

Excerpt from the book, **I have a lot to say**
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available on Amazon or www.heathersharp.info

Cowboy church

One day later - July 24, 2011 - 10 a.m.



The next day she brushed me and saddled me. Sara was trying to manage her time today. She was conflicted about what would give her the most benefit—going to church or getting prepared for the short go.

'That's funny. She thinks they are exclusive activities.'

She led me over to John's trailer and tied me up. The clouds were starting to gather. The day started out with lots of sunshine and now it was getting overcast and grey.

John came out of the house on wheels and joyfully shouted, "This is the day that the Lord has made and I shall be glad and rejoice in it!"

Sara laughed. "Are you kidding? It's calling for rain this afternoon. The arena will be a muddy mess. Don't you read the papers or listen to the radio?"

"Yep! But there's nothing I can do about it. It'll be what it'll be. If I'm ticked off, then it's only hurt me. So I choose to be happy!"

"Oh, my gosh! Are you high on life?"

"I am! I'm an adrenaline junkie, remember? I need to be high on sumptin."

Sara asked him, "Do you mind if I jerk this saddle off? I don't want him to stand here for an hour with a saddle on, and if it starts to rain I don't want it to get wet."

"Sure, no problem." I was standing between the two of them.

The box at the top of the poles said, "Cowboy Church starts in ten minutes in the grandstands. It is our belief that it doesn't matter where you are—you can worship God. Matthew 18:20 says, 'For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.' Today it happens to be a grandstand. Tomorrow it might be in a truck on the road. It can be wherever you invite God into your heart. All are welcome. Join us."

I bumped Sara with my nose and nickered at her.

'Hungry?'

She smiled and pet me. She thought it was odd that I nickered.

John looked at the clouds. "It'd be better if it rained tomorrow, but I don't think we have a say. You gotta dance with the one that brung ya!"

Sara started to uncinch me. She laughed. “Where does that positive mental attitude come from? Where’d you get it, because I want some.”

John pulled the saddle off my back. “From heaven above!”

“Has God brainwashed you? Does it come from heaven or is it because you believe in God that you have a positive outlook?”

He said, “I don’t know and I don’t care! It is kind of like the question of how you get into heaven. If it’s by what I do, then I’m in big trouble. The Bible says you are saved by grace alone. There is not another verse after it that says, ‘If you give money to the poor, you’ll get a better place in heaven.’ ” John put the saddle in his trailer and locked the door.

He said, “It doesn’t say, ‘If you do XYZ, then you will get a more favorable review of your life when you stand before God.’ It doesn’t say, ‘If you go to church every Sunday, you will receive blessings.’ Some people think if they try harder, God will love them more. People can have such big egos. People think everything depends on what they do. They think their actions can change God’s opinion of them. I want to do things that please God BECAUSE of my faith. As Christians we are compelled to be good people because we have God in our lives. Once we believe, our lives change. Going to church is not what causes us to believe. It’s BECAUSE we believe that we go to church.”

John checked that his horses had water. “Praying doesn’t change God. Praying changes me. The whole thing is pretty simple—if you admit that you are not perfect and accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior, then you will get into heaven. Pretty easy. Even a cowboy could understand that.” They walked around the trailer, across the arena, and into the grandstands.

People are the ones who create a hierarchy. They think everything is relative. They use words like *best*, *champion*, *fastest*, *highest*, *closer*, *better*. Those words don’t exist for God.

God does not evaluate the way that humans do. He doesn’t think that one is better than the other. Everything is equal in His eyes. In this life, man has dominion over the animals. Sorry . . . I hate to be the one to tell you, but in the next life, it won’t be the same as it is here.

I watched John and Sara walk across the arena to the grandstands. Sara listened to a song that came out of the boxes at the top of the posts.

“Open the eyes of my heart, Lord.
Open the eyes of my heart.
I want to see you.
I want to see you.”

