



The Gravity of 30

By Amie Rose

I am standing on a small platform a few stories above the ground in an old converted warehouse. Below me is a large white net. Before me is a man in a green spandex suit swinging upside down by his knees from a small bar suspended in midair. My feet are shoulder-width apart—sparkly polished toes dangling over the edge. I am leaning out into the air and grabbing onto a white bar, while my instructor keeps me steady. In a moment, the man in the green suit will yell “Hep!” and I am supposed to jump—let my feet go free from the platform, while holding onto the bar, swing out into the air, wrap my legs around the bar, then let my hands swing free above my head and wait for the man in the green suit to catch me. There isn’t much time left, but it’s amazing how slow only a few seconds can feel when fear takes over. And in that brief moment, I ask myself again, “Why am I here?”

Today is my 30th birthday.

It all started (the idea of this whole foray into flying trapeze) when I turned 29. I finally realized that my 20s were coming to a close. The past decade had seemed like such carefree and forgiving years. I didn’t have to have all the answers, and I could still be on that great quest of discovery. It was OK that I didn’t have a “real” job. I didn’t have to prove myself. I still had time to grow up. Everything was still possible and somewhere out there, waiting in the distance like a happy dream.

But then the world started ordering itself around my choices. Forks in the road left family and friends far away. And along came 30, pointing its menacing finger. It seemed to be saying that I had better get my act together and accomplish something that at least looked good on paper. When I turned to look at my friends and the people I knew who were my age, I saw their long lists of accomplishments. They had published books (plural). They had pets with larger expense accounts than I had and Glamour Shots families and nice cars and houses with a pool in the back yard. They seemed to have things pretty well figured out.

When I turned to the Internet, I didn’t find much comfort either. I read online advice columns with lists of 30 things you should do before you turn 30. I read about how you can still look fabulous after 30—just look at the celebrities. And about how to prove you’re still as wild and wonderful as ever. It was all just a

and to the world.

So here I am in my black yoga pants and stretchy purple T, which I bought specifically with hanging upside down from a swinging bar in mind. I’ve made it to my eighth try. I hold on. I let go. I realize how much energy it takes to hold on, and I realize how much faith it takes to let go. It’s not as easy as my childhood circus fantasy led me to believe. I realize that the white net is not as soft as it looks. But it is strong. And I find out the hard way that gravity is not the friendliest of forces. I realize that I have to listen to my instructor. I have to pay attention. I have to focus. I realize how good it feels to let go in faith and to be caught by strong arms. And finally, on my eighth try, I complete a semi-perfect catch.

I realized something else after I had gone home that night. I had been trying so hard to prove myself, but I didn’t have to. I had been so focused on myself that lists of “30 Ways to a Fabulous You on Your 30th” had distracted me from more important matters. I started rewriting my lists: 30 ways to serve others, 30 ways to love my neighbor, 30 ways to give thanks, 30 ways to let go, 30 ways to hold on.

I don’t have to prove myself to God. I don’t have to hold myself up to the celebrity mirror to measure my self-worth. I don’t have to worry about racking up accomplishments. Jesus was just getting started in His ministry when He was 30. When Jesus turned 30, He was homeless. He wasn’t married and didn’t have any kids. My time on earth may seem like an eternity, especially on bad days, but it’s short. I have been given 30 years. I don’t know if I will be given 30 more. But I do know that I don’t have to worry about who I will become as long as I am always becoming who I am in Christ.

The only other person in my trapeze “class” was a young girl about 9 years old. She was celebrating her birthday, too. As I watched her climb that wobbly green ladder up to the tiny platform, I saw a glimpse of myself when I was her age. Her whole body was full of energy—a mix of fear and determination. Her family looked on nervously below, while her dad dashed around with a camcorder. After a few tries and a few less-than-perfect attempts, she began to cry. She wanted so much to prove that she could do it. She wanted to make her family proud. But in the end she went home without ever completing a catch.

Later that night, as I blew out my birthday candles, I was distracted and forgot to make any birthday wishes. But I make one now. It is a wish for that little girl. It is a prayer for myself. That she would know God’s love and not have to live a life of proving her self-worth to others. That her whole being would find its passion and purpose in service. And that whether she holds on or lets go, she would always know that the same strong grace is there to catch her.

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