



LET ME  
**WALK**  
*with* **YOU**

LETTERS OF FAITH  
AND STRENGTH

**GI SELA YOHANNAN**

*Let Me Walk with You*

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# DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my dear sister Jeena, who has led the Women's Fellowship ministry since it first started in 2005.

It is through her commitment to the Lord, love for the sisters and hard work that this program has succeeded and become a great blessing to tens of thousands of women across South Asia.

We have traveled together to many places, and I have very much enjoyed her friendship and our times of sharing, dreaming and planning for the future of our Women's Fellowship.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Let Me Walk with You* is a continuation of the letters of hope and encouragement that were first published in my *Dear Sister* book. This new book represents the next eight years of my journey with the Lord and the faith and strength I found in His Word. I wrote these letters to thousands of women who serve the Lord. We have now published them so they can be a blessing to many more of God's people.

I sincerely thank Heidi Chupp, Kim Smith, Tricia Bennett . . . and all the others who helped produce this book. And I am grateful to my dear husband, K.P. Yohannan, for his support and advice.

## INTRODUCTION

The title of this new book, *Let Me Walk with You*, expresses the desire of my heart to come alongside my sisters who serve the Lord and to speak words that will fill their hearts with faith and strength. With each letter, I want to remind them that they are not walking alone and that the Lord is well able to strengthen them and fulfill all He has purposed to do through their lives.

The letters I wrote over the past eight years include specific lessons from God's Word. I have collected them into this book to make it possible for anyone to study them, whether on their own or with others in a Bible study group.

I have kept the letters in their original form, including dates, family references, travel reports and prayer requests, to preserve the time frame and personal touch. Because our ministry is changing and growing fast, the events and statistics mentioned in this book correspond only to the dates of the letters in which they appear.

My prayer is that this book will be a source of faith and strength to my sisters and many other believers who seek to serve the Lord and honor Him with their lives.

*Gisela Yohannan*

# 1

## WE HAVE A GOD OF NEW BEGINNINGS



FEBRUARY 2006

*Dear Sister,*

**G**od has given us a new year and with it, this promise: “*I will never desert you, nor will I ever forsake you*” (Hebrews 13:5). That means we don’t have to be afraid. No matter what we may encounter, Jesus will be right there with us and His hand will hold ours.

I would like to ask you a personal question: How did this past year end for you? Could you rejoice over the progress you made in your spiritual life, the victories you won, the blessings you received and the prayers God answered? Or do you look back over the bygone year with disappointment, a heavy heart, deep hurt, tears or regrets?

My dear sister, if you were one who could not rejoice, I want to encourage you to say each morning when you get up: **“This day and this year will be different, because my God is a God of grace, hope and new beginnings!”** That’s what the Bible teaches us from the first to the last book,

and that's what we must believe in our hearts, confess with our mouths and act upon daily.

If you want 2006 to become different from last year, you need to leave three things behind:

### **1. Your failures**

The devil wants to keep you a prisoner of your past, and that's why he fills your mind with lies like these: "Even if God forgave you, you can never recover from your failures. You missed your chance; God can no longer use you or fulfill the plan He once had for your life." Nothing could be further from the truth of God's Word! The Bible clearly says:

*If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness (1 John 1:9).*

*For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more (Jeremiah 31:34).*

*There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Romans 8:1).*

If you truly humbled yourself before God and repented of your sin, then God immediately and freely forgave you because of Jesus. In His sight you are completely cleansed and free of condemnation, just as if you had never failed at all.

Your responsibility is to receive His full pardon, rejoice in it, live from now on in obedience to God's Word and never look back. If the devil, people or your own heart still condemns you, you must reject the condemnation and choose to believe what God's Word says about your cleansing. Even if you face consequences as the result of your failures, don't get discouraged, but commit yourself to the Lord and trust

Him to see you through. I guarantee you He will. Above all, honor Jesus' sacrifice on the cross by leaving your failures and all condemnation behind and walking in the freedom He purchased for you.

## **2. Your hurts**

Perhaps this last year or several years ago, someone whom you loved and trusted hurt you deeply. You hoped the wounds the person inflicted on your heart would heal with time, but they haven't.

Now you have stepped into the new year, still chained to the hurts of your past. My dear sister, unless you forgive that person completely and release him of the wrong done to you, your wounds will never heal.

Maybe you forgave in the past, but you are still hurting. I urge you to search your heart. If you find any bitterness or resentment toward that person or you blame him for what became of you, or you wish he would feel the same hurt as you experienced or you desire to see him punished, then your forgiveness is incomplete and you are still in chains.

The only way for you to find freedom and healing is to choose to let go of *all* those things and forgive "*just as God in Christ also has forgiven you*" (Ephesians 4:32). Christ did not hold back anything, not even a grudge. He even prayed for God's mercy on those who drove the nails in His hands. My dear sister, it's not worth going through another day or year with wounds that God is able to heal if you forgive completely. Did you know that bitterness and unforgiveness will affect your physical health and also hinder God from blessing you?

Let this year of 2006 become for you the year of freedom from hurt!

### **3. Your low expectations**

God wants to establish His kingdom in your village, city, state and nation. He wants to do it through His people—and that includes you. The perception and expectation you have of yourself as a child of God determine the extent to which you will permit God to use your life. If you are convinced that you can't do anything and that others are more talented, spiritual minded and courageous to share the Gospel and disciple others, you leave no room for God to use you.

Let me tell you what God's Word says about you as a believer:

*It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me (Galatians 2:20).*

*You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses (Acts 1:8).*

*For God has not given us a spirit of timidity [fear], but of power and love and discipline (2 Timothy 1:7).*

*But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us (Romans 8:37).*

*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).*

*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and this is the victory that has overcome the world—our faith (1 John 5:4).*

My dear sister, you need to leave your low expectations behind and agree with and believe what God says you can do through Christ. It will cause you to volunteer like Isaiah: "Here

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*am I. Send me!”* (Isaiah 6:8). And it will enable God to use your life in ways you never imagined.



**Let us pray for one another,** that during this new year we will walk with Jesus in such a way that we will bring honor to His name.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## WALKING WORTHY OF HIS NAME



APRIL 2006

*Dear Sister,*

I think about you often, and I pray that you will become steadfast in your commitment to the Lord and represent Christ well in this world. Let me share with you a few thoughts on this subject.

When the Lord Jesus went back to heaven, He left His disciples behind to give leadership to the Church that was born on Pentecost. The Church was to represent Jesus here on earth and to proclaim the Gospel to the rest of the world.

Something wonderful happened, and we read about it in the book of Acts: “. . . *and the disciples were first called Christians in Antioch*” (Acts 11:26).

The remarkable thing is that the believers did not choose the name “Christians” for themselves; it was given to them by the people of their society. What caused the people to select

this name? The reason was this: They remembered how Christ acted and talked while He was on earth, and these believers behaved exactly like Him.

That means these believers loved like Jesus, showed compassion like Jesus, walked in humility like Jesus, spoke the truth like Jesus, prayed in faith like Jesus, cared for others like Jesus, healed the sick and cast out demons like Jesus, obeyed God's Word like Jesus, preached with authority like Jesus and were faithful until death like Jesus.

**What name does the world give us?** If the people around us closely observed our private lives—the way we talked and dealt with our parents, husband, children, neighbors, co-workers, pastor, leaders, fellow believers and others we come in contact with—what name would they give us to identify us?

Would they call us pretender, gossip, self-seeker, lover of money, unsubmitted, prideful or covetous, or would we truly qualify to be called Christians?

**We often excuse our un-Christlike attitude and behavior** by pointing out that no one is perfect and that we are no different than anyone else in church. It may be true that other believers are as sorry Christians as we are, but that should never be our justification or satisfy us to stay as we are. We must desire with all our heart to become someone worthy to be called a Christian.

There are specific things we must do or change in our lives to become more like Jesus:

**1. Jesus must become our measuring rod.** Romans 8:29 tells us that *“He [God] also predestined [us] to become conformed to the image of His Son.”*

Therefore, the cry of our heart must be, “Lord Jesus, I want to become like You, so I can bring honor to Your name.” This means we will no longer use our culture, our family background, our past failures and other people’s poor examples as excuses to stay as we are. But we will look at Jesus alone to tell us what God destined for us to become, through His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit.

**2. We must decide to obey the Word of God regardless of what others practice.** If other believers gossip, we will not join them. If they do not submit to authority or exhibit a critical spirit, we will not have any part in it. Why? Because we choose to do the will of God as His Word instructs us.

**3. We need to surround ourselves with people who live what we desire to become.** There is an old proverb that says, “Tell me who your friends are and I will tell you who you are.”

We may think it doesn’t really matter who our close friends are or who we spend time with, as long as we follow our own convictions. My dear sister, this may well be one of the most successful deceptions the Enemy uses to keep us from becoming like Jesus. We may not believe or admit it, but the negative behavior, critical spirit and rebellious attitude of those we associate with will surely rub off on us. It will not happen overnight, but over time and without us realizing it, our heart is being poisoned little by little.

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Perhaps we think we are strong enough and this will never happen to us. We are wrong. The Apostle Paul wrote, “*Do not be deceived: ‘Bad company corrupts good morals’*” (1 Corinthians 15:33).

My dear sister, if we want to become like Jesus, then we must surround ourselves with people who live what we desire to become. We may have to make a deliberate choice to let go of some of our old friends and choose to spend time with sisters who will influence us toward godliness, walking in the light and in obedience to God’s Word. We need to choose those people as our friends who have the same desire as we do to become like Jesus, and encourage and correct each other as we pursue this goal.

Yes, we will hurt some feelings, including our own, when we dissolve some friendships that pull us the wrong direction. We need to let them know that their influence is causing us to become as negative and critical as they are and, therefore, we can no longer maintain close friendship with them.

**4. We must draw near to God.** God put a wonderful promise and invitation in His Word for us: “*Draw near to God and He will draw near to you*” (James 4:8).

If we desire to become like Jesus, we must be faithful to spend time with Him in prayer and in reading His Word. We will find that His presence and character will transform our thoughts, hearts and actions in such a way that we become authentic Christians.



**Let us pray together** for the new television channel we will launch in a few months:

- Pray for the team that is working to get everything ready for the launch date.
- Pray for the ongoing production of the various programs.
- Pray that the Lord will be honored and millions of people will be blessed through this channel.

My dear sister, may God's love and grace strengthen you to follow Jesus.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## WATCH OVER YOUR HEART



JUNE 2006

*Dear Sister,*

This morning I had some workers from a nursery come to our house to plant two trees in our backyard. One is an oak tree, and the other one, a purple ash. Before the gardeners left, they told me how much and how often I needed to water the trees. In addition, the nursery gave me a whole page of tree maintenance instructions I am supposed to implement over the next few years.

I am determined to carefully follow all those directions, and I'll tell you the reason why. You see, last year we bought and planted three trees, but only one survived. The two trees planted today are replacements for the ones that died. I really don't want the same thing to happen again, because it's too expensive and time-consuming and my backyard keeps lacking shade.

You know, when we dug up the dead trees to make space for the new ones, I thought about how the Lord has to do the very same thing in our lives.

**God sows the seeds of His Word into our hearts, yet so often the plants that come up don't survive.** Consequently, He has to go back and replant again and again, until finally the plants take root, grow tall and bear fruit.

Just look at your life: For how many years now has God been trying to grow the plants of faith, honesty, compassion, holiness and obedience in your heart? You read daily about them in your Bible, and you have heard a hundred sermons on the subjects. Yet these plants never seem to develop in your life, though you have been a Christian for more than 5, 10 or 20 years. Why is that?

**In the parable of the sower, Jesus explains that the problem lies in the condition of our hearts.** We so often blame God, our pastor, fellow believers, our husband, parents, team leader, upbringing or difficult circumstances for our lack of spiritual development. We even feel sorry for ourselves and wish we could go to one of those big crusades where an anointed preacher lays hands on us and prays, so we can become instantly spiritual.

My dear sister, even if you had such an opportunity, no permanent change would happen in you, because your real problem is the condition of your heart. Please read carefully what Jesus says in Matthew 13:3–8 and 18–23, and identify which one of these soils is your problem.

**Roadside:** The seed never makes it into the ground at all. It's lying on top of, or right beside, the hard pavement and has no chance to even sprout. It's easily and immediately snatched away by the birds.

This is the picture of a heart that is totally unprepared to receive anything. The person either doesn't understand the

## Watch Over Your Heart

Word he heard or, in the case of a believer, something is blocking the Holy Spirit from penetrating his heart. Two things that will cause this are unconfessed sin and an unteachable spirit (which is the result of pride, unbrokenness and an unsundered self-will).

**Rocky ground:** The seed falls into the soil and sprouts. However, the layer of soil is very shallow and underneath is hard rock. The root of the little plant is unable to penetrate the rock and get to the water source. As soon as the sun comes up, it withers away and dies.

This is the picture of a heart that wants spiritual blessings and benefits, but has no intentions of carrying the cross. There are plenty of believers with such a shallow commitment. They gladly receive forgiveness of sin, deliverance from bondage, healing, peace, joy, material benefits and the promise of a heavenly home. They also want the church to pray and care for them when they are in need. However, when they must choose to accept inconvenience, suffering and sacrifice for the sake of Christ, they are unwilling to make the step from being a believer to becoming a disciple of Christ. A disciple is one who follows Christ wherever He goes, even if it means Calvary.

**Thorny ground:** This ground has no hardness or rocks. It's made up of good soil, soft and deep enough for a plant to put down roots and grow. However, the ground is not weeded. It has thorn bushes that overgrow and choke the life out of the little plants that came up from the seeds that were sown.

This is the picture of a heart whose ground has all the right conditions to receive the seed of God's Word and develop healthy plants that yield fruit. However, the person has permitted other seeds to take root in his heart as well. Jesus identified

them as the worry of the world and the deceitfulness of riches. Is it possible for these plants to peacefully coexist beside the Word of God? No—because their nature is that of a thorn bush: to spread and take over the entire ground and choke all other plants to death. Worry kills our faith, and without faith we cannot please God, so nothing in our Christian life works. The lure of riches takes our affection away from the things of God and causes us to desire the things of this world. Our love will grow cold, and our usefulness to God will die away.

But is there a way to turn bad soil into good soil and bring much fruit? Yes, there is!

**If your heart is hard like the pavement of the road and you are unteachable**, the only thing that will help you is to repent of sin, stop justifying yourself and humble yourself before God. Confess your pride and give the Holy Spirit permission to break you in all those areas where you are unyielding. Lay down your self life, and deliberately choose His will over your own. If you do this, He will make the soil of your heart fruitful and 2 Chronicles 7:14 will become your personal testimony:

*[If] My people who are called by My name humble themselves and pray, and seek My face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, will forgive their sin, and will heal their land.*

**If your heart has only a thin layer of good soil** and your commitment has no depth because of the rock underneath, then go to the Word of God and learn what it says. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you what it cost Jesus to redeem you and what the lordship of Christ is. If you submit to God's Word, you will find that it is "*like a hammer which shatters a rock*," the hard rock of your heart (Jeremiah 23:29).

## Watch Over Your Heart

**If your heart is invaded by thorns**, start weeding and pulling them *all* up by the roots. Don't entertain thoughts or listen to people whose words turn into thorn bushes. "*Watch over your heart with all diligence*" (Proverbs 4:23) and immediately pull up even the smallest thorns.

My dear sister, may God's grace be with you always.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## WHEN WE HAVE NO ANSWERS



AUGUST 2006

*Dear Sister,*

**H**ow are you doing? I am writing this letter to you on my way to Hyderabad in India. Sister Jeena and I are traveling together to conduct four training seminars for the state Women's Fellowship teams from every state of India and from Nepal. So far we have finished two seminars. The state Women's Fellowship teams are responsible to develop the Women's Fellowship program and give leadership to all the local and district Women's Fellowships in their states.

We are very encouraged to hear all the good reports of what God is doing through our sisters in the local Women's Fellowships in different parts of India. For example, in the state of Madhya Pradesh, the Women's Fellowship sisters from a local Believers Church went for mission outreach to a remote village where everyone is illiterate. God gave them grace to win eight families to the Lord.

This morning I read a scripture from the book of Zechariah that encouraged me. So I thought I would share with you what I learned.

**There are things and circumstances in our lives for which we have no answers.** They may be very personal, such as health issues and uncertainties about our future, or they may have to do with our family, children, relatives, co-workers and the ministry.

This morning I was thinking about some of those things in my life for which I have no answers. You know, each time I dwell on these issues, my mind tries to find solutions but can't. What happens next is this: My mind starts imagining the worst possible outcome.

I wonder if your mind does the same to you.

**As a result, we get discouraged, anxious, fearful and our heart becomes heavy.** This often happens to us not at first, but after we prayed and trusted God to intervene. However, when weeks and months go by and we haven't seen any positive changes, our mind tells us that there is no solution.

In addition, if we pray for someone specific, we are confronted with the fact that God can only work in people's lives and circumstances if they permit Him to. And if they refuse, then all our faith on their behalf will do no good. At least that is what our mind concludes.

**Did you know that God asks us a specific question if we think there is no solution possible?** The Old Testament tells us the story how God's people were taken into

captivity as the result of their sin. They were far away from their homeland. For 70 years their land was desolate, their cities destroyed and Jerusalem (along with the temple) in ruins. Then God told them that He would bring the people back and restore everything as it was before. Even after many of them returned, it was impossible for them to imagine that such a restoration could happen. In response, God asked them this question:

*If it is too difficult in the sight of the remnant of this people in those days, will it also be too difficult in My sight? (Zechariah 8:6).*

What God wanted to tell them—and us—is this: “Just because you can’t think of any answers and solutions, don’t conclude that I can’t either. Remember I am God, and for Me, all things are possible.”

**We are supposed to focus and meditate on the greatness of our God** instead of the conclusions of our limited minds. Let’s start with these stories:

- God brought Noah and his family safely through the flood.
- He made a way for His people through the Red Sea by dividing it.
- He fed them with manna through 40 years of wilderness travel.
- The Lord kept Daniel safe in the lions’ den.
- He protected Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego in the midst of the fiery furnace.
- He provided food for the prophet Elijah through ravens.

