

# Free Country Girls

Stories from Western Meadows



Shining Like Stars  
in the Universe *Philippians 2:15*

Summer, 2005

South Texas



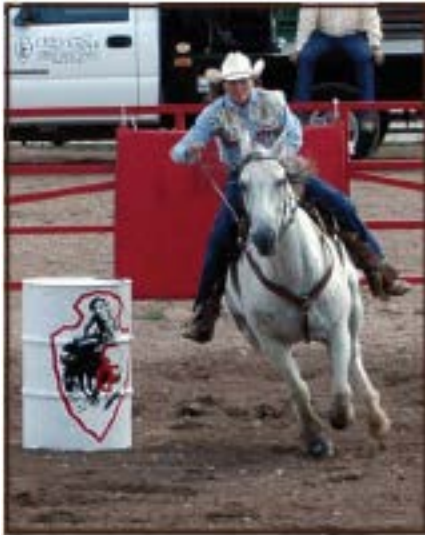
*Do everything without complaining or arguing,  
So that you may become blameless and pure,  
children of God without fault  
in a crooked and depraved generation,*





*in which you Shine like Stars in the universe  
as you hold out the word of life—in order that  
I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not  
run or labor for nothing.  
Philippians 2:14-17 (NIV)*







Do everything without complaining or arguing...

It is important to God that we be blameless and pure in speech and in life. He wants us to be without fault. But why does God want each of us to change? Will He stop loving us if we aren't faultless?—NO. We can never do anything for God to stop loving us. Even if we choose to reject him — He will still love us. Well, does He love those who totally obey more than others? NO! He loves each of us totally and unconditionally. Nothing we do affects the amount of love God has for us. Isn't that incredible. God loves us. It is a done deal, finished, can't be changed. WE ARE LOVED BY GOD FOREVER!!!!

So why change? Because God wants us to be the best we can be—blameless and pure, without fault. He wants each of us to SHINE LIKE STARS. He wants to bless us with an incredible inner change. It's not a gold buckle that he wants to strap on each of our belts—He wants something greater for each of us. He wants us to shine from the inside out like stars in the universe!

When I started barrel racing over 25 years ago, it was easy, very easy, for me to develop a bad habit. The habit was complaining and arguing. Complaining about the ground being wrong, the barrel pattern not marked the way I wanted, the secretary, the flagger, my rig, my horse, my husband, or my kids became a pattern.

And arguing, I could argue about anything with anyone. Just cross me and you would get an argument! Betty barrel racer and I went head to head more than once because I didn't agree with her. I called myself a Christian; but said whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. I never thought about the feelings of others or what God's desire was for me and my mouth.

God wanted me to stop arguing and complaining. In love, God disciplined me. I've often thought that I am like one of those strong willed barrel horses, that learn through tough times in the round pen. You know, the ones that want to do it their way. Even though I may have needed a brain chain and my head tied around for a day or two that isn't how God schooled on me. God's discipline is always strong but gentle.

Here's how the discipline came down, "You are sinning. I did not give you a mouth to tear down everything I have created. I gave you speech to glorify me. I want you to encourage others, not tear them down! Stop and look at the destruction you are causing because of your run away mouth. Repent now, and seek to restore and build up rather than tearing down."

I repented then, and many, many more times over the years. Bad habits are hard to break and I still sometimes run off at the mouth. A very important part of God's work in our lives, is that he promises to never quit. He is always willing to forgive and work the mess we created out for good. No matter how many times we mess up. Thank God He keeps tuning on us throughout our lives.

And Betty, (and everyone else) I'm sorry for all the ways I hurt you with the things I said. Forgive me. I pray that God will restore all the damage I did .

So that you may become blameless and pure, children of God.



In which  
You  
Shine  
like Stars  
in the  
Universe





## As you hold out the word of life

Life can be hard, very hard. Many things are hard, but for many of us, the criticisms and comments coming from other people are often “more than we seem to be able to bear.” It can be so very hard to have patience and perseverance when faced with criticism. Sometimes we retaliate, which makes situations worse. Sometimes we let the criticism cause us to become discouraged, depressed, and defeated. As God’s children, He wants us to live our lives walking with love, joy, peace, confidence and strength. Not handling criticism in a right way strips these from us.

The book of Nehemiah, in the Old Testament, tells a very interesting story. God calls Nehemiah to travel from Babylon over 400 miles to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city. In those times, walls were built around cities for protection from the enemies. When Nehemiah is in the middle of the construction process, he comes up against much criticism. His opponents threatened him and the people with their lives. Much can be learned from the example of this man’s leadership in the face of fierce opposition. A few people didn’t appreciate the good work, the work of God, that Nehemiah was trying to do. Nehemiah never stopped with the work God had given him to do and he never sinned in the way he dealt with his critics. Nehemiah didn’t let his critics discourage or defeat him. Nehemiah kept the people moving forward.

So here are a few things we might apply to our lives. Nehemiah is a short book and is not hard to read—the scripture references are given if you want to look further into his story.

