

Looking through the Windshield



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New Year – New You! How will you bring in this year with newness? Are you ready for all that is to come as you look through the big wide windshield of life? Do you have hopes and dreams in the distance that you are ready to chase after? Or do you find yourself frequently looking into the rearview mirror and dwelling on the past, making it challenging to fully see what goodness might lie ahead?

Rearview mirrors serve a crucial purpose—they allow us to see past mistakes for the sake of improvement, view challenges and difficulties we've overcome as a testament to our resilience, and remember all God has done and situations He has used to help us grow and make us more like Him.

But, to become 'New Yous' in the 'New Year' we must spend less time looking in the rearview mirror and more time with our eyes wide open and alert to what's in the windshield—all that God has for us today and in the future. This enables us to embrace new opportunities, new ways, new perspectives, and the beautiful new roads ahead while still appreciating the blessings and lessons from what is behind.

Through life's journey, I have found that one of the best ways to learn, grow and see more clearly is to 'carpool'. You see, when we have others in the car with us, we can rely on each other to get to our destinations in safer, better, more enjoyable ways. They can help us see more clearly in different situations, give us improved perspectives, warn us of hazards that we may not see, show us efficient shortcuts, help us navigate rougher roads that they've previously traveled, and sing with joy along the way. With these 'carpooling' benefits, I wonder why any of us would choose to travel alone.

Perhaps it's because others seem to have better vehicles (lives and circumstances) than we do. Why would we be vulnerable by asking others to join us in our old beat-up, disorderly, messy vehicles? Or why would we want to go into their beautiful, well-maintained, clean vehicles that make us feel inferior?

It is human nature to want others to see the best in us. This is why, more often than not, social media is filled with the wonderful parts of people's lives—the shiny exteriors. We don't often post the hard stuff—the garbage of difficult situations, the dirt and grime of addiction, the stink of family problems, or the stains of sin. But here's the secret: when we can be vulnerable and invite people into our not-so-perfect vehicles (lives), it gives others the courage to do the same. And when we all become 'carpoolers', think of the goodness that might just come as we ride together. We can help each other clean the garbage out, vacuum up dirt and grime, fumigate the stink, scrub the stains and travel better together.

Because I have a fondness for a clean and organized vehicle, and I enjoy helping others with theirs, I'll volunteer for vulnerability in 2024 and start the carpooling cleanup!

Most of the time, I feel ill-equipped to perform the roles I have in this life. I've made so many mistakes as a mom, wife, business owner, friend, etc. I often wrestle with feelings of inadequacy, insecurity, and not being enough. Sometimes I try to compensate and strive for perfection in all the things I can control. But it doesn't work and I eventually see things for what they are. Ultimately, my car is a mess. This past year, an even bigger mess was revealed and because I want to 'carpool' well with you—I'm going to invite you right on into my mess.

Be forewarned—there is a good chance that you will be tempted to judge my messy vehicle. But I hope that as you judge, you might consider doing so in a positive way rather than negative because of my courage and vulnerability—all for the sake of helping others learn from my mess.

For the last several years, I have been getting sicker and sicker until late last summer when I felt like I was dying. Sure, I put on my shiny exterior smile, but inside, I felt horrible. Symptoms that started out mild had worsened over time. I had overwhelming fatigue, brain fog, joint pain, extremely dry skin, systemic inflammation, weight gain, insomnia, adrenal fatigue, thyroid problems, dizziness, leg swelling, and so many GI issues.

Over time, testing revealed problems, but the cause was not found. I began working with a functional medicine doctor a few years ago to try to help relieve the symptoms. The things that were suggested did not bring relief. So, I began my own research—google, podcasts, books—anything that might help. I tried countless detox programs, naturopathic remedies, acupuncture, sauna, and supplements. I was already eating a gluten-free diet but under the advice of a detox program, I removed grains and sugar. Last spring, I began the bean diet (which I shared in a previous article). Though I found some relief in the first few months—it was short-lived, and my symptoms began to worsen again. I couldn't understand why my body felt like it was shutting down.

In August, at my lowest and when my kids returned to college, I committed to figuring out the problem. I began to see a functional medicine doctor again and I was determined to get help from a surgeon with a separate health issue.



Back story - due to GI issues, I developed a hernia several years ago. I had hernia repair with mesh in early 2022. After the repair, I had additional discomfort. I knew something was wrong but when I consulted my surgeon he said the lump of mesh in my stomach was "normal" and everything was fine. The problem was, I knew it wasn't fine. So, in August, I sought a second opinion. The new hernia surgeon I went to in the twin cities listened and after assessment, found that the mesh was improperly secured and he told me that when the surgeon put it in, the needle likely caused a second hernia.

I left his office, got into my vehicle, and wept. There were so many tears of relief and joy that it could be fixed. I praised God all the way home and began to plan for surgery. I wanted that mesh out of me and I was grateful to have found a doctor who was confident he could properly repair the issues without synthetic mesh.