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- He cleansed Naaman from leprosy.
- Jesus gave sight to blind Bartimaeus.
- He healed the paralyzed slave of a centurion.
- He silenced the wind and the waves with a word.
- He freed the daughter of a Canaanite woman from demons.
- He raised Lazarus from the dead.

Do you know what all these events have in common? They are problems for which we as human beings have no answers. Yet none of these things was too difficult for our God! He is almighty, and there is absolutely nothing He cannot do, including changing the laws of nature, if it fits His purpose.

**What will happen when we meditate on the greatness of our God?** Our faith and trust in Him will grow far beyond the limited solutions our mind can produce.

As a result, we will not give up believing that God knows a way to change the circumstances and the hearts of the people for whom we are praying. He has done it before, and He purposely recorded it in His Word so we may know that He is willing and able to do it again.

How privileged we are to serve a God whose power has no limits!



**Please join us in prayer** for our Women's Fellowship program:

- Pray for all the state Women's Fellowship teams as they start their ministry this month.
- Pray that Sister Jeena will find two capable sisters who can serve together with her on the national Women's Fellowship team.
- Pray that we will know the mind of the Lord for all the programs that need to be developed.

My dear sister, may the Lord strengthen you by His grace.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## POSSESSING WHAT IS OURS



OCTOBER 2006

*Dear Sister,*

**B**y the time you get this letter, I will be back in India for some teaching and for a special meeting with Sister Jeena and several other sisters from our Women's Fellowship. We will discuss and plan next year's Women's Fellowship curriculum. Please pray for God's guidance for this meeting.

This morning I read a few verses in the book of Joshua that have an important message for us.

**Israel stopped short of possessing the land.** God had delivered the people of Israel out of Egypt and brought them into the promised land. Under the leadership of Joshua, they had defeated all the kings and nations that lived there. However, only a few of the tribes of Israel went ahead and possessed the land God had given to them. The rest of them just lived within a small part of their new land and put off taking full possession of what God had already given them.

Why? Perhaps they were tired of waging war and wanted to take a break, relax and enjoy their lives. Maybe the piece of

land and the homes they now occupied were big enough for their present needs and it seemed troublesome and unnecessary to go after more. They might have thought, “Why should we be in such a hurry to occupy it all? Let the next generation finish the job in 10, 20 or 30 years.”

**They didn’t consider the consequences of not possessing their whole land;** otherwise, they would have seen the wisdom of doing it immediately. Right after the conquest of Canaan, Israel was in the best position to occupy the entire land because the majority of their enemies were dead or had fled. The few common people who still lived in some settlements would surely have run away or could have been easily wiped out as soon as the Israelites took over their areas. And strongholds still controlled by enemy resistance fighters would have stood no chance because they were cut off from any outside help.

However, if Israel failed to possess and occupy their entire land, the situation would look very different in 10 to 30 years: Their borders would not be secure, and any outside nation could invade their land. The enemies that fled before Israel would have time to regroup, elect new leaders, make alliances with other nations, raise up new armies and come against Israel to take back their land. The resistance fighters in the strongholds would establish outside connections and support and be a constant threat by waging guerilla warfare. The common people who were not driven out would multiply and become a snare to Israel with their idol worship and pagan lifestyles. Without being inhabited, the conquered cities would deteriorate and the fruitful land without being cultivated would turn into a wilderness.

**God urged them to finish possessing their land** because He could see the trouble they were going to have in the future. He spoke to Joshua, and Joshua in turn called the tribes of Israel and said to them, *“How long will you put off entering to take possession of the land which the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you?”* (Joshua 18:3).

They listened to Joshua and went ahead and started to possess their land.

**Israel’s story is given to us for our instruction** because what they encountered in the physical realm, we encounter in the spiritual one. Jesus brought us out of the kingdom of darkness into God’s kingdom of light. He has given us, His children, an incredible inheritance. Along with being conformed into the image of Christ, we have become heirs of everything God promises in His Word. Here are just a few examples of what is ours:

- Salvation
- Freedom from any bondage
- Victory over sin
- Authority over the devil
- Power to be a witness
- The ability to live a holy life through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit
- Faith that overcomes the world
- His strength to be able to do all things
- Divine love and forgiveness for one another and for our enemies
- Christ’s humility to be a servant of all
- The mind of Christ to become obedient until death

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- The authority to pray in Jesus' name and receive answers
- Spiritual gifts to serve
- The authority to heal the sick, cast out demons and speak on behalf of Christ

**We often stop short of possessing what is ours.** We are happy and satisfied with our salvation and the knowledge that we can go to heaven when we die. So we sit back and simply enjoy God's blessings instead of growing up in Christ and becoming fully equipped to serve Him as it is the will of God for our lives (see Ephesians 4:11–15).

We don't consider the consequences for our personal life and the kingdom of God. This is what happens if we neglect to possess what God purposed for us to have:

- We will be weak Christians who have little or no power to overcome anything.
- We will be immature in our behavior and unable to take responsibility.
- Our marriage and family life will not have the testimony it should have.
- Our children will not learn from us what it means to serve God fully and walk in faith, holiness and obedience to God.
- We will selfishly pursue blessings and have little concern or burden for the lost world.
- We will be a hindrance to others and a burden to the Body of Christ.
- We will delay God's plan and blessings for our lives.

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- We will deprive the church of our service.
- We will rob God of the glory He is supposed to receive from our lives.

**God urges us to finish possessing what He has freely given us through Jesus.** My dear sister, what is it that you fail to possess from your inheritance as a believer? Look at the first list of things God promises are ours. How much longer will you put off overcoming a sin, forgiving someone who hurt you or walking in faith?

**How, then, should we go about possessing our inheritance?** This is how the Apostle Paul did it, and he finished well: *“Not that I have already obtained it, or have already become perfect, but I press on in order that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus”* (Philippians 3:12). This scripture tells us that we must never be satisfied with less than what God intended for us to have. And we must desire and go after it until we lay hold of it.

May the Lord bless you and keep you in His grace.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

# JOY TO YOU!



DECEMBER 2006

*Dear Sister,*

**A**s I write this letter to you, it's almost Christmas. I don't know how you celebrate Christmas with your family, your Gospel team and your church—but I wish with all my heart that you experience the joy and peace the angels proclaimed 2,000 years ago when they announced the birth of the Savior to the shepherds.

This year our family will celebrate Christmas together in India. It will be very special, because our family has grown to six members!

Our daughter, Sarah, got married on the 11th of December. Her husband's name is Daniel Johnson. He is a godly young man who desires to use his training as a medical doctor to serve the Lord here in India. As a family, we were blessed that so many of our leaders and friends from across India and other countries came for the wedding. Daniel and Sarah very much valued their love and prayers. Now we two Daniels in our family, our son and our son-in-law.

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

It is our desire and prayer as a family that the Lord will use all six of us together to reach the unreached of Asia with the Gospel and to be a blessing to the Believers Church and the whole Body of Christ.

This Christmas season, I would like to share with you a little bit about the joy the angels announced to the shepherds with these words:

*Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord (Luke 2:10–11).*

**Did you know that God designed us to experience joy?** When God created the first people into His own image, He gave them the capacity to experience joy just like He does. He wanted them and their descendants to continuously live in the joy of His presence.

Before sin came into this world, Adam and Eve experienced a level of joy we cannot even imagine. Their joy was always present, perfect, pure and undisturbed.

In comparison, our joy is mostly short-lived and clouded by burdens, pain, disappointments and grief. How much it must have hurt our Heavenly Father to see His creation lose that wonderful joy He intended for them to have.

**God gave every person on earth a reason for great joy.** God in His great love didn't leave us without hope. He not only made a way for our salvation, but He also decided to restore our joy. When the angel first spoke to the shepherds, he said:

Joy to You!

*I bring you good news of a great joy which shall be for all the people (Luke 2:10).*

In the midst of darkness, sin and despair, God gave the people of the earth a great joy: He sent His Son to be our Savior. From that moment on, Jesus became the reason for our joy. Now, even in the midst of difficult circumstances, nothing and no one can rob us of our joy, because Jesus our Savior never leaves us nor forsakes us.

The saddest thing is that half of this world has not yet heard about God's love for them and that Jesus, their Savior, was born 2,000 years ago.

**Our relationship to Jesus creates joy.** The Apostle Peter talks about the joy that is ours because we love Jesus and we believe in Him:

*Though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory (1 Peter 1:8).*

As we abide in Jesus and His Word abides in us, the fruit of the Spirit will develop in our lives. This will cause our joy to grow much more:

*But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace . . . (Galatians 5:22).*

My dear sister, what I wish for you to learn from this little Christmas study is this: The more you love Jesus, believe in Him and abide in Him, the more your heart will be filled with joy! If it is joy you long for, this is the way you will get it.



**A personal prayer request:** Two days ago I got the news that my sister, Edith, is seriously ill. She is only 57 years old, and the doctors' prognosis is not good. If their diagnosis is correct, there is no cure and she has only two to five years to live. Edith is my only sister. I have no brothers, and my parents are already with the Lord. I will be cutting my time in India short and going to Germany to be with her while she spends time in the hospital for further tests. Would you please join our family and ask the Lord to touch her and heal her? He is well able to do a miracle.

Please share this prayer request in your Women's Fellowship meeting as well. Thank you so much.

My dear sister, may the Lord bless you this Christmas and may you experience the joy of His presence every day of the new year.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## DEALING WITH OTHERS' WEAKNESSES



FEBRUARY 2007

*Dear Sister,*

I count it a privilege to write to you, and I hope my letter will encourage you.

Last month I was in Germany with my sister, who has been ill. After extensive testing, the doctors confirmed that she indeed has an illness for which there is no cure and the life expectancy is but a few years. However, we as a family are praying that the Lord will heal her. We would be grateful if you would continue to intercede for her as well. From now on I will need to visit my sister more often.

These past few days, I have thought about how impatient and unloving we often are toward people when dealing with their weaknesses. The Bible teaches us a lot about this subject.

**Since the fall of Adam, none of us is perfect.** As human beings, we all have areas of strength in our lives—and areas of weaknesses. This is true of our physical body, our mind

and our character. For example, one person can easily run 10 miles, while another one is exhausted after only 300 yards. One is very gifted in music, while another one is unable to keep a simple tune. One has great patience, and another one has none at all.

When we become followers of Christ, we are brand-new creations—in our spirit. However, we are still living in the same imperfect body and have the same intelligence, natural gifting and character traits. For the rest of our lives, the Holy Spirit works in us to conform us into the image of Christ. That means, praise God, we are changing and gradually taking on Christ’s character, but we have a long way to go. In fact, the Bible declares that we won’t be perfect until we reach heaven.

**So how do we treat others when their weaknesses show up?** This is what usually happens: If others have the same weaknesses as we have, we treat them with some understanding and compassion. However, if they are weak in the areas where we ourselves are strong, we condemn them quickly. We show little mercy and understanding for their struggles because we don’t have the same problem. In fact, we lecture them and challenge them to exercise faith, follow our example and change at once. Should they fail, we are likely to write them off and not give them a second chance.

The Apostle Paul was the most bold, fearless, determined and hard-working missionary leader of the first century. Nothing, not even death threats, beatings, stonings, imprisonment, shipwrecks, wild animals, robbers, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, cold and much labor could stop him from proclaiming the Gospel and planting churches (see 2 Corinthians 11:23–28).

Naturally, Paul expected and demanded the same level of boldness, commitment and hard work from anyone who joined his missionary team. John Mark, a young man, traveled with Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but he only lasted through a few adventures before he left them to go back home. You see, his weaknesses were fear and lack of commitment to hard work, and he couldn't handle the intense situations and workload the team encountered.

Later on, when Paul was about to set out for his second missionary journey, he refused to give Mark a second chance to accompany him. He even called him a deserter and one who had not gone with them to the work (see Acts 15:38). You see, at this time in his life, Paul had no compassion for Mark's weaknesses in the areas where he himself was so strong.

**How does Jesus treat us when our weaknesses show up?** Jesus doesn't write us off. Instead, He has understanding and compassion on us and offers us His grace and help to overcome our weaknesses:

*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15–16).*

He even put it in writing that He will complete the work He started in us:

*For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus (Philippians 1:6).*

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

This promise gives us the assurance that the Lord will indeed succeed in changing us into His likeness, even in the areas of our present weaknesses. He did it for John Mark. Consider this: Near the end of Paul's life, he wrote in a letter to Timothy:

*Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service (2 Timothy 4:11).*

What tremendous work the Holy Spirit must have accomplished in Mark's life that the Apostle Paul wanted him for service while he was in prison awaiting his execution! No doubt it was a dangerous mission for Mark, but he was no longer fearful and unwilling to work. In fact, Mark had become so useful in service that God chose him to write one of the four Gospels.

What does the New Testament teach us concerning how we should deal with others' weaknesses? Exactly as Jesus deals with ours!

*Now we who are strong ought to bear the weaknesses of those without strength and not just please ourselves (Romans 15:1).*

*We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the faint-hearted, help the weak, be patient with all men (1 Thessalonians 5:14).*

Incidentally, these instructions were written by the Apostle Paul after the Holy Spirit helped him to recognize that he too had a weakness he needed to overcome: He lacked Christ's love, compassion and patience with people who were weak in the areas where he was strong.

My dear sister, let us learn to be compassionate with each other until the Lord has completed His work in us.



**Please join me in prayer** for the many thousands of Bible college students in our Bible colleges:

- For wisdom as they write their final exams.
- For clear guidance where each one should serve the Lord after graduation.
- For the Lord to empower them as they go for summer outreach or their permanent assignment.

May the Lord bless you and keep you close to Himself.

I love you in Jesus,

*Gisela*

## WHO IS ON TOP OF OUR LIST?



APRIL 2007

*Dear Sister,*

**D**uring the past six weeks I was in three different countries. For much of the time our family was together, for which I am grateful. We had a great time traveling together. Now I am at home for a while and I hope to catch up with my writing assignments.

This month we celebrated the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, the foundation of our faith. How much Jesus must love us to have come to earth and laid down His life for our redemption! He did it out of His free will, considering us more important than all the glory of heaven He could have enjoyed instead.

God desires that Christ's love, humility and selflessness become part of every believer's character. If it does, it will be the most powerful Christian testimony we can have in this world. So let's take a good look at our hearts and find out where we are in reflecting Jesus.

**To ourselves, we are the most important person in this world.** As human beings, we evaluate everything and everyone we encounter in relationship to ourselves. Whether we are rich or poor, educated or uneducated, famous or unknown, we appraise everything in relation to how it will benefit, bless and promote us, or how negatively it will affect our circumstances, plans or wishes. We try to get the best seat on the bus, the biggest cucumber in the market and the highest-paying job for ourselves! And we regard others who are after the very same things as our competition.

Even as Christians, we expect God, the pastor and the church believers to put our name on top of the priority list when it comes to blessings and care.

But Jesus' mindset was different. He thought of others before He thought of Himself. The Apostle Paul wrote how we should follow Christ's example:

*Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others (Philippians 2:3–4).*

**Who is our neighbor?** As believers, we are commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves (see Luke 10:27). When Jesus first made this statement, one of His listeners inquired whom He meant by neighbor. Perhaps he expected Jesus to say that his neighbor was a close family member, a dear friend, the person living next door or perhaps a member of his synagogue.

To the man's surprise, Jesus told him the story of the Good Samaritan. Through this story, we learn that God expects us to regard all fellow human beings we come in contact with as

## Who Is on Top of Our List?

our neighbors, even if they are total strangers or belong to a different ethnic, social and religious background.

This means that the poor woman in the marketplace, the rich banker, the important politician, the servant girl, the homeless beggar, the school principal, the man afflicted with leprosy, the slum dweller, the scientist and the illiterate bonded laborer—all are our neighbors, whom we are to love.

God's interpretation of whom our neighbor is presents us with the tremendous challenge of reaching with His love across all social and cultural barriers, including a 3,000-year-old caste system.

**What does it mean to love others as ourselves?** It means that we begin to see every person as God sees them: created in His own image, their souls more valuable than the whole world, loved by God so much that He sent His only Son to die on the cross for their redemption, called to become children of God and destined to be the Bride of Christ.

It means that we recognize that others are just as valuable as we are, regardless of their earthly social standing. It means we must treat them with the same dignity, respect and understanding we want for ourselves. And it also means that we reach out with Christ's love and compassion to help them in their need.

**Where do we start?** Across Asia, we are surrounded by millions of people who have countless spiritual and physical needs. Even if we wanted to, it would be impossible for us to reach out to all of them. So how do we begin to love others as ourselves?

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

In the story of the Good Samaritan, who did God hold responsible to help the man who fell among the robbers? Those who *traveled the same road* and saw his desperate condition. In the same way, God arranges for people in need to cross our path and puts it within our grasp to love and help them in the name of Jesus.

It may be the lady who sits next to us on the bus holding a sick child, the college student attending our class who failed her exam, the old woman living down the road whose husband recently died or the new believer in our church whose parents rejected her for her faith in Christ.

So how could we love those people as ourselves? We could offer to pray for the mother and her sick child on the bus. We could encourage the student and help tutor her in the subject she failed. We could visit the old woman and comfort her with God's Word. We could invite the new believer to our home for dinner and fellowship.

**How far have we come?** If we know Christ's teaching about loving our neighbor as ourselves, why do we struggle to live it practically, like Mother Teresa did, with such dedication and joy? The reason is that deep down in our hearts, we still regard ourselves better than others.

You see, for those of us who come from a lower social background, Christ's command is good news and a wonderful step up in acceptance, value, equality and dignity. But for those who come from a higher social class, it means taking a step down in humility in order to be like Jesus and to be one with the Body of Christ.

