

The SJD Women's Retreat this past February provided me encouragement, insight, and most importantly, renewal. Before I explain how the retreat provided me such restoration, let me first give you a picture of myself and how I came to be signed up as a "woman" (thinking, "Is that what I am now?") for the retreat. I graduated from the University of Texas last May and moved to Houston to teach English at Northbrook High School in Spring Branch ISD. While the district is fabulous, the faculty at Northbrook serves a tough crowd: low-income families, kids with little motivation to graduate and with limited English language skills, and student attitudes that left me in tears many days. You may already be aware, but the first year of teaching is always the hardest. In fact, twenty percent of all new teachers leave the profession within three years. Kids have no idea how crushing an eye-roll or a snide remark (or curse word, some days) can be to a 22-year-old teacher going on 4 hours of sleep because she was grading stacks of terribly written essays and trying to create a more exciting lesson for the next day. Curse words, failing grades, low attendance, loneliness, almost no quality time with the Lord, exhaustion, and countless doubts: they can break a girl, and quickly. Not only was I carrying these burdens, but when two of my students called me a horrendous name to my face, I felt my spirit crack. It was with this brokenness that I headed into the Women's Retreat.

Debi Tengler, our retreat speaker, was one of the avenues through which the Lord spoke profound truth into my life. On Saturday night after Debi's evening session, we transitioned into a time of prayer and meditation. Debi began walking around the room, pulling women from their seats, asking them questions, speaking boldly, and prophesying. The room was saturated in Jesus' presence. Not only was I crying, but I had a sense that Debi was circling my chair; I knew the Lord had something to say to me through this feisty woman. Debi stopped by my seat, pulled me from it, and after taking my hands, she said:

"Are you in the ministry?"

I responded, "I like to think of teaching as a ministry."

"What do you teach?"

"High School English."

"Oh honey, you do need prayer." After some laughter, she continued: "God wants you to know that he has heard you struggling, and He says, 'Do not grow weary, my child.' He knows that condemning words have been spoken against you, and He wants you to know that those were not of Him." This was, of course, following the week that students' words had cracked my spirit in half. My knees buckled.

Through Debi's words, the community of women that rallied to support me, and the prayers I received from our wonderful prayer ministers that Saturday afternoon, I felt complete restoration. I was invited to live the greatest love story that's ever been told, to draw near, to lay myself down and enter the Holy of Holies. I accepted, and received the strength to finish my first year well. AMEN!