope  
I need to know that I'm not alone  
Maybe God is calling you tonight  
To tell me something that might save my life  
Save my life  
I am just like everyone, Jesus I need You  
I need Your love to save my life  
Tell me what I need to hear  
Tell me that I'm not forgotten  
Show me there's a God  
Who can be more than all I've ever wanted  
'Cause right now I need a little hope  
I need to know that I'm not alone  
Maybe God is calling you tonight  
Oh, I know that You are calling me tonight  
Jesus only You can save my life  
Save my life

Source: [Musixmatch](https://www.musixmatch.com/lyrics/9T-One/SideWalkProphets)

Songwriters: David Frey / Ben McDonald / Ben Glover

Save My Life Lyrics © 9 T One Songs, Dayspring Music, LLC, Ariose Music Group Inc.





I value honesty and transparency, therefore I must confess, there is a very good chance I would not be around anymore if it wasn't for some amazing people God placed in my life for such a time as this: Roger, Paul, Diane, Elaine, Linda, John, Deanna. You know who you are. Sue and I are forever grateful!

Here is one example of many to illustrate the depth and quality of these relationships God blessed me with. One day when I was meeting with my friend Paul, he looked me right in the eyes and said, "You are not doing well. I'm afraid you are not going to make it. You need to go see Dr. John Walker at Blessing Ranch in Colorado. I am going to make the call for you."

God called Dr. John Walker to leave his well-established practice as a Psychologist in Houston, to start a ranch in Colorado to bring healing and restoration to pastors and missionaries who get deeply hurt or emotionally wounded in action in the church or on the mission field. Paul had been telling me about John Walker and Blessing Ranch for at least a year. But it never occurred to me to contact him or look into going there. I was in too bad of shape to figure that out for myself.

When Paul called Blessing Ranch he learned Dr. Walker had an opening and a cancellation. Providentially, as God would have it, we were the only clients on the ranch for the entire week, because God knew we needed all of Dr. Walker's time, attention, expertise, love, grace and mercy. God also knew how healing, therapeutic, and life giving it was for Sue and me to have dinner with John and Deanna Walker every evening in their home. Our conversations and friendship building with John and Deanna around their dinner table was an incredible gift Sue and I treasure in our hearts to this day!!

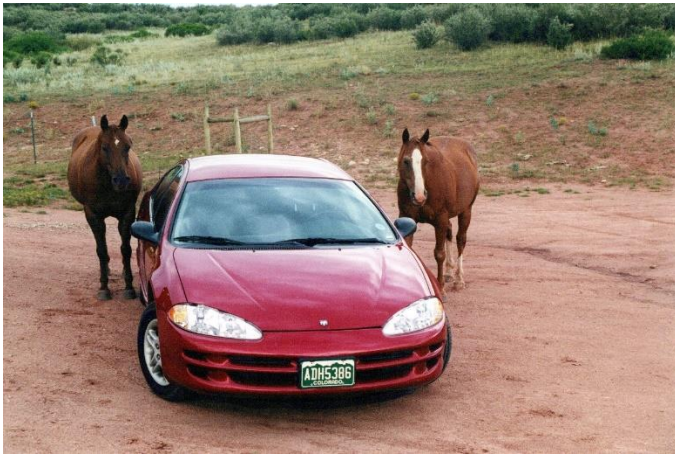


Blessing Ranch Guest House was a comfortable, safe place, for our intensive counseling.



John and Deanna's house was to the left and the setting was spectacular!





Their horses were curious about our rental car and their dogs stayed with us wherever we went.



They raised cattle and were always surrounded by the beauty of God's creation.



**Our week at Blessing Ranch was truly life saving for me!**

Sue and I have only one complaint about Blessing Ranch.  
At the end of the week we had to leave.



When we returned to continue our ministry at the church, I gave it my very best every day. But we encountered lingering difficulties and new difficulties. A year later Sue told me she thought I needed to go back to Blessing Ranch again. I told her I would love to because I had some things I wanted to process through with John Walker. I wasn't sure I had a whole week's worth, but Sue reminded me of what John would say about that.

Then words came out of my mouth to Sue that I had never expressed before. I said, "I don't know, maybe I'm struggling with a touch of depression." Sue quickly confirmed that what I just said was true. She could see it more clearly than I could. I remember describing how I was feeling by saying I felt like all of the joy had been sucked out of my life.

I made the call to Blessing Ranch and was delighted to hear that they had a cancelation and once again, God worked it out so we were the only couple there for the week, rather than their normal schedule with two couples that he counsels separately.

### **I describe our second week at Blessing Ranch in October, 2000, as being Hope Recovering!**

We processed through my depression, and God began to recover my hope. We processed through what it would look like for me to do ministry in a healthy, live giving, hope renewing way.