## Who Is on Top of Our List?

If you feel sorry for yourself, that you have to lay down some of your earthly privileges, just look at how much the Lord Jesus gave up to become your Savior:

*. . . who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross (Philippians 2:6–8).*

What an honor and a privilege have been given to you by God to lay down something for Jesus' sake so you can reflect and represent Him to a lost world!

My dear sister, let us determine to follow Christ in humility and love for others.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## TRUSTING THAT HE WILL



JUNE 2007

*Dear Sister,*

This morning while I was drinking my coffee, I was reading in the book of Psalms about the greatness of our God and about His lovingkindness toward those who trust in Him. Look what David wrote:

*For to Thee, O Lord, I lift up my soul.  
 For Thou, Lord, art good, and ready to forgive,  
 And abundant in lovingkindness to all who call upon Thee.  
 In the day of my trouble I shall call upon Thee,  
 For Thou wilt answer me.  
 There is no one like Thee among the gods, O Lord;  
 Nor are there any works like Thine.  
 For Thou art great and doest wondrous deeds; Thou alone art God.  
 I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord my God, with all my heart,  
 And will glorify Thy name forever.  
 For Thy lovingkindness toward me is great,  
 And Thou hast delivered my soul from the depths of Sheol.  
 —Psalm 86:4–5, 7–8, 10, 12–13*

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

This song of praise reminds me of a scripture in the New Testament: “*He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?*” (Romans 8:32).

**God is not stingy.** When we face troubles, we often pray to God as if He were unwilling to grant us our request. We agonize, shed tears and plead with Him, as if we have to wrestle the answer from His tightly closed hand.

Nothing could be further from the truth! The two scriptures we just read tell us that our Heavenly Father loves us dearly and is eager to answer when we call upon Him. He is more than willing to use His great power to deliver us out of our present trouble. After all, He delivered us before—out of hell, the greatest trouble of all! To save us, He made the most costly sacrifice in the universe: He gave up His only Son, Jesus, to die for our sin on the cross.

The Apostle Paul says that if God paid such a high price for our redemption, we can be sure He will *freely* give us everything else we need also. God doesn’t get upset over the many times we ask for His help. He hasn’t put up a sign by His throne that reads: “Four prayer requests allowed per day, per person.” There is no limit as to how often we can come to Him with our needs. We are always welcome and accepted. In fact, He invites us to come to Him with *all* our needs and burdens:

*Come to Me, **all** who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest* (Matthew 11:28).

*. . . casting **all** your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you* (1 Peter 5:7).

*. . . **in everything** by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God* (Philippians 4:6).

**None of our problems is beyond His power.** Think about how God created the heavens and the earth out of nothing. He simply spoke them into existence. He gave the breath of life to all the animals and the people He created. Ever since, the whole universe and all life have been sustained by His power.

When Jesus walked on this earth, we could see the power of God up close: He stilled the raging storm, multiplied bread to feed the hungry multitudes, walked on water, cast out demons, opened the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf, cleansed the lepers, healed every kind of sickness and raised the dead.

There was not one sick or demon-possessed person He could not heal or deliver. Even a legion of demons had to immediately leave a man when Jesus commanded them to go. Lazarus was already dead for four days when Jesus called him out of the grave, and he immediately came back to life.

Because of sin, Satan held all mankind captive, and we were destined for hell. Yet the power of the blood of Jesus cleansed us from all sin and set us free to become sons and daughters of God. And God wants us to know that He is willing to freely use the same divine power on our behalf if we cast our cares, needs and problems upon Him.

**What's there left for us to do?** Our part is to trust Him completely that He not only *can* deliver us from our troubles, but that He *will*. That's called faith!

Now, because our Heavenly Father is taking care of our problems, we can stop worrying. He has all power and authority at His disposal; He doesn't need our help or advice to come up with a solution. The very best thing that will honor Him is for us to start thanking Him for answering our prayers, even before we see the evidence of His intervention.

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

If we do this, His peace will fill our hearts and protect us from fear and despair, even in the midst of the storm. That's His promise:

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication **with thanksgiving** let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, shall guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:6–7).*

Our natural human response to problems is the opposite of the instructions we read in this scripture. We get anxious, worry and imagine the worst outcome. That's why we have to purposely retrain ourselves according to God's Word.

My dear sister, I encourage you to deliberately practice this new response the next time you encounter a problem in your home, with your children or in your ministry. It will change your life.



**Let us pray together** for the new school year in our Bridge of Hope centers:

- For the children, that they will do well in their studies.
- For the teachers to be able to love each child as Jesus would.
- For the parents and children to get to know Jesus.

May the Lord bless you with His presence and grace.

Your sister in Christ,  
*Gisela*

## WHAT'S YOUR TESTIMONY ABOUT GOD?



AUGUST 2007

*Dear Sister,*

I am so glad to be back home after being gone to Germany for more than three weeks during the month of July.

My parents passed away a few years ago, and it was the responsibility of my sister and me to clear out the home they lived in for 50 years and give away their possessions. Because my sister is seriously ill, she could no longer help me with this task, and so I needed to go and take care of it by myself. I am so thankful that the Lord was with me and answered my prayers to finish the job.

Since I got back, I have started again to work on my writing assignments and preparation for upcoming meetings and seminars. I would like to ask you to please keep my sister in your prayers, that God would touch and heal her by His grace.

In this letter I would like to share with you a few thoughts from Psalm 144:

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

*Blessed be the Lord, my rock,  
Who trains my hands for war,  
And my fingers for battle;  
My lovingkindness and my fortress,  
My stronghold and my deliverer;  
My shield and He in whom I take refuge.*  
—Psalm 144:1–2

**This psalm contains David’s testimony of what God is in his life.** We often read powerful declarations of praise like this one in our Bibles, and we borrow them for our own prayers and worship songs. David, however, didn’t copy these statements about God from a prayer book. Each expression was a personal testimony of how he experienced God when he was in trouble and cried out to Him for help.

**My rock:** After David killed Goliath and Saul became envious of him, David’s peaceful life was over. His whole world turned upside down, and there was not a place in Israel where he could stay in safety. Because of constant danger to his life and that of his family, he even had to relocate his parents outside the borders of Israel.

In all this turmoil, David found someone he could rely on, count on for help and completely trust in—and that was his God. He experienced Him as his unmovable rock in an ocean of trouble, confusion and uncertainty.

**My trainer:** When David went out to fight Goliath, he wasn’t an experienced soldier who could handle sword and spear. He was a shepherd boy with a sling, some stones and faith that God would give his enemy into his hand.

Even later on, when David became a mighty warrior, he attributed all his success to God and not to any captain of

## What's Your Testimony about God?

Saul's army who taught him the basics of warfare. He said: "*For by Thee I can run upon a troop; and by my God I can leap over a wall*" (Psalm 18:29).

**My lovingkindness:** David loved God and had a humble and teachable heart. Even when he sinned, he always humbled himself before God. That's why God could shower him with His grace and lovingkindness and call him a man after His own heart.

This is how much David valued God's love and compassion toward him: "*Thy lovingkindness is better than life*" (Psalm 63:3).

**My fortress, my stronghold:** Think about how many years King Saul hunted for David to kill him. David was constantly on the run and had to hide in caves and in the wilderness. He didn't have a fortress with towers and a high wall to protect him inside and keep Saul out. But he experienced how God became his fortress and stronghold and kept him safe. Saul with all his army could not penetrate God's protection around David.

**My deliverer:** More than once David was betrayed, surrounded by enemies or outnumbered in battle. Yet each time, God delivered him and those who belonged to him.

**My shield:** David had many close encounters where he could have easily been killed, such as when Saul threw a spear at him while he was playing the harp. At those times, he experienced God as his shield, which no enemy weapon could penetrate.

**My refuge:** Being a fugitive, where could David have gone for protection and help? People were afraid to give him a place to stay, because Saul had even killed a priest and 85 of his

relatives for giving David supplies. God became David's place of refuge and defense when he was in danger, discouraged or weary.

**What is our personal testimony about God?** It's wonderful to know Jesus as our Savior, but the Bible says He wants to be so much more in our lives. Do we know Him yet as our strength, comfort, wisdom, peace or any of the names we just looked at?

Like David, each time we walk through a time of difficulty or blessing in our lives, we should be able to add one more name of God that testifies, in praise, what He has become to us.

My dear sister, I hope these thoughts from Psalm 144 will encourage you to get to know Jesus in a much more personal way.



**Please pray with us** for the upcoming state Women's Fellowship training seminar in the month of September in India. Pray for:

- Safe travel for the teams.
- The Lord's presence to be with us.
- The training to strengthen our Women's Fellowship program.

May the Lord bless you and fill you with His joy.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## GOD PUT US IN A FISHBOWL



OCTOBER 2007

*Dear Sister,*

Recently, a friend sent me an interesting letter. She wrote about the time she met our family when our children were still small. And then she wrote, “I know you, Brother K.P., Daniel and Sarah have made a sacrifice living in a ‘fishbowl,’ as it were.” What she meant was that because of my husband’s ministry, people watch our lives very closely—much of the time. I thought: That’s true, and now Erika and Danny, our daughter- and son-in-law, have also joined us in the fishbowl!

Being on display came with the call of God on our lives—and it is the same with your life as well. God wants to make each of His servants an example of a Christian whom others can follow, even though He knows we are not perfect. In this letter, we will consider how mindful we must be of our conduct and calling so we will bring honor to Jesus and not discredit His Church.

**When the Lord Jesus called His 12 disciples, He simply invited them to follow Him.** He didn’t reason,

threaten or plead with them to become His disciples; nor did He promise them position, power and money. He didn't give a demonstration of His divine powers or tell them that He was the Son of God and the promised Messiah of Israel.

Jesus simply walked by Peter and Andrew's fishing boat and said: "*Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men*" (Mark 1:17). In a similar way, He called the others to become His followers.

**Jesus allowed them to be with Him and observe Him closely.** The disciples were with Him 24 hours a day for more than three years. They watched every aspect of His private life and His public ministry.

They saw the attitude He woke up with in the morning, they listened to what He said about others in private, and they watched His reaction when the food didn't taste good, when the sleeping arrangements were terrible and when He was tired and exhausted.

The disciples learned what made Him happy, serious or sad. They watched how He handled disappointments, misunderstandings, opposition, persecution—as well as praise, fame and the contributions people gave to His ministry.

Each time they heard Jesus teach God's Word, they could check to see if He followed His own teaching. And when He cast out demons, healed the sick, cleansed the lepers, gave sight to the blind and raised the dead, they noticed if He gave God the glory or took it for Himself.

Living and traveling with Jesus, the disciples observed how much of a prayer life He had and whether or not His personal holiness and devotion to God's Word were real.

**What was their conclusion?** As eyewitnesses of Jesus' private and public life, they came to the conclusion that Peter expressed: "*Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. And we have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God*" (John 6:68–69). The apostles never changed their confession, not even when they faced opposition, persecution or martyrdom.

**What did people say about the disciples and the believers of the first-century Church?** After watching their private and public lives closely, they called them Christians (see Acts 11:26). They did so because these believers lived and behaved just like Christ.

**What do people say about us?** Most of us would get a pretty good report card if someone would ask the people in our community and local church about our Christian testimony. After all, we follow the rules of our society, pay our taxes and don't make any trouble. And at church we teach Sunday school, sing in the choir, give our tithe and help the poor.

However, I imagine our report card would get a few deductions if someone asked our friends and neighbors about our Christian character. They know us a whole lot closer and see us daily.

But we would receive our most accurate report card if someone asked our parents, brothers and sisters, husband, children, daughter-in-law or son-in-law regarding our Christian walk. They know who we really are behind closed doors. They could testify to our uncontrolled anger, the sharp words we use to criticize others, how defensive we get when we are corrected, our lack of submission, the unforgiveness we harbor when our feelings get hurt, how often we neglect to pray

and read God's Word and the many times we fail to practice what we tell others to do.

**What would happen if 12 new believers moved in with us and copied everything we practiced?** If they didn't know the Word of God and we were the only believers they could observe and learn from, what kind of Christians would they turn out to be? They would become exactly what we are!

Do you think the Lord Jesus would be honored by the conduct of these disciples if they lived in public what we practiced at home? And would they be a blessing or a headache for the church? If, like Jesus' disciples, they were to become the future leaders of the church, the church would be a reflection of them and those who had trained them.

**It is our responsibility to produce authentic followers of Christ.** We may feel very insignificant in the work of God. However, we must remind ourselves daily that the future of the Church depends on us providing the correct example. Paul wrote to Timothy, and to us, how we should go about it: *"In speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe"* (1 Timothy 4:12).

**What if we mess up and make mistakes?** We will not be perfect, and those who watch us will surely point out our failures. This is what we must do when we fail: We must humble ourselves, ask forgiveness from God and those we hurt, accept correction and continue to walk in God's grace. God put us in a "fishbowl" so those who watch us can learn this crucial lesson by our example as well.

My dear sister, let us be careful how we represent the Lord Jesus to our generation.



**Let us unite in prayer** for all our pastors and missionaries.

Pray for them:

- That they will maintain a close personal walk with God.
- That their lives will reflect Christ's character.
- That their families will have a testimony in the community that honors Jesus.

May the Lord bless you and keep you close to Himself.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

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## WHY DID HE LOVE US?



DECEMBER 2007

*Dear Sister,*

**I**t's the middle of December, and soon all our family will arrive home. I am excited that we all can spend Christmas together. It will be fun to cook, bake and make our home look nice for the holidays.

It will be so great to do these things together with Sarah and Erika. Of course, my husband, Daniel and Danny will also have their parts in making our Christmas celebration special.

In the first week of January, I will travel to Germany to be with my sister for about two-and-a-half weeks. She is very ill and needs for the Lord to heal her. Please keep her in your prayers. From Germany, I will travel on to India for our state Women's Fellowship seminars and other programs. It looks like I will be gone for almost two months.

In just a few days, Christians all over the world will celebrate Christmas and rejoice over the birth of our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. Though this event took place 2,000 years ago, it still fills us with amazement: God loved us so much

that He sent His own Son to live among us and then die for our sins.

What was it that God saw in us that was so lovable and deserving that He would make this ultimate sacrifice?

Nothing mankind did was worthy of God's amazing love! Just like today, people broke every one of God's commandments. They turned away from the Living God and worshiped nature and self-made idols. They were selfish, unthankful, corrupt and rebellious, hating, lying, cheating and shedding innocent blood. God's assessment of everyone on earth was: "*There is none righteous, not even one*" (Romans 3:10).

**Were we worthy to be redeemed because God created us** in His image (see Genesis 1:26) or because He created us for Himself (see Colossians 1:16)?

He also created the angels for Himself, one-third of which joined Lucifer in his rebellion against God and, together with him, were cast out of heaven. Likewise, Adam and Eve joined Satan by listening to him and sinning against God; they consequently were thrown out of Eden. Why did God send Jesus to redeem us, while none of the fallen angels got a second chance?

**So why is it that** "*God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life*" (John 3:16)?

We really don't know the answer to why God's love for us is so great. But we know that it is real when we look at His Son lying in a manger. That's why we celebrate Christmas with such joy, hope and thankfulness.

Why Did He Love Us?

**What is our response to God's greatest demonstration of His love for us?** If we consider the extent of God's love and the sacrifice God made on our behalf to send His Son to become our Savior, our response should be the very same as that of the wise men who followed the star to Bethlehem: "*They fell down and worshiped Him*" (Matthew 2:11).

This Christmas and every day of the new year, our hearts will overflow with praise and worship if we daily allow the Holy Spirit to reveal God's amazing love to us.



**Please pray with us** for our leader in Myanmar. His dear wife, Susanna, recently went home to be with the Lord. Pray that the Lord would comfort him and his family and be near to them during this difficult time.

My dear sister, I wish you God's blessing for Christmas and for the coming year. May the Lord watch over you and fill your heart with His joy and peace.

With love, your sister,

*Gisela*

## HOPE BEYOND DEATH



MARCH 2008

*Dear Sister,*

A few days ago we celebrated Easter, the day the Lord Jesus rose from the dead. For us as believers, Jesus' resurrection is the proof of His victory over sin, the devil and death. It is also the source of all our hope, comfort and assurance that we too will rise again should we die before the Lord comes back.

This Easter I spent more time thinking about the resurrection of Jesus and all those who belong to Him—because of what happened in February.

Perhaps you remember that in my last letter I told you I was planning to visit my sister in Germany in January and then go on to India for our state Women's Fellowship seminars.

I arrived in Germany on the 4th of January, and I found that my sister had become much more ill and weak than when I saw her last summer. Two years ago she had been diagnosed with an illness that has no cure, and I had asked all the sisters who receive my letter to pray for her.

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

It was very sad to see her suffer and struggle. While I was there, I helped take care of her. She could no longer walk or speak, and she had great difficulties swallowing food and increasing problems with breathing. However, she was very brave, and she used a speech computer to communicate. She would type in what she wanted to say and then press a button for the computer to speak out what she had written.

One day, while we were sitting together in her living room, she typed in that she believed she would not live much longer. I cried, and then I asked her about her faith in Jesus. I told her that I needed to know if I would see her again. She replied that I didn't have to worry, and that she was sure she will see me again.

To make certain she understood why I was concerned, I said to her: "When you were a child, you made a beginning with the Lord, but later you lived your own life. What happened to that faith you had as a child?" She replied: "I came back to it." When I asked her when that was, she told me: "This sickness brought me back."

When I heard her answer, it became so clear to me how God had answered the prayers of all the thousands of believers who were praying for my sister's healing: He had brought her back to Himself, so she could be forever with Him.

On January 23, in the early morning before I left for India, I prayed with my sister. She wrote "come back soon" on a piece of paper, and then she waved good-bye to me.

When I landed in Delhi, I got the news that the same day I had left Germany, my sister had to be hospitalized because of severe breathing problems. For the next two weeks, her

condition changed daily, sometimes bad, sometimes critical and sometimes stable.