1. Nehemiah chose to be a God pleaser not a people pleaser. Like Nehemiah, there are always going to be people opposed to what we are doing. We are going to be criticized. We just can’t make everybody happy. Neh. 4:1-3, Galatians 1:10
2. God’s favor will help us to deal with our critics and to help us succeed. Neh. 2:20 God allows problems and critics in our lives. He wants us to have courage and self control. Galatians 5:22, 2 Timothy 1:7
3. When faced with criticism—pray first! Refuse to retaliate, no matter what. Nehemiah did. Charles Swindoll says this about prayer and criticism, “Never am I used of God more significantly than when I am praying for my critics.” Neh. 4:4-5
4. Evaluate the criticism. Criticism can be constructive or it can be destructive and demoralizing. We must always weigh the comments and then totally ignore, throw away those that are destructive.
5. Don’t give up. Don’t let the criticism of a few discourage you! God wants his servants to be persevering, not quitters! Neh 4:6



6. Even though you have prayed and not retaliated, the criticism may intensify. Neh. 4:7

7. Pray more and make plans to protect yourselves and God's work. Keep your eyes on God. Get focused on how to finish the job in spite of the opposition. Neh. 4:9

8. Nehemiah went to Jerusalem to build a wall, to do good for God's people, but was confronted with opposition, criticism and conspiracy. Even when we are trying to do good, we may still be put down.

9. Don't let the critical spirit of others rub off on you. Neh. 4:12

10. Refuse to be discouraged! God is bigger than any problem any critic can throw at you. Get your eyes on God and off of the trouble makers. Neh 4:14

11. Don't quit the work God has called you to do! Encourage others to be the best they can be. Neh. 4:15-23

In order  
that I may boast  
on the day of Christ  
that I did not run or labor  
for nothing.



## Keep Shining!

Nehemiah is a shining example of the verses in Philippians 2:14-15. “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life—in order that I may boast on the day of Christ that I did not run or labor for nothing.”

Nehemiah did the job that God gave him to do very well. The keys to his success were his devotion to God and to prayer. His commitment to obeying God gave him strength, wisdom, patience, and perseverance. Talking and listening to God in prayer helped Nehemiah keep the main thing (GOD) the main thing. (pleasing God)

Nehemiah didn't retaliate in spite of all the harsh criticisms he faced. He continued to focus on the job at hand, not the critics or criticism. He didn't get discouraged and quit. He finished the job God had given him to do. And what makes him shine even brighter is the fact that he helped other people. He encouraged thousands of people to build walls around their city to protect them and their families from danger. Nehemiah made life better for many generations of people because he did what God called him to do and he did it in a way that was pleasing to His heavenly Father.

Nehemiah didn't let the critics turn his enthusiasm and commitment to doing God's work to discouragement, defeat, and depression. How can we be more like Nehemiah and not let criticism cause us to become discouraged? When we let criticism lead to discouragement the shine in our lives becomes dull.

Charles Swindoll says this about discouragement. “Discouragement is indeed an internal disease. It starts with the germs of self doubt. Through fear and negative exaggerations, the germs begin to grow and multiply. Soon we lose our way, we weaken and we run and hide. As it continues we become virtually useless and downright defeated. We become easy prey for the enemy of our souls to take charge and nullify our efforts. It can happen almost overnight.”