We also took time for John to teach me a few things on the ranch that I was eager to learn how to do: like welding steel and operating a big bulldozer!!







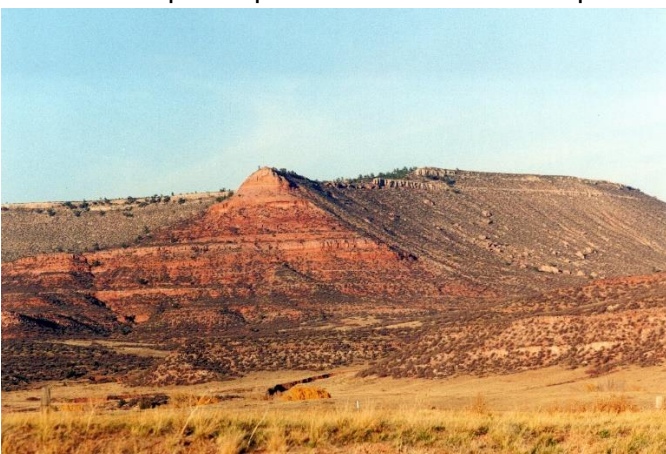
Sue got in on the action too!



I was like a little kid with a great big new toy!



God paints pictures in nature that depict some of my feelings and emotions in living color.



I remember climbing up the face of that mountain as far and as high as I dared to. While I was climbing I remember thinking to myself: "I have to change the way I do ministry or I am going to die." After resting and praying, I walked across the top of the entire Mesa asking God to show me the way.



These next two pictures are worth more than 2,000 words.



Dr. John and Deanna Walker, Blessing Ranch, Livermore, CO



God has marvelous ways of recovering our hope!



## Live well. Lead Well. Finish well.

These words are repeated as the rallying cry for Blessing Ranch Ministries. Sue and I have seen them in action in the lives of John and Deanna Walker. The story of John and Deanna Walker is the story of Blessing Ranch Ministries. It's a story of faith and trust.

The story began one morning in Houston, TX with God audibly and dramatically calling John to start a resource and renewal center for Christian leaders. It continued with the purchase of 166 acres in Livermore, CO, and John and Deanna leaving successful careers to relocate their family to a very different existence. But because of John and Deanna's trust, obedience, and reliance on the Holy Spirit, the "Ranch" quickly became the go-to place for Christian leaders to unhinder their hearts to be transformed for sustained pastoral excellence.

Flip a few pages, and you will find Blessing Ranch Ministries nearly 30 years later thriving in the Tampa Bay area of Florida. Since 1994, over 4,000 leaders have been impacted through the Unhindered Model of transformation! John and Deanna have surrendered their lives to faith and trust, so that they can minister to the minister and see a healthy Church. But last month, John officially retired!





For many years the question was asked, “Does Blessing Ranch exist beyond the life and work of John Walker?” God is good and the answer is “Yes!” But God’s calling wasn’t just to John Walker; it was to the Walker family! Charity leads the ministry as CEO and Psychologist with Hope on staff and part of the Lead Team.



Dr. Byers serves as our Chief Executive Officer and Psychologist. As a licensed Psychologist, she provides Counseling Services to pastors, missionaries, and other Christian leaders. She loves continuing the mission that began with her father, Dr. John Walker, to help Christian leaders live well, lead well, and finish well. Dr. Byers is invested in bringing the transformational work Blessing Ranch has done for over 25 years into greater reach for leadership teams and staff. Dr. Byers’ educational experiences include a B.A. in Clinical Counseling and School Psychology from Western State College of Colorado, a M.A. in General Psychology from the University of Northern Colorado, and a Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from the University of Denver. She is co-author of the books *Unhindered: Aligning the Story of your Heart* and *Unhindered 30 Days: Discover Healing, Freedom, and Power Within*. She lives with her husband, Todd, and son, Bennett, in Trinity, Florida.





Hope serves as Blessing Ranch Ministries' Business and Development Director. Her educational experience includes a B.A. degree in Organizational Communications and Political Science from Western State College of Colorado.



**Blessing Ranch Ministries**  
**[www.blessingranch.org](http://www.blessingranch.org)**



**Thank you for partnering with PastorCare West Michigan to advance the Kingdom of God through your prayers and financial donations.**

**Please make checks payable to:** PastorCare West Michigan  
8056 Burlingame Ave. SW Bryon Center, MI 49315

**You May Donate Securely Online: [www.pastorcarewm.org](http://www.pastorcarewm.org)**  
**Bitcoin and Cryptocurrency are accepted.**

**Pastor John and Sue Smith**  
**[jsmith@pastorcarewm.org](mailto:jsmith@pastorcarewm.org)    Cell: 616-304-8543**