In the meantime, Sister Jeena, our national Women's Fellowship leader, along with our regional leaders and I held our first state leaders' seminar in Delhi. It was such a blessing to hear the reports of what the Lord was doing through our Women's Fellowship sisters and the plans God had put on their hearts for this year.

After our time in Delhi, Sister Jeena and I traveled to Nagpur, where we had our second leaders' seminar, and then on to Kerala to take part in the Women's Fellowship program at the Kerala Believers Church state convention.

However, early the next morning I got a call from Germany with the sad news that my sister had passed away. My daughter, Sarah, and I traveled to Germany for my sister's funeral. Sarah was such an encouragement and joy to have with me.

I had to leave Sister Jeena alone to do the speaking and teaching at the Women's Fellowship program during the convention and the rest of the state seminars. I praise God for how well it went.

My sister's funeral was a sad event. She was only 58 years old, and our family and her friends will miss her a lot. For me it is strange to think that now all my immediate family members are gone. But I am so glad that my grandmother, father, mother and sister confessed their faith in Christ—and that I can know they are with the Lord and one day I will see them again.

Christ's victory over death and His promise that those who believe in Him shall live even if they die (John 11:25) turn

LET ME WALK WITH YOU

our tears and mourning into joy. My dear sister, as believers in Jesus, we are so privileged to have a hope that goes beyond death and the grave.

Thank you so very much for all your prayers on behalf of my sister over these past two years. The Lord answered according to His greater wisdom and purpose.



**Please pray with us** for our brothers and sisters who are facing severe persecution in the Indian state of Orissa. Recently, many churches and believers' homes were burned down, and hundreds of believers had to flee for their lives into the jungle. Please pray:

- That the Lord will keep them safe.
- That their needs for food and shelter will be met.
- That their faith will remain steadfast.
- That those who persecute them will come to know Christ.

May the joy of the Lord be your strength.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## JUDGING OTHERS



JUNE 2008

*Dear Sister,*

**I**t's early in the morning. I just made myself a cup of coffee, and now I am sitting at my kitchen table to write to you. The other day I read a scripture about not judging others, one that so many believers do not take seriously. I would like to share with you a few thoughts on this subject. Jesus said: *“Do not judge lest you be judged. For in the way you judge, you will be judged; and by your standard of measure, it shall be measured to you”* (Matthew 7:1–2).

**The Bible is given to us for our instruction and correction** (see 2 Timothy 3:16). God clearly told us in His Word how we should live on this earth as His children. He gave us moral laws to keep and instructions for our personal walk with God, marriage, family, raising children, work, church, missions and our conduct in society.

God's Word is the foundation for our Christian lives and is the measuring rod by which we must evaluate ourselves and everything we encounter in this world as well. Following

God's instructions guides us safely through all the dangers of this fallen world and protects us from wrong decisions. Even if we have taken a wrong turn, God's Word will correct us and put us back on the right path.

**We like to measure and judge the spirituality and performance of other believers.** We use what we have learned from the Bible as a measuring rod to highlight the faults of other believers and pass judgment on them. We find their speech and behavior not dignified enough, their prayers too lengthy, their spiritual understanding too shallow, their home too fancy or too unkempt, their dress and hairstyle too worldly and their children not as well behaved as ours.

**How does it look when we judge others?** We are irritated by their behavior, and we condemn them in our hearts. We try to correct them by criticizing or scolding them without truly caring for them. We don't consider their circumstances and have no real compassion or love for them. We get together with other believers and discuss their wrong behavior, inappropriate clothing or lack of spirituality, while we lift up our own righteousness and excellent performance.

Why does Christ not want us to judge others? Because:

- We will be judged by God with the same measure we judge others (see Matthew 7:1–2). The truth is, we often condemn others for the very same things we do ourselves, but we justify *our* behavior with explanations and excuses.
- When we judge, we elevate ourselves above others, and pride and self-righteousness take hold of our heart.

## Judging Others

- We forget that it is only God's grace, and nothing in ourselves, that keeps us from making the very same mistakes.
- When we judge others, we destroy the opportunity to speak into their lives and help them change.
- Our judgment may not be accurate! We may have added our own cultural interpretations and religious traditions to what God's Word actually says. This was the mistake the Pharisees made. They burdened people with their many extra laws and regulations (see Mark 7:13).
- The person we judge may be a new believer who loves the Lord dearly but has not yet had time to grow in his faith. It is totally unfair of us to judge him by what took us 5, 10 or 20 years to learn. Our judgment will discourage this new believer and harm his spiritual development.

### **So what should we do when others don't measure up?**

- Don't condemn, criticize or scold them in order to change their performance. True change must always come from the heart; otherwise, the "godly" behavior we scolded them into is only a façade.
- Don't discuss their shortcomings and failures with other believers. Love them enough not to make them the subject of gossip. Instead, seek to cover their failures. If you get any satisfaction out of discussing others' weaknesses, it proves that you lack love for them. *"Above all, keep fervent in your love for one another, because love covers a multitude of sins"* (1 Peter 4:8).
- Show them compassion and mercy like Jesus did when He dealt with others' failures. I guarantee

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

you that the time will come when you will make mistakes and will need others' compassion and mercy. *“As those who have been chosen of God, . . . put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving each other”* (Colossians 3:12–13).

- Pray for them diligently, and allow the Lord to fill you with His love for them.
- Take them aside privately and talk to them without condemnation. Show them from the Word of God where they fall short. Teach, correct and counsel them with love and gentleness. Encourage them and build them up instead of tearing them down. Pray with them.
- If you find they have a problem that is too difficult for you to counsel, put them in contact with an experienced pastor or a mature believer who can help them.
- Teach them godly behavior by your example rather than by your many words (see 1 Timothy 4:12). You only qualify to teach and correct others if you live in public and private what you proclaim.
- Seek to be a friend and mentor whom they can trust and love rather than a judge who passes sentence on them.

If you practice these things in your church or Bible study group, you will see many positive changes in your life and the lives of others.



**Let us pray** for the country of Myanmar, which just experienced a devastating cyclone:

- For the thousands of people who lost loved ones, are injured or are homeless.
- For supplies to reach those who are suffering and are threatened by disease and starvation.
- That God will enable our leaders, believers and churches to help, comfort and share His love.

May God's peace be with you always.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## EVIDENCE OF REPENTANCE



AUGUST 2008

*Dear Sister,*

On June 16, our first grandbaby arrived! Her name is Esther Hope, and she is so sweet and beautiful. I just like to look at her and watch her sleep. We all are so grateful to the Lord that our daughter-in-law Erika's delivery went well and that she and the baby are healthy. Of course, little Esther keeps her parents busy. Her favorite things are eating, sleeping and being held. Our son, Daniel, took nice pictures of her, and I wish I could send you one. We feel so blessed to have little Esther in our family.

And very soon she will have a cousin!

This morning I read the message John the Baptist preached when he was baptizing people in the Jordan River. It was quite a fiery sermon, and he wasn't shy in pointing out people's sins. No wonder he was arrested by Herod later on. The statements John the Baptist made regarding repentance are very relevant for us as followers of Christ. He said:

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

*Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham for our father,” for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham (Luke 3:8).*

**After our salvation, we still need to repent.** Though we were cleansed from all our sin and saved by grace through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ, we still need to repent each time we act contrary to the will of our Heavenly Father.

As Christians, we live in a fallen world, and the devil tries to trick us into sin every chance he gets. However, our greatest challenge is to be transformed into the image of Christ *in every area* of our lives. In order for this to take place, our mind must be renewed by the Word of God.

For such a long time, our thinking was wrong and led us to wrong actions and habits. Once we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit shows us, one area at a time, where we need to change. This is a process that takes our willingness to leave our old ways and adopt Christ’s ways. We will still fail at times—and when we do, God expects us to repent and receive cleansing. The Apostle John explains how this works: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness”* (1 John 1:9).

### **What is insincere or unbiblical repentance?**

- When we ask forgiveness because we made a mess of things and we want God to rescue us from the consequences.
- When someone confronts us with our unbiblical conduct and we admit our wrong but at the same time defend our old habits.

## Evidence of Repentance

- When we make excuses with our repentance such as, “This is normal behavior in my culture,” “I was brought up in this way,” “It is due to the temperament I was born with,” “Everybody in my family acts like this,” or “The hurtful experiences in my life made me this way.”
- When we confess our wrong actions to God but have no intentions of changing them.
- When our mouth admits our un-Christlike behavior, but our heart doesn’t see the ugliness of our sin.

**What do people rely on when they don’t change their old ways?** In John the Baptist’s time, the religious Jews relied on being descendants of Abraham for their salvation and eternal security. They believed that this fact automatically included them in God’s covenant with Israel. Therefore, their repentance was often insincere, and nothing changed in their lives as a result. John the Baptist had a message for those Israelites: “*Do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham for our father,’ for I say to you that God is able from these stones to raise up children to Abraham*” (Luke 3:8).

In our time, many born-again Christians rely on the love, mercy and grace of our Lord and the fact that indeed they are already saved and going to heaven. Thus they take their remaining un-Christlike behavior lightly. Their repentance is often insincere, and nothing changes in their lives as a result.

But such an attitude is not without severe consequences for ourselves and for the kingdom of God: By clinging to our old ways, we will not grow in many areas of our Christian life, and our usefulness to God becomes very limited. This will result in not fulfilling God’s plan for our lives and consequently missing out on many of the rewards God wants to give to us

in heaven. Most of all, we will not be able to represent the Lord Jesus in this world in the way we should. This will bring dishonor to God's name and the Church. It will cause people to mock Christ and His Church and will also give them an excuse for rejecting Jesus and the Word of God.

### **What is true repentance?**

- We see our un-Christlike attitudes, habits, behavior and actions in the light of God. We recognize and are deeply convicted by how ugly, offensive and sinful they really are.
- We confess them as sin to the Lord and to others, and we make no excuses for ourselves.
- We ask sincerely for God's forgiveness, and we receive His cleansing by faith.
- We turn from our sinful habits and behavior with all our hearts, and we desire never to go back.
- We renew our mind with what God's Word says, and with the help and power of the Holy Spirit, we replace our old behavior with what we see modeled by Christ.

### **What is the visible evidence of true repentance?**

John the Baptist gives the answer: "*Therefore bring forth fruits in keeping with repentance*" (Luke 3:8). It's the new fruit we produce that will grab people's attention and point them to Jesus. They will recognize our new Christlike attitude and behavior and understand that our old ways are gone.

**What are the "old ways" you need to sincerely repent of and replace with Christ's life?** Is it gossip, envy, laziness, complaining, criticizing others, dishonesty, disobedience, immorality, unforgiveness, selfishness, lack of submission,

## Evidence of Repentance

rebellion, greed, backbiting or pretense? Perhaps your “old ways” are not on this list, but you know what they are.

Today, make a decision to truly repent and remove these un-Christlike ways, and put on the life that is in the Lord Jesus Christ, as the Apostle Paul wrote:

*Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and . . . put on the Lord Jesus Christ. . . . In reference to your former manner of life, you lay aside the old self . . . and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth (Romans 13:12, 14; Ephesians 4:22, 24).*

My dear sister, let us desire to become all that God has planned for us to become in Jesus.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## WHAT DOES GOD SAY ABOUT GRANDMOTHERS?



OCTOBER 2008

*Dear Sister,*

I am writing this letter to you on my way back from India. For the past two months I had the joy of being with our daughter, Sarah, and our son-in law, Danny, for the arrival of their first baby. Little David Jeremiah was born on the 5th of September. He is so cute and beautiful, and it was so special to watch and hold him. As a family we thank God for this healthy little boy and for watching over Sarah during the delivery.

The birth of David made my husband and me grandparents for the second time in three months! I am still learning how to be a mother-in-law, and now I need to learn how to be a grandmother.

**Perhaps you wonder: What is there to learn about being a grandmother?** Does this role not come naturally to us? Can't we just follow the example of our own grandmothers, who are the most wonderful people on earth? They love us unconditionally, cook our favorite food, buy us those

presents our parents won't get, rescue us when we make mistakes, comfort us when we are sad, tell us we are wonderful even if we are not, pray for us when we are in trouble and believe in us when nobody else does.

Are these not the most important qualities we should seek to imitate when our time comes to be a grandmother—or is there more we should do?

**What does the Bible say about the role of a grandmother?** Actually, so far I haven't found very many scriptures on grandmothers. However, the Bible has a lot to say about the specific qualities God desires for a godly woman to have and how older sisters should teach younger sisters His principles for their personal life, marriage, work, family and raising children (see Titus 2:3–5).

Surely this means that by the time we are grandmothers we should have acquired those godly qualities God talks about in His Word: *“Let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the imperishable quality of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is precious in the sight of God”* (1 Peter 3:4).

It also means that by then we should have succeeded in applying in our own life the principles we are supposed to teach and pass on to the younger women in the church. Certainly among those younger women are the mothers of our own grandchildren: our daughters and daughters-in-law.

**God expects grandparents and parents to pass on their faith to their descendants.** Our grandchildren will have to grow up in a world that is full of sin and controlled by the Evil One. Yet God desires that they will know Him early and choose to follow Him. God said about Abraham: *“For I have chosen him, in order that he may command his children and his*

## What Does God Say about Grandmothers?

*household after him to keep the way of the Lord by doing righteousness and justice . . .”(Genesis 18:19).*

God also instructed the children of Israel not to forget the things He did for them, “*but make them known to your sons and your grandsons.*” They were also to remember the words He spoke to them, “*that they may teach their children*” (Deuteronomy 4:9–10). According to this scripture, grandparents are given the responsibility by God to pass on their faith to the next two generations!

**The Bible tells us about a grandmother whose example we can follow.** It is Lois, the grandmother of Timothy who was the most trusted and faithful “son in the faith” of the Apostle Paul. In fact, Timothy carried on Paul’s life work after the apostle was martyred.

Timothy was the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father. Yet this is what Paul wrote about him: “*From childhood you have known the sacred writings. . . . For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois, and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well*” (2 Timothy 3:15; 1:5).

Because Timothy grew up in a Gentile nation with a non-Jewish father, who would have taught him the Word of God and helped him to believe in the God of Israel? It was his grandmother Lois who passed on her sincere faith to his mother and, together with her, to Timothy. This grandmother went against all odds with her efforts. Amazingly, she succeeded to see her daughter follow the Lord in spite of her marriage and her grandson serve the Living God in the midst of an idol-worshiping society. What a joy that all three of them received Jesus as their Messiah.

**How did Lois pass on her sincere faith?** She lived it every day before Eunice and Timothy. Lois not only had faith,

but she had *sincere* faith. This means that her faith was genuine, pure, honest, reliable and trustworthy. There was no hypocrisy in her walk with God or her conduct with others. Eunice her daughter followed her example. What Timothy saw in his grandmother and in his mother was genuine godliness and faith, and he too became like them.

When we become grandmothers, we too must model the same kind of godliness and sincere faith to our grandchildren. When they look at us, they should be able to learn from our example what it means to follow Christ, be faithful in all things, have a gentle and quiet spirit, walk by faith and obey God's Word.

**Why am I writing to you about how to be a grandmother,** even if you may be still unmarried or you are a young wife and mother? My first reason is because I am a new grandmother and I myself need to get a clear understanding of what God expects from me. The second reason is that someday you, too, will be in my place! Let me assure you of this: What you live and practice right now will determine what you become 10 or 20 years from now.

You see, in spiritual things you can only teach others what you genuinely live yourself. Your life, not your words, is the most powerful testimony you have to your children and grandchildren. What you model will transfer, not what you lecture at them!

I want to encourage you to choose now to develop those godly qualities that honor the Lord and that are worthy to pass on.

May the Lord give you much grace to walk with Him with all your heart.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## DON'T TAKE GOD'S CALLING LIGHTLY



FEBRUARY 2009

*Dear Sister,*

**H**ow are you doing since the new year started? Our family had a wonderful Christmas, and we especially enjoyed that our children and grandchildren were here to celebrate with us. Now it's already February, and I am busy with writing projects and preparations for meetings, a trip to India and a Women's Fellowship seminar next month.

This morning I read in the New Testament how the Lord Jesus called the tax collector Levi to become His disciple: "*As He passed by, He saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting in the tax office, and He said to him, 'Follow Me!' And he rose and followed Him*" (Mark 2:14).

Levi's instant obedience changed his life forever. He became the Apostle Matthew who wrote the Gospel of Matthew.

**What would have happened if Matthew hadn't obeyed immediately?** He could have said to himself, "I need

to finish my obligations in the tax office before I can leave. When Jesus passes by next time and calls me again, I will go with Him then.”

But what if Jesus never again came along this same road? Even if He passed by a second time a year later, what guarantee was there that the spot among Jesus’ 12 disciples was still open? After all, Jesus had only three-and-a-half years to complete His ministry on earth, train His disciples and then die for our sins. He needed disciples who were ready to follow Him right now.

**As long as we live on this earth, we are governed by time.** We have only a few years for each stage of life. We pass from birth through childhood, youth, adulthood, middle age and old age in a few decades.

Many of the opportunities in life come our way only once. That’s why it is crucial that we think deeply and make our decisions with eternity in mind. Especially as Christians, we must take very seriously what we choose to live for during this brief time we have on earth. Levi the tax collector recognized the privilege God offered him and he never looked back, even when things got difficult.

**Don’t take lightly God’s call to serve Him.** Did God call you to serve Him in any capacity, whether on a team, in the ministry office, at the church, in the Women’s Fellowship or with your husband? Take it very seriously, even if it is just one single task, such as welcoming visitors, discipling a new believer, giving out Gospel tracts, or encouraging and praying for your husband when he goes for ministry.

Consider this: The God and Creator of the universe has chosen *you* among more than 6 billion people on earth to

do something for Him. He easily could have given the job to thousands of other people more qualified and able than you. But He wanted to bless you with the awesome opportunity to serve Him and help win souls for God's kingdom. There is absolutely nothing in this world, nor in the universe, that is of greater value than the smallest task Jesus entrusted to you.