She thought, *‘When I get to heaven, I want to see God. I want to know what He looks like.’*

I'm just a horse and I've never been there, but I imagine that heaven will be different. You won't use the same senses you use now. You want to SEE God in front of you, but your mind can't conceive that God will be all around you. In heaven, it won't be the same as it is here. In this life, we're all limited by physical restrictions. I can't speak like human's can. In the next life, everyone will be able to communicate. I don't waste time in trying to understand it all. I have total faith that in another life we will be able to taste sound. All of us! People! Horses! Dogs! We will be able to hear color. We will see music.

A new person's voice came out of the boxes on top of the posts.

"Welcome to Cowboy Church. Later today will be the short go of the National High School Rodeo. The top 20 in each event made it back to the final round. They will award buckles to the top four finishers in each event, and the champion will get a saddle and a scholarship. There will only be one champion, but I want to let you know that everybody who made it to this rodeo is a winner."

The audience clapped.

"You've all heard that before and you blow it off. But let me tell you what I mean and why it's so important. Whether you made it to the short go or not, you made it here. The bar was set and you qualified. ALL the contestants were in the same grand entry. ALL the contestants got to compete. Go to the dance, have your picture taken. Heck! You got the T-shirt! Alaska was as good as Arizona; Maine was equal to Montana. South Carolina was just as good as South Dakota. Every single state was EQUAL and every competitor was EQUAL. You made it, and for that you deserve a hand!" There was wild clapping.

"Let me tell you about somewhere else. Another event you will want to make sure you are part of. This week has been unbelievable and so much fun, but this can't even hold a candle to the place I'm talking about. It's not like this event. At this rodeo there's a limit on how many can make it. Just the top four from each state. At the place I am talking about there is no limit, no cap, no four from each state baloney. There is an unlimited number of entrants and all you have to do is qualify. I'm talking about Heaven. To qualify . . . all you have to do is believe."

Just then the thunder boomed and shook the stands. That noise scared me and I jumped.

"Let's think about it. God won't look at how you ranked. God won't say, 'Congratulations! You were the fourth best. That's good enough to get in. Welcome! Make yourself at home!' And the next person will step up, and He'll say, 'Oops, sorry. You were fifth. Dang it. You didn't make it. Too bad for you. Next!' "

The audience laughed.

"God doesn't think like that. There is no ranking. God will take everybody who believes in Him. He doesn't view it as one person is better than another. That concept has no use. Either you're in or you're out."

"So that deals with the future. But what about TODAY? You came here hoping for a pearl of wisdom that would help you today. By a show of hands, who came here to pray

that they would win first? Or came here to pray that your son or daughter would win first?

“What—no hands going up? Come on! That’s the American way! You should be asking, ‘What’s in it for me?’”

The crowd was laughing.

“What should we pray for, then? I have an idea! Let’s pray for God to bless us!”

There was more thunder and lightning in the distance.

“Let’s pray to do our best. Our son or daughter to do their best. Maybe our best will be good enough to win first. That’s great. Maybe our BEST will place twelfth today.

“If we admit that He is more powerful than us, then He will bless us. We don’t know what that blessing will be. If you say that you want to win first place, then you are trying to tell God what to do.

“He’s a nice guy, but I don’t know that He is very keen on following directions.”

It started to rain.

“If you drew a horse that won’t buck in the saddle bronc, does it mean God was trying to teach you a lesson . . . or does it mean that the horse was having a bad day? If your horse slips in the barrel race, does that mean God was trying to punish you . . . or does it just mean that your horse slipped? If you prayed to do your BEST, does it really matter that your horse slipped?

“And does first place really matter? That will impress your friends. But who are you trying to impress? Are you gonna take the buckle to heaven? Is the title of champion going to impress God? What REALLY matters? The stuff on the outside or who you are on the inside?

“Let’s finish up before we get soaked. God, Father in heaven, keep everyone safe today. We pray that we do our best. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen!”