Planning for surgery involves a preoperative physical assessment. My functional medicine doctor conducted this along with necessary lab tests. Previous lab results had shown issues requiring attention after surgery, but the new tests revealed additional problems—I was not absorbing nutrients and my ferritin level was 4.1 (extremely low). But despite my hemoglobin being just below normal, I was cleared for the necessary surgery.

On September 8th, Dr. Panait performed robotic surgery, removing the improperly secured mesh and repairing both hernias. His surprise at what he found led him to share a picture of the poorly placed mesh with me. I was shocked but relieved to have it out and though I was disappointed that it was not put in correctly, I was grateful to have found such a caring and competent surgeon to fix it.

During recovery, I delved into research about mesh and its associated problems. In the process, I learned about other issues that can arise with foreign objects in the body. It was then that a "still-small-voice" whispered to me—'what if all your health problems were stemming from other foreign objects in your body'? My heart began to race as I researched.

Approximately 1.5 million women get breast implants every year. The reasons women choose to have augmentations are many—to reconstruct what cancer deconstructed, to fill up the sag/deformity that may be left after breastfeeding or weight loss, to correct uneven breasts, to appease husbands, to feel more feminine, etc.

After nursing all my children, I felt deformed and less than desirable. I was obsessed with thoughts of how breast implants would fix the mess that was left and make me feel more feminine and confident. At the time (2007), breast implants were marketed as being "super safe" and they were FDA-approved. With that knowledge and with the hopes of looking "normal", I had a breast augmentation.

For 16 years, I was content with the results. Then, early last year during one of my detox programs, I learned implants could be toxic to the body. I quickly dismissed the idea since my previous mammograms had not indicated any problems.

Midway through the year, the subject came up again as I read an article on Breast Implant Illness (BII). I briefly considered this as a contributing factor to my health issues, but honestly, I didn't want to deal with it. So, I boxed it up and put it away for a different day. The different day was when the "still small voice" whispered to me shortly after the hernia surgery. I didn't want to believe it—I didn't want to lose my breasts, I didn't want another surgery, I didn't want to deal with the emotional and physical toll. But I prayed and asked God to reveal truth to me.

He did.

I immediately found a website and group of over 184,000 women who all suffered from BII. I scoured the posts. It was me! So many of them had my exact

story! And removing the toxic implants is what cured some, if not all their symptoms. I prayed again. I was scared but I was also confident that God had led me to the answer for my failing health.

What I began to see in that moment is that God had been preparing me for what was to come. I had done a summer Bible study with my daughter and mother-in-law with a deep dive into the Lord's Prayer. I learned a new way to pray and I would need it! Then I was led to a personal study on Esther—the only book of the Bible that doesn't mention God, but one that you see how He worked behind-the-scenes. He began to show me how he'd been working so long behind-the-scenes, showing me that my worth is not in the shiny exterior but the goodness that He has been making on the inside through Jesus. And during these new revelations in September, I was doing a Bible study with a group of women called Take Courage. Oh, how I would need His courage!

So, I took that courage. I devoured everything from the website and gained support and encouragement from the community of women I found. There they all were, showing me their messy cars as I revealed mine to them also. It was 'carpooling' at its best! I gained an improved perspective, was warned about hazards, shown efficient shortcuts, helped by so many others to navigate the rough road ahead, and with all the goodness and support, it was like we were singing with joy on the journey together.

I'd love to tell you that with my new 'breasties' (that's what they call each other, lol), my 'carpooling' journey was all sunshine and rainbows. But it wasn't. The surgery was hard. Both of my implants had contracture and one was ruptured (releasing the raw toxins into my body). The recovery was painful. And though I am starting to notice improvements, I continue with many of my pre-explant symptoms.

The healing formula suggested is that it takes approximately one month per year of having implants in order to fully detox. That's almost a year and a half for me. I have a couple of options while traveling the roadways ahead. (A) I can spend a lot of time looking in the rearview mirror with regrets and feeling sorry for myself. Or (B) I can be grateful for all that I've learned and who I've met in this 'carpooling' trip while looking at all that God has for me in the future. And if I want to make it an extra good trip, I can share my journey with others. I'm choosing B with the extra goodness.

It would take several more pages to share all I have learned. So instead, I'll let you do some of the research on your own and leave you with a few truths. All breast implants can cause Breast Implant Illness (BII) – all brands – both saline and silicone. They can also cause cancer. The symptoms are multifaceted and show up in so many different ways that most affected women and their doctors don't even think to contribute symptoms to BII. FDA approval does not mean safe. Sauna bathing heats the implants and releases more toxins into the body. Mammograms can rupture implants (if you have implants, you should NOT get mammograms, you should get ultrasounds and MRIs—better yet, you should consider removal). If removal is not for you, implants should be replaced every ten years.

And my final truth is this: In this world, we place far too much emphasis on making our vehicles shiny on the outside. The Lord says that He does not look at the outward appearance, He looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:7).

In 2024, let us do as Jesus does. Let's stop looking at the shiny exteriors of ourselves and others. Let's learn how to be vulnerable to 'carpool' well so that we can shine up what's on the inside of each other's vehicles. And let us stop dwelling on what is behind in the rearview mirror so we can see all that God has for us in the windshield of life.



"We care for people and fix cars!"