**Don't quit—or trade your calling for something else.** Over the years, I have seen many brothers and sisters who started so well walk away from fulfilling their calling. Here are just a few of the reasons:

- Being offended by someone
- Not being given the recognition or position they thought they deserved
- Not wanting to humble themselves and accept correction from their pastor or leader
- Harboring bitterness and developing a critical spirit
- Someone betraying their trust
- Feeling lonely and discouraged
- Financial struggles and fear of the future
- Unwillingness to serve in a place that is not near their home
- Misunderstanding between co-workers
- Having a materialistic mindset and looking for opportunities for personal gain
- Making a mistake and covering it up instead of confessing and repenting from it
- Difficulties adjusting to a new mission field
- Losing heart because someone spread lies or gossips about them

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

- Pressure from parents and relatives who want their son or daughter making a lot of money instead of doing ministry
- Constant complaints and tears from a wife who does not submit to her husband's leadership
- Being lured away from the ministry by someone who offers them an important position, money, travel and other material benefits

My dear sister, Jesus and the apostles faced many of these struggles in their ministry, and we will too. The Enemy always wants to use problems to cause us to quit our calling, or at least to make us bitter and unfruitful. Jesus, on the other hand, desires that we overcome each of these trials and temptations and become stronger and more Christlike in our character and usefulness to God.

God's Word declares that we as Christians are not helpless or too weak to overcome all these trials: "*For whatever is born of God overcomes the world*" (1 John 5:4). Jesus promised to be with us always (see Matthew 28:20), and we have received the Holy Spirit, who lives in us and empowers us to be His witnesses (see Acts 1:8).

*But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us* (Romans 8:37).

*I can do all things through Him who strengthens me* (Philippians 4:13).

Therefore, let us never entertain the thought of quitting or trading our calling for anything else! Instead, let us make a lifetime decision to be faithful to Jesus and fulfill our calling no matter what we may encounter.

Don't Take God's Calling Lightly

**It's worth it to finish the race and win the prize.**

Shortly before he was martyred, the Apostle Paul wrote, “*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing*” (2 Timothy 4:7–8).

My dear sister, let us pray for one another that we will all be found faithful in finishing what God has entrusted to each of us.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## HE DEALS GENTLY WITH US



APRIL 2009

*Dear Sister,*

This letter comes to you from Kerala, India, where I arrived at the beginning of March. I had the privilege of attending the graduation of our seminary students and also meeting many of our Believers Church leaders during the leadership meeting that took place afterward. From March 15–18 we held a seminar for our Believers Church Women’s Fellowship state leaders from India, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Sister Jeena and I were very encouraged to hear the good reports of what the Lord is doing through our Women’s Fellowship sisters in the local churches and through our district, state and regional Women’s Fellowship teams.

This month, a new literacy training book will be printed in the Hindi language and will be available for our local Women’s Fellowship teams to order and use for their literacy classes. It will be such a blessing to thousands of sisters who haven’t yet had a chance to learn how to read and write. Please encourage all the illiterate sisters in your church to participate in the literacy classes, so they will soon be able to read the Bible.

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

Plans are already under way to translate this literacy training book into five other languages. Please pray with us for this important project.

While I am here, I have the joy of spending time with our children and grandchildren. Little Esther is now nine months old, and little David is six months old. They are so sweet and fun to watch, especially when they smile at me or play with their toys.

Yesterday morning I read something in the book of Hebrews that I would like to share with you.

*For every high priest taken from among men is appointed on behalf of men in things pertaining to God, in order to offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins; he can deal gently with the ignorant and misguided, since he himself also is beset with weakness (Hebrews 5:1–2).*

**In the Old Testament, God chose a high priest to stand before Him on behalf of His people.** This high priest was not perfect. Like everyone else, he made mistakes, and in one way or another, he too transgressed God's laws. That's why he had to offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as for those committed by the people of Israel.

**God desired that this high priest would deal gently with His people!** God loves and cares for His people like a shepherd for his sheep. Psalm 23 is a true picture of how God leads and looks after them with great compassion and understanding of their needs.

God doesn't want His sheep to be beaten, judged or destroyed if they do wrong or get sick or hurt. Instead, He wants them rescued and restored to health. That's why God wanted

## He Deals Gently with Us

the high priest to care for His people with the same loving heart as His.

In fact, God expected the high priest to deal extra gently with those who sinned out of ignorance or because they were misguided by their own hearts or the influence of others. The high priest's gentleness and compassion toward others were to come from recognizing that he, too, was plagued by weaknesses and needed forgiveness and mercy.

**In the New Testament, Jesus, the Son of God, became our High Priest.** When Jesus died on the cross for the sin of the whole world, He was the final, perfect and sinless sacrifice God accepted for our redemption. Since that point, our sins have been completely forgiven, and we can become sons and daughters of God through faith in Jesus. There is no further sacrifice needed, ever. And if there are no more sacrifices, then there is also no need for a human high priest to offer them. The Bible says that when Jesus went to heaven, He became our High Priest, constantly interceding for us (see Hebrews 7:25).

**Jesus, our High Priest, deals gently with us!** As long as we live on this earth, we will be surrounded by the results of the fall of man: sin, sickness and death. Our world is full of corruption, unspeakable suffering, poverty, diseases, abuse of innocent children, injustice, slavery, child labor, cruelty, wickedness, violence, murder, wars, dishonesty, lies, gossip and any other evil thing we can imagine. As a result, we face fear, discouragement, economic struggles, sadness, burdens and constant pressure from the world around us. In addition, each one of us has weaknesses and we face temptations. Though we are saved and we have the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the world and temptations, we still fail at times.

When that happens, our greatest comfort is that Jesus understands us completely and has compassion and mercy on us. He deals gently with us because He lived in a human body in this corrupt world for 33 years, experiencing everything we go through.

*For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and may find grace to help in time of need (Hebrews 4:15–16).*

**As servants of God, we are likewise expected to deal gently with others!** How do we deal with others when they make small mistakes or fail miserably? So often we are disgusted, angry and ready to cut them off from our love, care and fellowship. Yes, we must hate sin, the consequences it brings and the dishonor it causes for the name of the Lord. However, we must also remember that God has no pleasure in the destruction of a child of God who has sinned, but rather in his restoration. To find compassion for the one who failed, we must look at our own weaknesses and in humility admit that we are capable of failing just like him. The only thing that keeps us safe is the grace of God. This perspective helps us to be humble and deal gently with the already bruised reed (see Isaiah 42:3).

**The Bible teaches that gentleness must be part of the character of a servant of God.** If we cannot deal gently with others, we are not qualified to look after God's people. Helping others does include rebuke, correction and instruction, but it must come from a heart of compassion and love:

## He Deals Gently with Us

*Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness (1 Timothy 6:11).*

*The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition (2 Timothy 2:24–25).*

*Remind them to be . . . gentle, showing every consideration for all men (Titus 3:1–2).*

Dear sister, let us watch over our heart, cultivating the fruit of the Spirit of gentleness, so that our ministry will be according to the will of God.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE



JUNE 2009

*Dear Sister,*

**H**ow are you getting along with your brothers and sisters in your church or ministry? Sometimes it is not easy to maintain the unity and love God wants us to have for each other.

This morning I read the story of how Abraham and Lot separated because their herds and flocks had grown too large for the grazing land available. There are some important things we can learn from this story that will help us when another believer takes advantage of our love and kindness. Please read Genesis 13:5–17.

**Abraham addressed the issue.** Abraham did not pretend that everything was fine while there was ongoing strife between his and Lot's herdsmen. He recognized that something had to be done to end the conflict. That's why he took the initiative to talk to Lot, his nephew, about the problem.

Abraham's main goal for finding a solution was to maintain peace between them. *"Please let there be no strife between you*

*and me, nor between my herdsmen and your herdsmen, for we are brothers” (Genesis 13:8).*

**Abraham offered a solution:** *“Is not the whole land before you? Please separate from me: if to the left, then I will go to the right; or if to the right, then I will go to the left” (Genesis 13:9).*

Abraham was God’s chosen servant, a respected leader, a powerful chief of his people and Lot’s uncle. As such, he had the full authority to tell Lot what to do and expect him to follow his orders without question.

However, Abraham’s love and desire to live in peace with his “brother” caused him to humble himself before Lot. Rather than giving him an order, Abraham twice, gently but urgently, appealed to Lot with a request. And when Abraham offered a solution to their problem, he took the risk of ending up with a bad deal.

**Abraham left the choice of land to Lot,** who shamelessly took advantage of his uncle’s generosity and chose *all* the best land for himself (see vv. 10 and 11).

Didn’t Abraham see it coming? No doubt Abraham must have known Lot’s character. After all, the young man had lived with Abraham since his father, Haran (Abraham’s brother), died. Perhaps he hoped that Lot had learned and changed since he too believed in Abraham’s God, and Abraham wanted to give him a chance to succeed in life.

**How did Abraham respond when he was exploited by his “brother”?** He was silent when Lot took advantage of his love and generosity. Surely Abraham must have been disappointed, hurt and sad, yet he didn’t complain to God, to his wife, Sarah, or to anyone else about Lot.

And he didn't scold or slap his nephew for his utter selfishness, lack of respect and ungratefulness. Abraham easily could have gone back on his word and fairly divided the good and bad land between his nephew and himself, but he didn't. He chose rather to suffer loss and be considered foolish in order to maintain peace with his brother.

In addition, Abraham didn't keep any bitterness in his heart toward Lot. Instead, he loved and cared for him enough to risk his own life and that of his men to rescue Lot when Lot was taken captive during a war. And he pleaded and bargained with God to spare Sodom on behalf of his nephew and his family.

**Why did Abraham not fight for his rights?** Abraham trusted God with all his heart. He believed that the God who called him and promised to give him all the land (which included the portion Lot took) would surely fulfill His word. He was not worried about his present disadvantage, Lot's greediness or what he should do to get the fertile land back in his possession. He placed himself and his future into God's mighty hand and left it up to Him to defend his rights and fulfill His promise at the right time. That's faith!

**God reconfirmed His promise to Abraham.** Read Genesis 13:14–17. God was pleased with Abraham's choice to humble himself and suffer loss in order to maintain peace—and to trust God to be his defender.

God encouraged Abraham by repeating and reconfirming his former promise: *"For all the land which you see, I will give it to you and to your descendants . . ."* And then God rewarded Abraham by adding a new promise: *"forever"* (Genesis 13:15). Even today, God still stands by this promise to Israel.

**Choose to follow Abraham's example!** We too will encounter situations when other Christians take advantage of our love and kindness, even if we never make them a generous offer like Abraham. Perhaps you lend money to a needy sister in the church, but later on when she is doing well, she has no intention of paying it back. Or maybe your co-worker or team member takes credit for your good work and gets the recognition and reward you deserve.

If the fellow Christian who took advantage of your good heart is unwilling to change, you have only two choices:

1. You can fight for your rights by proving them wrong and force them to do the right thing, but you will end up with a broken relationship.
2. Or you can choose to suffer injustice, forgive them and entrust yourself to the Lord and thus maintain peace in the Body of Christ.

If you choose the second option, you are following Abraham's example, and God's blessing will surely rest on you. Don't fear that your fellow believer got away with defrauding you. God will deal with him in His own time, for he too is His child and needs transformation of his character.



**Let us thank God together** for the release of Brother Manja from prison in Nepal. Pray for him and his family, that God will bless them abundantly and use their testimony to strengthen His people.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## TRAVEL, SEMINARS AND FAMILY



AUGUST 2009

*Dear Sister,*

When I landed in Delhi, India, last month, I had the joy of receiving a copy of the printed Women's Fellowship (WF) literacy training book in the Hindi language. A team of our WF sisters and a pastor who is trained in literacy work wrote and designed this book. It will be used to teach our illiterate sisters and others in the local churches how to read and write. The book has already been shipped to all the states where the Hindi language is spoken. Our WF leaders are now working on the task of getting it translated and adapted into six other major Indian languages.

On September 8, World Literacy Day, we will start our WF literacy teachers training. Sisters from six Indian states will come together to learn how to use the literacy book in order to start literacy classes in our local churches. A recent survey of our churches in 14 states in India shows that 54 percent of our dear believers are illiterate. There is much work to

be done to help these first-generation Christians to be able to read the Bible for themselves. It's vital not only for their own spiritual growth, but also for the stability and future of the Church.

The literacy course will be an ongoing Women's Fellowship program. Even if all the current believers become literate, we will continually gain new illiterate ones as each church grows in numbers.

A week ago, Sister Jeena (our national Women's Fellowship leader for India) and I returned to Kerala, India, from our trip to Myanmar and Tamil Nadu.

In Myanmar we had a five-day Women's Fellowship training seminar. The sisters were so eager to learn and participate, and we are very confident that they will do well in implementing the program. The Believers Church leadership was very supportive, and we had wonderful fellowship with our sisters and brothers. We felt like family. During our stay, we had the opportunity to eat all kinds of food we had never seen or tasted before. It was a lot of fun.

One afternoon we visited the first church that Adoniram Judson established, named after the first Burmese Christian he won to Christ. Judson's life and sacrifice were not in vain. The believers throughout Myanmar are the fruit of this man's willingness to become the grain of wheat Jesus talked about: *"Unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit"* (John 12:24).

Our second training seminar in Chennai was for pastors' wives. About 225 sisters came from all the different districts of Tamil Nadu. We were encouraged by their eagerness to

learn lessons that will help them in their personal walk with the Lord and improve their effectiveness as pastors' wives. We were grateful for the help, advice and support we received from our Believers Church state leader and our state WF team.

Pastors' wives seminars are part of the WF program. They are designed as an ongoing program in every district where we have churches. The goal is to encourage and train each pastor's wife to be able to help her husband in his ministry and to be a blessing to the church.

In a number of places, our state and district WF teams have already held pastors' wives seminars, and we have heard good reports as a result. However, before we can implement the seminars everywhere, we need to complete the curriculum for the first series of seminars. These are biblical lessons and practical ministry training sessions that need to be taught systematically in all of the seminars. That way all the pastors' wives receive the same ongoing training. We hope to be able to complete the curriculum needed within the next two months.

Right now, I am in Kerala for a few weeks. My husband was also here when I came. At the moment he is traveling for two weeks to speak in meetings.

While he is gone, I work in the morning hours on some WF writing projects, and in the afternoon and evening, I spend time with our daughter, Sarah, and her family. I was so looking forward to seeing them and especially little David. When I saw him last in April, he was just starting to figure out how to crawl. This time he is walking and running. He is so busy playing and discovering things and smiling at everybody. He has a lot of friends at the campus.

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

Each morning he goes with his mother to the seminary office, and while he takes a nap, Sarah works as part of the administration team. At lunchtime they go home, and Sarah does the rest of her work in the evening when David is asleep. He likes his mom the best when he is sad, tired or hungry.

David is especially excited when his daddy comes home from his work at the ministry. He wants to play hide-and-seek with him and other noisy games. With me, he likes to read books, bounce on my knees to nursery rhymes and clap his hands to songs. In two weeks he will have his first birthday. I am happy that my husband and I can be here for this event.

Little Esther, David's cousin, was one year old in June. She walks and "reads" books to herself and goes to sleep hugging her little doll. She is a very happy little girl. When she visits me, she likes to play with my purse, my keys and some teddy bears I have in my kitchen. She is such a sweet little angel, and I miss her while I am here in India. I look forward to when I can enjoy both of my grandchildren together at the same place!

Dear sister, I wish I could also know something about your life, family and ministry. Perhaps I will meet you somewhere at a conference or seminar.



**Please join us in prayer** for some of the things I mentioned in this letter:

- The upcoming training of literacy teachers for our local churches in September.
- That soon the WF groups in all our local churches will be able to start the literacy course.
- The training of teams to adapt and translate the literacy book into other languages.
- For our sisters in Myanmar as they implement the WF program in their churches.
- For the completion of the curriculum for the pastors' wives seminars.
- For several dedicated sisters to help Sister Jeena in the head Women's Fellowship office.
- **And let's thank God** together for the printing of the literacy book in the Hindi language.

May the Lord bless you and use your life to reach others with His love.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## DIVERSE BUT ONE



FEBRUARY 2010

*Dear Sister,*

**I**t has been a while since you received my last letter. How are you doing? I trust that you seek the Lord each day and find encouragement and strength in His Word.

Time has gone by so fast, and we have already passed the first month of the new year. Since I wrote to you last time, our family has grown—my husband and I became grandparents for the third time. On the 27th of October, little Jonah was born to our son, Daniel, and his wife, Erika. We thank God for a safe delivery for Erika and for a healthy, beautiful grandson. Little Esther, Jonah's sister, is excited to have a baby brother.

About a week before Jonah was born, our daughter, Sarah, her husband, Danny, and little David came for a visit. We all had a few wonderful weeks together, and we enjoyed watching Esther and David play. They were so busy discovering the world around them, and they made us smile a lot.

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

Thank you for your prayers for our family and especially for our grandchildren. Our hearts' desire is that they will come to know the Lord early in their lives and serve Him.

My husband and I were in Kerala during most of December and January. We celebrated Christmas together with Sarah and her family. Little David was so happy about all the lights, stars and decorations of the season.

January 3–10 was our Believers Church General Assembly. More than 3,000 delegates from all the people groups and nations where we have churches came together and celebrated God's goodness and our oneness as His family. The sessions were translated into 15 languages.

Personally, what blessed me the most was to see the diversity of our church and watch how much these first-generation Christians love the Lord and one another. The wonderful diversity among our brothers and sisters came alive each evening during the cultural programs and during the rallies at the beginning and the end of our General Assembly, when everyone wore their traditional clothing. The one thing I was most grateful for were the many godly leaders the Lord has given to our church. We are indeed blessed beyond measure.

Because our church is so diverse, I thought to share a few thoughts with you about how we as Christians should treat others who are different from us. This does not just apply to a conference, but also to our life in society and in the local church.