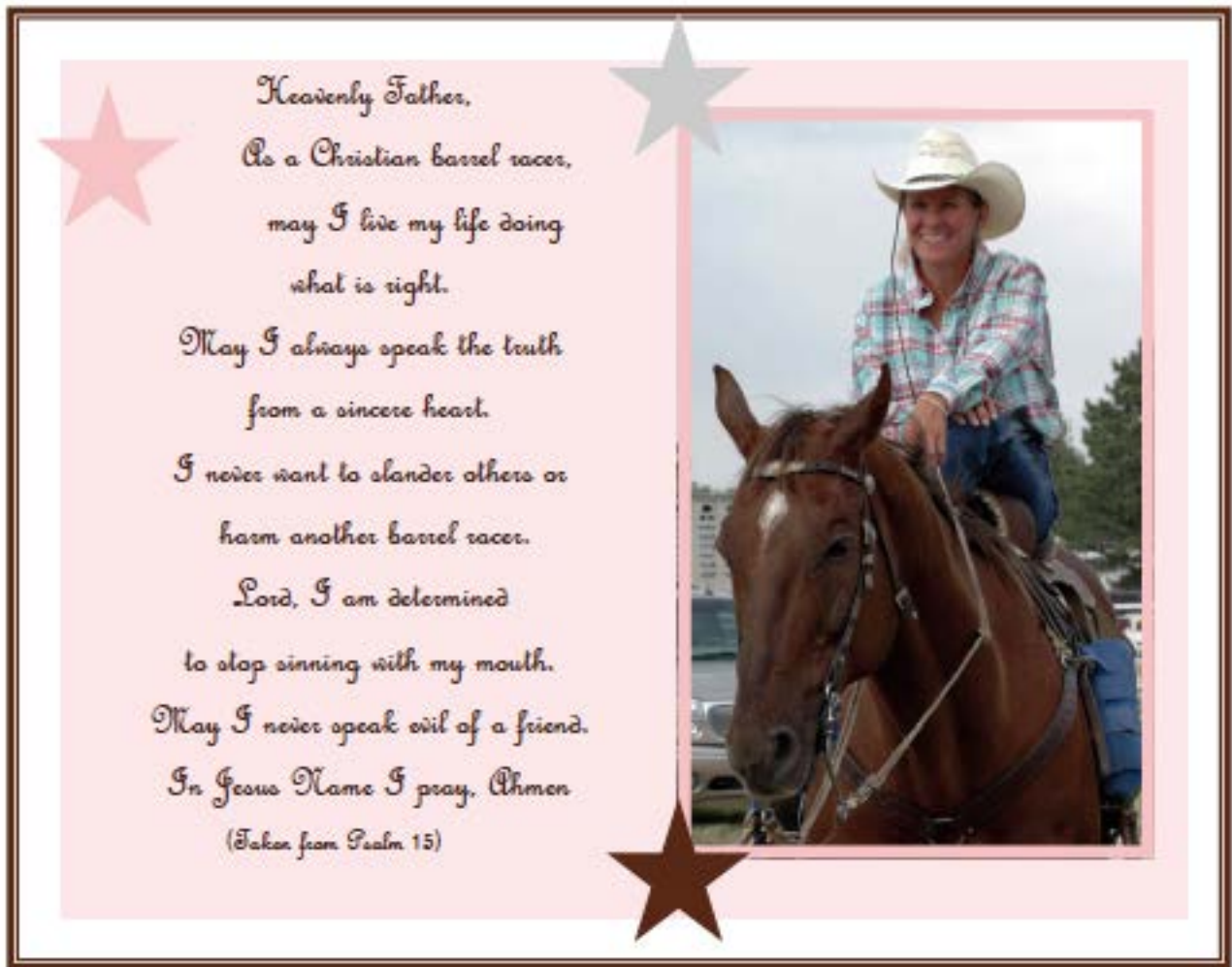
- We don't have to let criticism control our lives. We don't have to become discouraged when we are criticized. We don't have to become angry when we are criticized. We can become better when criticized!
- Don't think it a strange thing when you are criticized. Learn to expect it and then how to deal with it. We can't please everyone. It seems that around every corner of life we can find people who will tell us how to do it, how they could do it better, or how we are making a mess of everything. All of this may be in an attempt to control us. On the other hand, none of us have arrived—we all make mistakes and need to change in some areas of our life. We have to become secure in who we are in Christ and then we will be able to calmly separate the good criticism from the destructive.
- Pray about everything; in this case pray for your critics and pray about the criticism. God will show you the truth or partial truth in every criticism. God doesn't want bad criticism paralyzing us; he will give us the strength to endure; patience to love our critics, and healing for the wounds caused by hurt-

ful criticisms. The good criticisms are opportunities for us to learn and to grow—to shine even more.

- We lose the battle in the beginning when we don't properly evaluate the criticism. We must let the good criticism make us stronger, more confident, with more insight as to how to finish the job we have set out to accomplish. Negative, hurtful, destructive criticism must be ignored.
- Don't ever let criticism cause condemnation. Don't let criticism cause doubt in what God has said in the Bible about you. Don't get into the self talk of how stupid you are, you can't do anything right. If it is healthy criticism, focus on the main point of the criticism—don't generalize that it means you have never done anything right. It is easy to let defeat in the arena act like negative criticism in our head—don't react to defeat this way. Let defeat make you wiser and better at what you do!
- Shine don't whine. Don't complain about your critics to others. Don't argue with your critics. Whining only makes us more miserable and encourages discouragement. Arguing wastes time.
- Ignore the wrong criticisms. God will show you what needs to be changed. Change that, ignore the rest. Cutting comments can cut into our heart and grow. Soon they become bigger and uglier and bigger and uglier. We blow it out of proportion. We get mad, get even, get depressed, and get discouraged. At the beginning, LET BAD CRITICISM GO!
- Pray, pray, and pray some more. Let God instruct you. Believe what God says about you. Jesus doesn't condemn us, He really, really believes that each of us are precious and He really, really wants to help each of us!
- Get your eyes on God and the main thing. When we let the criticism drive us to depression and discouragement—we are too focused on ourselves. Analyze your self talk! Where have you gone wrong in evaluating the criticism? If it was good criticism where did you let it turn into something bad? If it was hurtful criticism, go again to God and ask for Him to help you forget the pain and for him to comfort and heal you. Run to God and ask Him to restore your mind and emotions.

We are often on the wrong path in life and need to change directions—but just as true is the fact that we are very often on the very path God wants us to be and some just can't stand it. We must know we are where God wants us to be and then when the critics come we must keep our eyes on Jesus, the perfecter of our faith. If we will just learn how to live above and beyond critical spirits we can finish the work that God has given us to do. We will hear the Lord say, "Well done, thy good and faithful servant."





Our purpose for Jesus Loves Cowgirls is to encourage barrel racers and to remind them that they are unconditionally loved by Jesus Christ.

All pictures were taken during the first go around at Cheyenne 2005.

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We are an outreach ministry of  
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