When we meet others from different social backgrounds and cultures, we must always keep two things in mind:

**1. All people were created by God and in His image.**

That makes them all equally precious in the sight of God—so much so, that Jesus died for each one of them (see John 3:16). Social divisions such as classes and castes were invented by people in order to keep others out of their own group or to dominate each other.

**2. God created each person different from anyone else in this world because He wanted him or her to be different!**

That means you are made unique. Everything about you was specifically chosen by your loving Heavenly Father according to the plan and task He has for your life. That includes your people group, language, looks, skin color, gender, gifts and talents (see Psalm 139:13–16). There never was, and never will be, another you! And the same is true of every person you meet!

**If we keep these two things in mind, we will be able to treat others with respect and kindness.** It also will keep us from pride and from exalting ourselves above others. And it will prevent us from trying to make others into something they were not created or gifted to be. That's something parents need to remember when they raise their children.

**Being different is not the same as being wrong!**

Each culture or ethnic group has its own way of doing things, such as food preparation, dress, social interaction, family relationships, entertainment, art and the things they value. Each group believes they have the best way of life and that their view on things is the right one.

What happens when we meet others who come from a different background? Often, we automatically judge their

behavior by the values and customs we were taught. That's the reason why we look down on others, despise and reject them, question their values, criticize their behavior and dress, condemn their views and discriminate against them.

We must learn that being different is not the same as being wrong! According to God's Word, "wrong" is when we transgress God's unchanging moral laws such as "you shall not kill" or "you shall not commit adultery." There is nothing wrong in being different in the way we dress, eat or interact, unless one of these things violates God's moral laws.

**Diversity in the Body of Christ makes us richer and stronger.** This is true about the gifts of the Holy Spirit (see 1 Corinthians 12:7). It is also true about the various cultures within our church: Believers Church can broadcast the Gospel in 110 languages and work among 300 people groups only because we have brothers and sisters from each of these cultures and languages in our churches.

**We can learn from each other.** Instead of being proud and criticizing others' differences, thank God for an opportunity to learn something new about them and from them. The more you understand others, the more effective your witness for Christ will be. You will find that each group has good things worthy of learning.

**How is it possible for such a diverse church like ours to be one in Christ?** It is possible only if each of us follows what Jesus told us to do: "*A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another*" (John 13:34).

Diverse but One

Love is not proud, does not judge and knows no discrimination. Love accepts others as they are and seeks to bless and serve them, just like Jesus did when He walked on this earth.

My dear sister, let's pray for one another that above all else, we will love one another as Jesus loved us.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## FEARLESS AND AFRAID



MAY 2010

*Dear Sister,*

Last month, little David and his parents came to visit us. It was wonderful to have our family all in one place. David and Esther (his cousin) had such fun playing together. Jonah, who is now 6 months old, enjoyed watching them. All three made us laugh a lot. I thank God for giving us this time together with our children and grandchildren.

These past few days I have been reading the story of the prophet Elijah in the Old Testament. He seems to be one of those spiritual superheroes who stands far above all of us. Yet this is what the Bible says about him: *“Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain; and it did not rain on the earth for three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the sky poured rain, and the earth produced its fruit”* (James 5:17–18).

If indeed Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, what was it that made him such a spiritual giant? We find the answer in the events recorded in 1 Kings 17–19.

**Elijah didn't have an easy ministry** in the days of King Ahab and Jezebel. In fact, he was on their “most wanted list” and had to spend much of his time in hiding to save his life. The message God gave him for Ahab and Israel was not prosperity and blessing, but rebuke and severe judgment for their idolatry and wickedness. It surely wasn't easy for him to preach to a hostile audience and not get any applause or appreciation for his sermon. Yet Elijah never altered his message to please people.

**He saw incredible miracles in his ministry.** Just in these three chapters alone, we read how according to Elijah's word, it didn't rain for three years, and how it only rained again when he said it would; how ravens brought him food during the drought; how the flour and oil in the house of the widow of Zarephath didn't run out and how her dead son came back to life when Elijah prayed; how on Mount Carmel God answered Elijah's prayer with fire; and how he even outran, on foot, Ahab's chariot.

**He was bold and fearless one day, and afraid the next.** On Mount Carmel, Elijah boldly stood alone for God against King Ahab, 400 prophets of Baal and the people of Israel. He challenged them to a contest that proved to everyone that the Lord was God. And he killed all the prophets of Baal. However, the very next day when he received Jezebel's death threats, Elijah was so afraid that he ran for his life into the wilderness.

**He even wanted to quit the ministry and die.** Elijah's expectations may have been a national repentance after the Mount Carmel victory. Instead, Ahab, Jezebel and the people resumed their idol worship, and Jezebel did her best to hunt him down. Elijah got so depressed and discouraged that

he prayed, *“It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers”* (1 Kings 19:4).

**How did God respond to His fearful and discouraged servant?** God in His grace remembered that Elijah was human. The Bible tells us, *“For He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust”* (Psalm 103:14).

God sent an angel to bring the weary prophet food, so he could go on a long journey to the mountain of God. There God met with Elijah in a gentle way. He let him pour out his heart and patiently listened to all his complaints and discouragements. He didn’t interrupt him, condemn him for his weakness, preach a 10-point sermon at him or rebuke him for his wish to die.

Then what did God do? He simply allowed Elijah to be in His presence, and ultimately, He sent him out with new ministry assignments. The time Elijah spent in the presence of God renewed his strength, and he was able to resume his ministry.

God’s presence always restores us; that’s why it is so important that we come to Him daily. Please read 1 Chronicles 16:11, 27 and Isaiah 40:29–31.

What do we learn from Elijah’s story?

**To have a nature like ours means:** Elijah was not born a super human. His fear, weakness and discouragement prove it. He was a fragile vessel of clay, just like we are. That means all the boldness, power, glory and miracles we see in his life and ministry were of God and not of himself (see 2 Corinthians 4:7).

**What, then, made him a spiritual giant?** Each time this clay vessel trusted God and prayed in faith, God stood by His Word, empowered His servant, answered his prayers and performed miracles. It was Elijah’s faith in his God that made all

the difference. Elijah believed and acted on what God said, with full assurance that God would do what He said He would do.

**God still acts on faith!** As Christians, we have Jesus as our example, God's Word for our instruction and the Holy Spirit to empower us. However, God is still looking for that "Hebrews 11:1" kind of faith to act on our behalf and to fulfill His promises. Without faith we cannot please Him, nor can we expect to receive anything He promised in His Word (see Hebrews 11:6 and James 1:6–7).

My dear sister, God recorded Elijah's story of weakness and faith for us, so we will know what incredible things God can do with even the most fragile vessels of clay—when we believe.

**God is our example** for how to deal with Christians who are discouraged and weary. Deal with them gently, with grace. *Listen* patiently and with compassion. Let there be no condemnation or 10-point sermon. Take them with you into God's presence and help them to wait upon the Lord until their strength is renewed.



**Let us pray together for:**

- Recruitment of committed students for our Bible colleges.
- Teams working on translating and adapting the literacy book in seven languages.

I am grateful to God that you love the Lord and seek to serve Him with all your heart.

Your sister in Christ,  
*Gisela*

## THE VALUE OF DIFFICULTIES



AUGUST 2010

*Dear Sister,*

This letter comes to you right after my return from India. In July I had the privilege to be part of our Women's Fellowship leaders' seminar in Kerala and then to travel with Sister Jeena to Sri Lanka for a training program for Women's Fellowship district teams. Both seminars went very well, and we are excited and encouraged by all the good things the Lord is doing through the Women's Fellowship program.

A few days ago I read Psalm 119, and I would like to share some thoughts with you.

**The writer of Psalm 119 earnestly prayed to God to teach him His statutes:**

*Blessed art Thou, O Lord; teach me Thy statutes (v. 12).*

*Open my eyes, that I may behold wonderful things from Thy law (v. 18).*

*Teach me Thy statutes. Make me understand the way of Thy precepts (vv. 26–27).*

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

*Remove the false way from me, and graciously grant me Thy law (v. 29).*

*Give me understanding, that I may observe Thy law, and keep it with all my heart (v. 34).*

*Teach me good discernment and knowledge (v. 66).*

The law, statutes and precepts are the commands, principles and guidelines God has given us in His Word to live by. If we follow them, our lives will be blessed: They protect us from wrong and harmful ways, and they guide us in the path of righteousness.

**God answered the psalmist's prayers by letting him encounter afflictions.** When the psalmist prayed, he may have thought God would answer him by giving him a special revelation through an angel, a dream or a vision like some of the prophets had. But none of these things happened. Instead, God allowed him to go through afflictions—this means sufferings, problems, pain, difficulties and hardships.

At first, he may have been confused and wondered why God did not prevent these afflictions from coming his way. After all, he loved God and was seeking to learn His ways and serve Him with all his heart. Should that not qualify him to be blessed by God and receive the very best from Him in his daily life?

**But then he discovered that these afflictions were the very best God allowed him to have for a season, because they taught him the very things he so much wanted to learn:**

## The Value of Difficulties

- Through the trials he faced, he learned to search out God’s promises and to cling to them (vv. 49, 50, 52).
- He learned to walk by faith and trust God to fulfill His Word (vv. 107, 116).
- He discovered how he could keep from sin and walk in purity (vv. 9, 11).
- He experienced that God was his hiding place and his shield when he could not protect himself (v. 114).
- He found out that God’s Word gave him light for his path, understanding and wisdom (vv. 98–100, 104, 105, 130).
- He learned that God was good, faithful and righteous (vv. 68, 137–138, 142).
- He learned that his greatest treasure was God’s Word, and that all of God’s Word was truth (vv. 127, 142, 160).

And this man experienced that God was faithful to bring him safely through every single storm and affliction he described in this psalm.

**When he realized what he had learned, he was thankful to God for the afflictions through which He led him.** He told God: “*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word. . . . It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes*” (Psalm 119:67, 71).

He looked at his life before and after he faced all those difficulties and sufferings, and he came to the conclusion that going through those trials was well worth it. They taught him important lessons that he may not have learned any other way. Most of all, before those afflictions he so easily went off

course, but now he was able to obey God's Word and stay on the right path.

We, too, ask God to teach us His ways, but we seldom appreciate when He answers by leading us through trials. Why?

**1. Because we expect God to teach us through one earthly blessing after another.** This may include getting an A+ in our exams, having the best house, job and car or making a lot of money so all our dreams can come true. There is no doubt that God is kind to us and He blesses us with many good things. *However, we rarely seem to learn deep spiritual lessons and obedience through an ongoing series of earthly blessings.* The children of Israel didn't, though it was definitely God's first choice for them to hear His Word and keep it forever and thus avoid all bitter consequences. We seem to have the same struggle with obedience that they did.

**2. Because we often don't understand the value of learning through difficulties.** If you look back at your Christian life, you will discover that you learned more through a short time of struggles and trials than in 10 years of an "easy life." For example:

- The persecution and rejection you faced from your family when you received Christ caused you to learn to cling to the Lord for strength, comfort and help. It also caused you to learn to trust the Lord for your future.
- When you were misunderstood and falsely accused, it caused you to learn to commit yourself into the hand of God and allow Him to defend you in His own time.

There is something about suffering that teaches and changes us. God used the same teaching method for His Son when He came to earth, though He was without sin: “*Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered*” (Hebrews 5:8). And Philippians 2:7–8 tells us that Christ’s obedience went from laying down all His glory in heaven until His death on the cross.

**3. Because we don’t recognize that it is God’s love that doesn’t give up on us.** God could easily let us go astray if we didn’t abide by His Word. Yet it is His great love for us that uses afflictions so we will learn to keep His Word and live.

As parents, we love our children in a similar way. If our 3-year-old son runs across the street by himself, a car may hit him. If our words have no effect to restrain him, we discipline him. It hurts momentarily, but it teaches him to abide by our command. We love him enough to “afflict” him to save his life.

The writer of Psalm 119 recognized God’s love behind the afflictions he faced. That’s why he wrote, “*In faithfulness Thou hast afflicted me*” (v. 75). If you can look back on the afflictions God has led you through and see His faithfulness, then you, too, will become thankful for the work He has accomplished in your life.

Dear sister, there is a lot more we need to consider about afflictions in order to have a good balance on this subject. We will do so in my next letter.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## GOD KNOWS WHAT HE IS DOING



NOVEMBER 2010

*Dear Sister,*

Since I wrote to you last time, I spoke at several women's retreats and visited our ministry offices in England and Germany. It was so nice to meet our brothers and sisters who work so diligently to help reach Asia with the love of Christ.

Last month, Sister Jeena wrote me the good news that the Women's Fellowship literacy books have been completed and published in seven new languages. Let us thank God together for making this possible. Soon thousands of our illiterate believers will be able to read God's Word. Please pray for the training of all the literacy teachers in those languages.

In August, I sent you the first part of a lesson on affliction. Here is the second part:

In our last lesson we learned about a man who had trouble staying on the right path. When he asked God to teach him His ways, God led him through afflictions. In the end, this man was

thankful that he was afflicted because it taught him to abide by the Word of God. He also recognized that it was God's faithfulness and love that led him through this experience.

We, too, can trust God when we go through afflictions.

**God does not create the afflictions we face in this fallen and corrupt world!** He is *not* the author of evil. The devil is. When Adam sinned, he and the whole human race suffered the consequences. That's why people in this world face problems, sickness, tragedies and death. We also suffer because of the ungodliness, unrighteousness and injustice of world systems as well as individuals' corruption, perversion and slavery to every kind of sin.

**As believers, we must not fear when God permits afflictions to come our way.** The Bible teaches us that we have a loving Heavenly Father who does not enjoy torturing or persecuting us for His entertainment! We are His beloved children, and He deeply cares for us. He hurts when we hurt, and He is near to the brokenhearted and compassionate toward the afflicted and suffering.

The afflictions we face as children of God are carefully measured by God.

**They cannot come without His permission.** We see this very clearly in Job's life. We read that God had put a hedge of protection around this man, and the Enemy could not touch him, his family or his possessions. Even when God permitted afflictions to come his way, He set definite limits that Satan could not cross (see Job 1 and 2).

**They are temporary afflictions.** Job's afflictions were for a limited time, and so were Joseph's sufferings as a slave in

Egypt and David's struggles because of King Saul. The writer of Psalm 119 clearly states: "*Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Thy word*" (v. 67). The words "was" and "now" tell us that his afflictions passed. Even if someone's affliction continues until death, we must remember that death marks the end of all suffering for a child of God. From the perspective of eternity, all our earthly afflictions are temporary.

**God uses our temporary earthly afflictions to teach us His ways.** The intention of the devil is always that the afflictions we face in this world would cause us to walk away from God (see Job 1:11 and 2:5). God, on the other hand, uses the very same afflictions to draw us closer to His heart, strengthen our faith and cause us to know Him in a deeper way.

The Bible is full of incredible truths that people learned through difficult times:

- **Job** declared by faith: "*As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives*" (Job 19:25). After his encounter with God, he said: "*I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear; but now my eye sees Thee*" (Job 42:5).
- **Joseph** told his brothers: "*Now do not be grieved or angry with yourselves, because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life*" (Genesis 45:5).
- **David** wrote: "*For by Thee I can run upon a troop; and by my God I can leap over a wall*" (Psalm 18:29).
- **The writer of Psalm 119** concluded: "*It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Thy statutes*" (v. 71).

**We can trust God 100 percent that He knows what He is doing and that He does not make a single mistake.** How can we be sure? There is so much we don't

understand when we encounter suffering and pain. Often we ask, how could a loving and all-powerful God let this terrible thing happen to an innocent child or to a dedicated believer?

When we have no answers, we must always go back to the basic things we know for sure about God:

- God is love (see 1 John 4:8).
- God is good (see Psalm 136:1).
- God never changes (see Hebrews 13:8).

He always will be love and He always will be good. This has to be enough for us until we reach heaven. Then our perspective will be different, and all our questions will be answered. Only God knows and understands everything about afflictions. We are not God!

**We must be careful not to judge others when they go through suffering!** If someone is afflicted, we cannot simply say, “This sister suffers because she didn’t learn to obey God. Now God has to teach her the hard way. She brought this on herself.” Remember, there are a million other reasons why someone may go through emotional or physical pain, such as an injury, a child going astray, a tragic death of a loved one or the effects of old age.

The disciples judged a blind man wrongly, thinking his condition was the punishment for his or his parents’ sin. Jesus told them that his blindness was “*in order that the works of God might be displayed in him*”(John 9:3).

**We must not give wrong advice to someone who suffers.** We will cause a lot of confusion and damage if we wrongly evaluate someone’s afflictions and then tell the person, “It’s your own fault that it takes so long for you to be

healed. The faster you learn your lesson, the sooner your afflictions will be over.”

**We must not deliberately bring afflictions upon ourselves or others for the sake of learning spiritual truth.** In many religions, people inflict physical and emotional suffering upon themselves in the hope of gaining spirituality. Nowhere in the Bible does God ask us to torture our bodies, forsake normal life and deprive ourselves of any joy so we can become spiritual. If we do these things, we only damage ourselves and others.

We must never conclude that if God teaches us through afflictions, then it would be wrong to interfere and ease someone’s pain. This kind of faulty thinking would prevent us from alleviating any pain and suffering in this world. It would cause us to not use doctors and medicine to get well, set broken bones, feed the hungry, save a child from drowning, comfort people in their distress, stop a crime, end a war or even pray for those who suffer. This is an entirely wrong and unbiblical way of thinking.

Wherever Jesus found suffering, He responded to it with the Good News of God’s love, healing, deliverance and restoration. He fulfilled the scripture:

*The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to proclaim release to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, to set free those who are downtrodden, to proclaim the favorable year of the Lord (Luke 4:18–19).*

On the cross, He bore not only our sin, but also our sorrows, grief and sickness (see Isaiah 53:4–6). When Jesus

LET ME WALK WITH YOU

sent His disciples out for ministry, He commanded them to respond to suffering just like He did (see Matthew 10:8).

**In conclusion, God is good!** Though He uses the afflictions we face as human beings to teach us spiritual truth, at the same time, He is also our Healer, Deliverer and Savior.

Dear sister, this letter became longer than usual in order to conclude our lesson. May the Lord bless you and keep you close to Himself.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

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## GOING FORWARD



JANUARY 2011

*Dear Sister,*

I trust you experienced God's blessing at Christmas and for the start of the new year. Our family celebrated Christmas together. We had a wonderful time with our children and grandchildren. Esther, David and Jonah entertained us with their play, words and accomplishments. We are so grateful for God's love and care for our family. Thank you for your prayers on our behalf. It is our desire that God may continue to use our lives to serve His people.

For the new year, a scripture from Paul's letter to the Philippian Christians stands out to me: "*But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead . . .*" (Philippians 3:13).

**Paul was talking about God's goal for his life.** Jesus had saved him and taken hold of him for a specific purpose and calling: knowing Jesus. Paul said in his letter that he had not yet reached this goal. But he was going to pursue it with all his might. In fact, he purposed to forget *all* the things that were

past and reach forward to what lay ahead. He even said that this would be the only goal he would pursue (see Philippians 3:10–14).

**The Apostle Paul’s ministry was the result of truly getting to know Jesus.** Each of his letters and instructions for the Church came out of this deep relationship. He became so close to the Lord that he understood His heart.

In turn, God was able to fulfill everything He had planned for Paul’s life on earth. The apostle himself wrote shortly before he died as a martyr: *“I have finished the course”* (2 Timothy 4:7).

**What made it possible for Paul to go forward with God?** It was his decision to forget what lay behind! There was so much in Paul’s past that could have held him back. There was his prestigious ancestry, his superior education, his perfect report card as a Pharisee and his zeal for the law. These things gave him the highest respect of his nation. However, when he became a Christian, he gave up all those honors. And then there was his ruthless persecution of the Church, for which God had forgiven him. Paul recognized that if he was going to go forward with God, he had to make a choice to leave all of his past behind—the good and the bad.

**God has a plan for this new year for each of us.** There are specific things God wants to do through our lives. Even if we consider ourselves insignificant, we are an important part of God’s plan for our generation. God needs for us to go forward with Him to build His kingdom.

**However, we cannot go forward as long as we are chained to the past.** All of us wish to grow in our Christian life and to be used of God. But as long as we hold on to something in our past, or something in our past holds on to us, we

wear a chain that pulls us back each time we try to take a step forward with Jesus.

Perhaps you find your chain in one of these examples:

- The high caste or importance of your family that holds you back from becoming a servant of all.
- The low caste or poverty of your background that makes you feel unaccepted by others.
- Your college education that causes you to consider yourself more important than others.
- Your lack of education that makes you feel inferior.
- Disappointment because you failed to accomplish the goals you set for yourself last year.
- Someone you loved deeply hurt your feelings and you are unable to get past your pain.
- Your grief over a loss in your life (the death of a loved one, a lost friendship, finances, job, reputation, health) and you blame God and others for your loss.
- A sister in the church whom you trusted betrayed you and you are unable to forgive and love her.
- Something bad happened in your life and you can't understand why God allowed it.
- You prayed for a specific matter and God did not answer your prayer.
- Last year you tried to overcome a temptation or sin in your life and you didn't succeed.

**If we don't leave these chains behind,** we will go round and round in a circle. And by the end of 2011, we will discover that we could not even take one step forward with God.

**How do we get rid of our chains?** Just like the Apostle Paul, we must make a decision to forget what is past:

1. We must stop clinging to positions, honors and accomplishments that will hinder us from picking up the cross and following Jesus.
2. We also must leave our failures and losses in the past. We cannot make one thing undone by reliving it, mourning about it or blaming others for it.

As children of God, we have received God's complete forgiveness for *all* our failures. And He already has given us His grace and the power of the Holy Spirit to forgive others who wronged us and leave all the chains of our past behind.

**How do we go forward with God?** Just like the Apostle Paul, we must focus on what lies ahead and not look back. We must pursue knowing Jesus, and out of this relationship with the Lord will come our ministry, our usefulness to God and the fulfillment of our calling.

**What if the past tries to come back?** Practice this:

- Right away, cast down any thoughts and imaginations that will bring back past failures and griefs.
- Actively refuse to dwell on anything from the past you have left behind.
- Immediately replace fear, doubts and hurts with words of faith from Scripture.
- Commit to God the things you don't understand about your life. Leave them there and trust Him.
- Continually fill and occupy your mind with the things of God; then you have no place for the past.

Going Forward

**Determine to go forward with God in 2011.** My dear sister, what are the things that chain you to the past and hinder you from going forward? It's not worth holding on to any of it. Cut the chains to your past and experience the freedom to reach for the things that lie ahead. I want you to know that God's power and grace are sufficient for you to be more than a conqueror in 2011!

May the Lord bless you and surround you with His love.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## BECAUSE HE HAS RISEN



APRIL 2011

*Dear Sister,*

**T**his month we celebrate Easter, the day when our Lord Jesus rose from the dead.

The resurrection is incredibly important for our Christian faith. Without it, we would not even know if Jesus' death on the cross was enough for our redemption. But now that He has risen from the dead, we should be the most joyful people on earth, for our hope and faith are in the living Savior!

Let's look together at Christ's resurrection and what it means to us as believers.

**Jesus' resurrection is God the Father's approval.** It tells us that the price Jesus paid on the cross was indeed enough for our redemption. God raised Jesus up and, through Him, made salvation freely available for us.

*The God of our fathers raised up Jesus. . . . He is the one whom God exalted to His right hand as a Prince and a Savior, to grant repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins (Acts 5:30–31).*

**It's the fulfillment of prophecy.** King David spoke these prophetic words about the resurrection of the Messiah: *“For Thou wilt not abandon my soul to Sheol; neither wilt Thou allow Thy Holy One to undergo decay”* (Psalm 16:10).

Jesus told His disciples that He would rise from death: *“The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and the scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again”* (Mark 8:31).

**The resurrection proves that Jesus is indeed the Son of God.** After Martha's brother, Lazarus, had died and was in the tomb for four days, Jesus told her: *“I am the resurrection and the life”* (John 11:25).

And when Jesus talked about laying His life down for us, He said: *“I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again”* (John 10:17–18).

Only God Himself can say this and back up His words by raising Lazarus from the dead—and later, by walking out of the tomb alive Himself, after being crucified and dead for three days.

**Jesus' resurrection proclaims His victory over death.** After Adam sinned, the entire human race was subjected to death. Throughout all generations, no one could escape death or come back from the grave on his own. Even those few who were brought back through a miracle of God would die again after a short time.

But when Jesus rose from the tomb, He defeated death for all of us for all eternity. Now death cannot hold us in its power any longer. We live because He lives.

## Because He Has Risen

*Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? (1 Corinthians 15:54–55).*

*Jesus . . . abolished death, and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel (2 Timothy 1:10).*

**The resurrection gives us the assurance that we too will rise again.** Jesus is our resurrection and our life. He said about us: *“He who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die”* (John 11:25–26). That means when we leave this world and we are with the Lord, we will never have to face death again.

**It tells us that everything else Jesus said about us being with Him is the truth.** Jesus promised us: *“In My Father’s house are many dwelling places. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. . . . I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also”* (John 14:2–3).

**The resurrection sets Christianity apart from any other religion.** Out of all the founders of any religion, only Jesus rose from the dead. His grave is empty. He is alive. If we call upon His name, He saves, delivers and heals us, and He answers our prayers.

**It calms our fear of death.** For a believer, death is just the moment he walks as through a door right into the presence of the Lord. The Apostle Paul wrote: *“I . . . prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord”* (2 Corinthians 5:8).

**The resurrection lets us look forward to the glory that awaits us.** *“Things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love Him”* (1 Corinthians 2:9).

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My dear sister, I hope this reflection on the resurrection of our Lord fills your heart with joy and comfort. Soon we will see the Lord face-to-face.



**Take some time and thank the Lord for:**

- His amazing love for you.
- His willingness to suffer and die for your sin.
- The hope you have because He is your resurrection and life.
- His promise that He will come again, so you can always be with Him.

May the Lord bless you with His peace.

In Christ's love, your sister,

*Gisela*

## HE CREATED YOU FOR YOUR OWN TIME



SEPTEMBER 2011

*Dear Sister,*

**I**t's now been a few months since you received my last letter. I didn't forget you, but I was recovering from hip surgery. Thank you so much for all your prayers. God answered, and after more than three months, I am able to put full weight on both legs. I still have to improve in strength and ability to get around before I can travel overseas, but by God's grace and diligent exercise on my part, I believe that I will be able to do so by next year. Please keep on praying for my full recovery.

In this letter, I would like to share with you a few thoughts on God's call to serve Him in our lives. I have talked to some of my sisters who have expressed fear that God may one day require sacrifices or a ministry lifestyle from them that they neither desire nor feel strong enough to live.

**Where does this fear come from?** Perhaps we read about the persecution of the Christians in the first century. Many were burned alive, crucified or thrown to wild animals.

Or we heard of the immense suffering of pioneer missionaries like Adoniram Judson, who had to bury his wife and children on a hostile and disease-ridden mission field. Or we remembered the story of Corrie ten Boom, who was imprisoned in one of the worst Nazi concentration camps during World War II.

Then we met brothers and sisters serving in our own ministry who had been persecuted, beaten and imprisoned for sharing their faith. Others were called by God away from a good life to serve in a slum, a remote tribal area or a travel ministry that caused their families to be often alone.

In the end, we compared ourselves with those we read about or met and concluded, "I could never do or endure what they did." Then fear set in and told us, "But what if God is asking me to do the exact same thing?"

Before we shed tears of fear, we need to know a few things about God:

**God is doing something new with every generation.** God has a definite timeline for this earth and for mankind. There was a beginning in the Garden of Eden, and an end is outlined in the book of Revelation. Along this timeline, God has planned many events to occur to fulfill His purpose. For example, it was God's plan for Jacob and his family to go to Egypt during a seven-year famine. Four hundred years later, it was God's time for Israel to leave Egypt and go to their Promised Land. Throughout the Bible, we read statements like: "*When the time was fulfilled . . .*" That simply means that God is not going backward in time, but forward. He is not repeating the old stories over again, but He is doing new things in every generation.

## He Created You for Your Own Time

In the ministry also, each generation will face its own unique opportunities, challenges and difficulties in serving God. You must see yourself as part of His present timetable.

**God specifically chose and prepared you for your own time.** The same was true for Abraham, Moses, Daniel, Judson and all the others who were called to serve before us. The Bible says that King David, “*after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep*” (Acts 13:36).

According to His specific plan, God chose when each of His servants would be born and in which generation they should serve. Accordingly He prepared, gifted and empowered them to be able to fulfill His purposes.

My dear sister, this means you, too, are specifically chosen by God and prepared for this present generation. You lack nothing that He is not able and willing to supply to fulfill His purpose through you. Don't wish you could have served God in the first century or in the time of Hudson Taylor or 50 years ago. You are most effective and gifted for this time in which you live!

**God does not compare you with anyone, or your calling with someone else's.** He didn't call you to be the Apostle Paul or Amy Carmichael or Sister Mary. He already has one of them. God wants you to be *you* to serve your generation. Your calling is intentionally different, and so are your talents, skills, upbringing, language, education and everything about you. You bring the most honor to God and bear the most fruit for His kingdom if you do what He created, gifted and called you to be.

But doesn't Paul say to follow his example? Yes, he does, but he doesn't mean we should wear his style of sandals or try

to be shipwrecked in order to be as holy and dedicated as he was. He only asks us to imitate his faith, service, commitment to Jesus and faithfulness until death—in the context of our own calling and in our own generation.

**God’s grace is just as sufficient for us to live and serve Him in the 21st century as it was in the first!** Paul was so strong and fearless in his ministry that we can’t imagine he ever felt weak like we do. Please read 2 Corinthians 12:7–10 and you will be surprised at how much he was in need of God’s grace. Jesus told him, *“My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness”* (v. 9).

The weakness Paul mentioned and prayed three times about was most probably a physical problem that made his life and ministry more difficult. It was something beyond his control—and something God permitted to continue. There were many other things beyond Paul’s control as well: hatred and persecution from the Jews and Gentiles, imprisonments, beatings, the stoning, the storm and shipwreck, dangers on the road, false brothers, prison guards, the kings and rulers who questioned him, the Roman soldiers who escorted him to Italy, the soldier he was chained to and the Roman emperor who decided over his life and death.

Were these things not major hindrances or “weaknesses” for his ministry? For all these adversities, Paul needed God’s grace to be sufficient and Christ’s power to take over. And it was so. As a result, in spite of all these “weaknesses,” Paul was able to keep the faith and finish the course.

God will do the very same for you. His grace will be sufficient for your specific calling and your 21st-century trials and weaknesses. Therefore, you must not be afraid of what God

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wants to do with your life, the difficulties you will encounter, the sacrifices you are asked to make and the victories you are called to win. When you are the weakest in yourself, then His grace will be totally sufficient to carry you through, and Christ's power will take over and accomplish the impossible. And then, in the sight of everybody, all glory will go to Jesus.

My dear sister, may you serve the Lord with great joy.

In Christ's love,

*Gisela*

## THE GREATEST REASON TO CELEBRATE



DECEMBER 2011

*Dear Sister,*

**I**t's almost Christmas, my favorite celebration of the year. I have so many wonderful memories of celebrating this holiday growing up, and later with my husband and children, and now with my grandchildren. Perhaps you don't have the same Christmas traditions as I have, but I hope you will make Christmas a very special day in your home and in your church.

I would like to share with you a few thoughts about why Christmas is the greatest reason for God's people to celebrate with great joy and a thankful heart.

Mankind had no hope left after sin separated them from their Creator.  
Adam and Eve had disobeyed God and had to leave the Garden of Eden.  
Sin had cut their and their descendants' relationship with God.  
There was no way back.

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

They lived in terrible darkness.  
From this time on, mankind was  
subject to the consequences of sin:  
spiritual darkness, sickness and death.  
The further they drifted away from the Living God,  
the darker and more corrupt their lives became.  
Idolatry, injustice, oppression, hatred, greed, dishonesty,  
slavery, bloodshed and war marked the path of humanity.

Satan had power over them.  
When mankind chose to disobey God,  
Satan gained power over them.  
He afflicted them with every kind of evil—  
deception, suffering, addiction, bondage  
and even demon possession.

They could not save themselves.  
People throughout the centuries  
tried to find forgiveness of sin  
and to free themselves from their  
sinful nature and Satan's power, but they failed.  
There was no escape.

They would be eternally separated from God.  
The tragedy was that their separation  
from God would not end with death.  
They would go into eternity without their sins forgiven,  
and they would end up in hell together  
with Satan and his demons.

In the midst of all this, God promised to send them a Savior.  
God, however, did not forget us, because He loved us.  
He promised Adam and Eve and  
all their descendants that one day  
He would send us a Savior who would take our sin away

## The Greatest Reason to Celebrate

and restore us back to our Heavenly Father.  
He repeated this promise through many prophets  
so we would have hope.

For thousands of years, mankind  
was waiting for this Savior to come.  
All those who put their faith in God's promise  
were eagerly waiting and praying for our Savior to come.  
They trusted God's Word that the Savior  
would take the sin of all mankind away,  
starting from Adam and Eve up to the last person who  
would ever be born in this world.

Finally, 2,000 years ago, our Savior came to this earth.  
God sent Him as a little baby.  
He is God's greatest gift to you and me.  
God loved us so much to give us His only Son  
to die for our sin:

*"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son,  
that whoever believes in Him should not perish,  
but have eternal life" (John 3:16).*

Now we can have salvation by believing in Jesus.  
All our sins are forgiven.  
Satan's power over our life is broken.  
All our bondage is gone.  
Our relationship with our Creator is restored.  
We become children of God.  
We will go to heaven when we die.  
We will live forever in God's presence.

All this is the meaning of Christmas!  
Christmas made all the difference for mankind.  
That's why we celebrate.

LET ME WALK WITH YOU

When we celebrate Christmas:  
We thank God for Jesus our Savior.  
We proclaim to the world His coming.  
We celebrate God's amazing love.

Christmas is the very best time to tell others about Jesus.  
People who don't know Jesus  
wonder why we are so joyful at Christmas.  
They are curious why we sing Christmas carols,  
put up stars and give gifts to each other and to the poor.  
They will be eager to listen to the Christmas story  
and learn about God's love for them.  
Let's tell them!



**Let's pray together** for all the Christmas programs and outreaches of our churches and the Women's Fellowships. Let's believe that thousands of people will come to know Jesus as their Savior as a result.

My dear sister, I wish you God's blessing and joy for this wonderful Christmas season and for the new year. May God's love become real to you as you reflect on the gift of our Savior.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## TAKE YOUR PLACE



FEBRUARY 2012

*Dear Sister,*

**T**his is already the second month of the new year. I trust that you are excited about what God will do with and through your life this year. After all, He chose you to serve Him.

As I write this letter, my family is in India; they went for the leaders' meeting in January and the Kerala convention in February. This time I did not go with them. I still need to gain more strength before I travel overseas, but I am confident that I will be able to travel later on this year.

In this letter, I want to write about how important you are for God's kingdom and His plan for this world.

**The Lord Jesus died for the sin of every person ever born on this earth:** *"For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life"* (John 3:16).

**Jesus told His disciples to take the Gospel to all nations:** *"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations"*

(Matthew 28:19). They went and preached the Gospel in Israel, the Middle East, Europe and Asia.

**He empowered His messengers with the Holy Spirit:** *“But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). The power the disciples received enabled them to preach the Gospel along with signs and miracles and to be bold witnesses in spite of opposition, persecution and martyrdom.

**They all are gone!** All the heroes of faith we read about in the Bible are dead: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, David, Elijah . . . as well as the apostles and the disciples of the first century. So are the saints, reformers, great preachers and missionaries of the last 1,900 years: St. Augustine, Martin Luther, John Wesley, Hudson Taylor, Adoniram Judson and Amy Carmichael. And some of the great men and women of the 20th century are very close to leaving us: Billy Graham, for example, is 95.

What does it mean that all these great men and women of God have gone to be with the Lord?

**It means we are the only ones God has left on this earth to reach this generation!** Please take some time and think deeply about this. God is actually counting on you and me to reach the lost millions of our 21st century with the Gospel before they die. *We are it!*

**It means we need to take our place.** There is a definite task God wants us to fulfill in His plan, whether we are in full-time ministry or not. If that were not so, we would not have been born in this century.

*But what if you are not ready?* Perhaps you look at yourself and you feel small, unqualified, fearful and weak in your walk with God and in your witness. You barely make it yourself as a Christian and can't imagine how you could possibly disciple and teach others how to have victory over sin, overcome temptation, have a consistent walk with God, love others as God loves them, exercise faith and be faithful in all things.

It is very true—you cannot lead and help others in what you yourself have not succeeded. Only what you have become through the work of the Holy Spirit is life, which you can pass on to others. If you are not ready to take your place in God's plan, don't make excuses. Get serious today about getting prepared and ready.

**It means we need to arm ourselves with the same things these heroes of faith and the apostles had:** God's Word, a Christlike character, faith, power, love, faithfulness and endurance.

**1. Know God's Word.** There is no shortcut to knowing God's Word other than to study, meditate on and practice it. *"This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it"* (Joshua 1:8).

**2. Seek to become more like Jesus.** It is God's will that we take on the character of Christ. This starts by renewing our mind through what God's Word teaches (see Romans 12:2), receiving correction and allowing God to mold us into the image of Christ (see Romans 8:29).

**3. Develop faith that can receive from God.** Faith comes by hearing God's Word and allowing it to take root in our hearts (see Romans 10:17). Our faith grows not by theory,

but by opportunities to practice. Keep this in mind when you encounter situations for which you have no solutions.

**4. Be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 1:8).** It's not for a few privileged Christians, but for all who believe in Jesus. *"You shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far off, as many as the Lord our God shall call to Himself"* (Acts 2:38–39). Jesus told us that all we need to do is ask and we will receive (see Luke 11:9–13).

**5. Grow in love until you can love like Jesus.** We experienced God's love because it was poured out within our hearts (see Romans 5:5). Divine love is part of the fruit of the Spirit who lives in us (see Galatians 5:22). That fruit grows in our hearts when we stay connected to Jesus and His life flows through us (see John 15:5).

**6. Become faithful in all things—even until death (see 1 Timothy 3:11; Revelation 2:10).** Faithfulness is part of the fruit of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22). It takes time to develop and a commitment to abide in Jesus. Practice by being faithful in small things: being on time, keeping your word, doing your best when you perform a task, speaking without pretense and being honest in even the smallest things.

**7. Develop endurance.** Endurance is gained through tests and trials we go through. *"Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance"* (James 1:2–3).

My dear sister, perhaps you noticed that getting ready to be used by God does not come cheaply or by accident. It comes by giving ourselves over to Him fully, without any plans to walk off when the training gets hard.



**If we don't take our place in God's plan, we will lose our generation.** God has no other plan than using you and me. Let us pray for one another that in this year of 2012 we will rise up, pay the price of becoming useful to God and take our place in His plan.

I love you in Jesus,

*Gisela*

## EXPERT HELP FOR OUR PRAYERS



APRIL 2012

*Dear Sister,*

**H**ow are you doing in your personal life and in your ministry? I wish I could visit you and learn what's on your heart. Maybe you are full of joy over the good things the Lord has done for you, or perhaps you feel discouraged because of the struggles you are going through.

God knows every detail of your life, and He wants to encourage you daily with His Word. In this letter, I would like to share with you some scriptures about prayer that should make you glad every time you think about them.

**The Bible exhorts us to pray continually and about everything:**

*Pray without ceasing* (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

*Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God* (Philippians 4:6).

**It also says that we must pray in faith; otherwise, we will not receive anything:**

*But let him ask in faith without any doubting, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea driven and tossed by the wind. For let not that man expect that he will receive anything from the Lord (James 1:6–7).*

**However, there are times we don't know how to pray for a difficult situation. For example:**

- A son has gone astray and lives in rebellion to God and his parents, and they don't know how to rescue him.
- A husband quits working, drinks and mistreats his wife and children. He doesn't care about the tears and suffering of his family and won't accept any advice.
- An old grandmother is near death, and her family has no idea if God wants to take her home or raise her up.
- A young woman is treated poorly by her in-laws, and she is discouraged and hurt and doesn't know how to change the situation.
- We face opposition and problems in our ministry, and we are unable to stop the harassment.

Yes, we pray for things like these in faith, asking God to intervene and to do a miracle—but only in a general way. So often we can't pray specifically because our knowledge about the situation is limited. Also, we have no idea how God wants to deal with it.

**Did you know God already has provided someone to pray the right prayer on our behalf?**

## Expert Help for Our Prayers

*In the same way the Spirit also helps our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words; and He who searches the hearts knows what the mind of the Spirit is, because He intercedes for the saints according to the will of God (Romans 8:26–27).*

**This scripture means:** When we got saved, the Holy Spirit came to live in us. He knows the difficult situations we face and the hurt and sorrow we feel. He also understands the limitations of our prayers and knows the will of God for each situation we encounter. So when we pray, He strengthens our weak prayers by adding His prayer to ours. He does this by interceding for us and our problem according to the specific will of God.

This is good news for us, because there is a promise in the Bible that says:

*This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him (1 John 5:14–15).*

### **There is someone else who always prays for us:**

*Christ Jesus is He who died, yes, rather who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who also intercedes for us (Romans 8:34).*

*He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25).*

After Jesus went to heaven and took His place at the right hand of God, He didn't forget us and our struggles. Even right now, He continues to pray for us.

**We are so blessed that both the Holy Spirit and Jesus intercede for us.** It's like our Heavenly Father gives us a double assurance that our needs and prayers are presented before Him in a perfect way and that He will surely answer us according to His perfect will.

Because we have such wonderful and expert help for our prayers, let us pray faithfully and with courage for the needs of others as well as for our own.



**Today, let us pray together:**

- For our recent Bible college graduates who have gone to their mission fields. Ask the Lord to watch over their lives and open doors for them to share the Gospel.
- For the new class of our Sisters of Compassion that started a few weeks ago. Ask the Lord to prepare them for their ministry among the poor and needy.

My dear sister, may God's love and grace be with you always.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## GROWING DEEPER



JULY 2012

*Dear Sister,*

On June 4, we had the joy of welcoming Hannah, our fourth grandchild, to our family and to this world. Our daughter, Sarah, her husband, Danny, and little David came to stay with us before Hannah was born. We are deeply grateful to God that Sarah and Hannah are doing well. Hannah is so sweet and beautiful, and her brother David (3½ years old), cousin Esther (4) and cousin Jonah (2½) love her a lot. David likes to hold his little sister, sing songs to her and show her his picture books.

By the time you get this letter, I will be leaving for India. It's my first trip overseas since I had my operation a year ago. Thank you for praying for me. God answered, and I recovered and gained enough strength to be able to travel again. I am looking forward to seeing our Women's Fellowship leaders and being with them for our training seminar in August.

In this letter, I would like to share with you a few thoughts from the closing of a letter the Apostle Peter wrote to believers:

“. . . *but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*” (2 Peter 3:18).

**The apostle desired for these Christians to grow much deeper in their relationship with Jesus than they already had.** We look to these first-century Christians as our examples and heroes of faith, and we wish to become like them. They loved Jesus, were filled with the Holy Spirit, fearlessly proclaimed Christ, had amazing faith, experienced incredible miracles and were willing to suffer and die for the Lord. If these Christians still needed to grow, what about us?

**We often think and act as if we have already become all God expects us to be.** Perhaps we have been Christians for 10 or 20 years and know enough of God’s Word to teach others. We may have experienced answers to our prayers and are successful in our ministry. And when we go to church or a conference, we hear nothing that we didn’t already know. If you are in this category, the Apostle Peter’s exhortation is for you: “*Grow.*”

We are to grow in two specific areas: “. . . *in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.*”

**Grow in the grace of Jesus:** Grace is favor we don’t deserve. It is rooted in God’s amazing love for us, the depth of which we can only begin to understand when we look at the price He paid at the cross for our redemption.

Jesus introduced us to the grace of God when He came to earth and died for our sin (see Romans 5:2). We are saved by grace, are kept by grace and will go to heaven by grace. Everything we receive from God comes to us by grace, including our calling to serve Him. All we are and all we accomplish for the Lord on this earth is by grace alone (see 1 Corinthians 15:10).

If you want to grow in the grace of Jesus, you must:

- Walk in humility: “*God . . . gives grace to the humble*” (James 4:6).
- Receive God’s mercy and grace for your life on earth (see Hebrews 4:16).
- Allow God to place you in situations where you must depend on His grace to get through (see 2 Corinthians 12:9).
- Extend grace to others.

**Grow in the knowledge of Jesus:** This scripture doesn’t tell us to grow in knowing *about* Jesus but in knowing Him. We can know all the Old Testament prophecies and New Testament facts and teachings about Jesus and still know Him only a little, or not at all. The only way we can really get to know Jesus is to spend time with Him on a very personal level. We need to walk with Him, talk with Him and be with Him wherever He is—in good times, in ministry and in suffering.

Physically, this was only possible for the disciples and those who lived in the time of Jesus. We can’t go back in time to be with Jesus while He was on earth. So how can we be with Him? Jesus told His disciples, “*I am with you always, even to the end of the age,*” before He went to heaven (Matthew 28:20). So even if we cannot see Him, Jesus is with us. If we choose to spend time with Him, we have the opportunity to get to know Him better each day of our life.

Paul became a Christian after Jesus had already gone to heaven. In his letter to the Philippians, he told us what he was doing to grow in the knowledge of Jesus:

*I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord . . . that I may know Him, and the*

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

*power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death (Philippians 3:8, 10).*

This is what Paul meant: “To know Jesus is my greatest desire in life and my only focus. It is worth it for me to suffer and to sacrifice everything I am and all I have in this world. I am willing for God to take me to places where I am in need of experiencing His resurrection power, to places of suffering and to the cross where I face death with Jesus. All Jesus went through I am willing to go through with Him, so I may know Him intimately.”

If you want to grow in the knowledge of Jesus, you must:

- Be aware of His presence with you.
- Live consciously with Him throughout the day.
- Enjoy His fellowship and love for you.
- Talk with Him about everything and listen to His answers, just like you would with a friend who walks beside you.
- Spend daily time in prayer and meditation on His Word.
- Be willing to let Him lead you through places and circumstances in your life that will teach you to rely on Him, stretch your faith and increase your trust in Him to take care of you.
- Allow Him to let you taste a little of the rejection and suffering He faced for you, so you will get a glimpse of how deeply He loves you.

My dear sister, it is my prayer that you desire to grow in the grace and knowledge of Jesus.



**Let us pray together** for our Women's Fellowship leaders' training in August:

- For God's protection for all the sisters who will be traveling.
- That the training will encourage and help the sisters become more effective in their leadership.
- That God will help our sisters to make plans for the Women's Fellowship programs that are on His heart.

May the joy of the Lord fill your heart and may His grace be with you.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## UNDERSTANDING OTHERS



NOVEMBER 2012

*Dear Sister,*

A lot has happened since I wrote my last letter to you. I traveled to India in July and came back at the end of August—without any problems. I praise God that He restored my health and strength, and I am grateful to you for praying for me.

In August we had our Women's Fellowship leaders' seminar in Kerala, and it was good to see the sisters again. I was encouraged by their reports and their commitment to see the WF program grow.

During the seminar, Dr. Daniel, our son-in-law, taught two sessions: preventing the spread of disease and women's health issues. We want to teach these important lessons, along with others, in all our local Women's Fellowships, so Sister Jeena is organizing a special training seminar for January 2013. Two sisters will attend from each district where we have churches, and they will then travel to all the WF groups in their district to teach the lessons. It will be a great blessing for our churches

as well as for the ladies from these communities, whom we will invite to attend the classes. Please pray for Dr. Daniel and his team as they prepare the needed teaching material and do the training.

Since I returned home, in addition to my normal writing assignments, I have taught in six women's retreats in different parts of the country. Though this kept me quite busy, it was a blessing to share God's Word with so many ladies from churches that love and pray for our ministry in Asia.

In this letter, I would like to share with you a few thoughts on how to better understand others.

**People come from so many diverse backgrounds and experiences.** Their looks, lifestyles, customs, ways of thinking and values may be so different from ours. Yet as believers, we are supposed to accept, help and love them as Jesus would. And especially when they are born again, we are one with them in the Body of Christ—for eternity.

**How can we even start to relate to them?** Listen to them carefully, so you will get to know what's in their hearts. Learn about them without judging them and love them in spite of their differences.

Actually, Jesus made understanding people very simple. He gave us two rules to follow:

1. *“However you want people to treat you, so treat them”* (Matthew 7:12).
2. *“You shall love your neighbor as yourself”* (Matthew 22:39).

## Understanding Others

These verses mean that:

- I am created very similar to others, even if I look different, speak another language and come from a different background and educational level.
- What I feel, desire and value, they also feel, desire and value.
- What hurts me hurts them too, and what makes me glad makes them glad also.

Look at yourself and think about what hurts you:

- When my leader, teammates, school friends and church members prefer others and ignore me.
- When they laugh at me because I am skinny, fat or have a disability.
- When they make fun of me and publicly put me down.
- When they don't take me seriously because I am less educated than they are.
- When they gossip about me or talk behind my back.
- When they take advantage of my willingness to work hard.
- When they exclude me from their fun times.
- When they always give me the dirtiest jobs because I am from a lower class of society.
- When they never thank me for anything I do.
- When they remind me often about the mistakes I made in the past.
- When they never say anything appreciative after I do something well.

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- When they take credit for my hard work or good ideas.
- When they give gifts to each other, but never to me.
- When they criticize me constantly and tell me that I will surely fail.
- When they ignore my efforts to learn a new skill.
- When they never mention my name when my team receives recognition for a job well done.
- When they never ask for my opinion or suggestion on a matter.

**Jesus says:** Don't do these things to others—they feel just like you would! It hurts them deeply, hinders them from succeeding and destroys them.

Look at yourself and think how you wish others would treat you:

- I wish they would listen to me when I say or share something.
- I wish they would value my opinion, suggestions and ideas.
- I wish they would take me seriously.
- I wish they would give me an opportunity to do something significant.
- I wish they would encourage me when I am struggling.
- I wish they would keep the promises they made to me.
- I wish they would talk positively about me to my leaders.

## Understanding Others

- I wish they would acknowledge the good work I did.
- I wish they would have patience with me while I learn a new skill.
- I wish they would love and accept me for who I am.
- I wish they would appreciate my work and tell me so.
- I wish they would build up my confidence by telling me that I will succeed.
- I wish they would assist me when I need help with a task.

**Jesus says:** Do these things to others—they feel just like you would! It lifts them up, gives them courage, helps them succeed and enables them to reach their potential.

My dear sister, I hope these thoughts will help you to understand and love others just as Jesus commanded us.



### **Let us pray together for:**

- All the upcoming Christmas programs in our churches and Women's Fellowship groups, that through them many people will come to know the love of God.
- The WF training seminar on health issues in January.

May the Lord bless you and keep you walking close to Himself.

In Jesus,

*Gisela*

## I AM WITH YOU ALWAYS



JANUARY 2013

*Dear Sister,*

**H**appy New Year! I came to India last month, and my husband and I celebrated Christmas with Sarah, Danny and their children, David and Hannah. It was a lot of fun to be with them. Daniel, Erika and their children, Esther and Jonah, returned to the United States the beginning of December, and we missed them at Christmas. We look forward to all being together in the same place at the same time.

I will be here for our Women's Fellowship training seminar on health issues in January and for the Kerala Believers Church convention in February.

Just a few days ago, we all entered a new year. I imagine that most of us attended a Watch Night service at church and received a little promise card with a Bible verse for the new year. I always look forward to getting one, and I keep it in my Bible so I can read it often and think about God's faithfulness.

**Jesus gave us one of the greatest promises we have in the Bible for our life here on earth.** Just before He

returned to His Father in heaven, He told His disciples and us, *“I am with you always, even to the end of the age”* (Matthew 28:20).

**Jesus made this promise to us because He knows the uncertainties and fears we encounter.** He lived on this earth for 33 years in our human form. He saw and experienced all the things we go through: joys and disappointments, celebrations and grief, successes and losses, expectations and unfulfilled dreams, friendships and betrayals, love and hate, hope and fear, freedom and oppression. Because He lived our life, we are assured that He understands us and has compassion on us.

**The Scripture tells us how deeply Jesus felt our pain and the struggles we go through.** He was moved with compassion when He saw the multitudes who had no one to lead them. He had mercy on all those who came to Him with sicknesses and in bondage, and He healed and set them free. He even touched the leper no one else would touch, felt compassion for the grieving widow and raised her son from the dead, embraced and blessed the little children His disciples didn't regard as important, prayed that Peter's faith would not fail and wept over Jerusalem and the judgment this city was going to face.

**Jesus' promise to be with us always does not mean that we will not face any difficulties in life.** It is a false idea that believers are spared from all the troubles the rest of mankind suffers. Yes, God carefully watches over His children and protects them from the Evil One. But because we live in a fallen world, all of us will face normal human problems, hurt, sickness, old age, death and grief. And as believers, we will also encounter rejection and persecution because of our faith

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in Christ. However, the difference is that Jesus has promised to be right there with us when we go through these things.

I encourage you to meditate on these promises God has made to His people to walk with them through their trials:

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, **I will be with you**; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you. For I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior (Isaiah 43:1–3).*

*Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I fear no evil; **for Thou art with me** (Psalm 23:4).*

**This means:** We are not alone when our child is sick, when we face financial struggles, when we fail a school exam, when someone we love hurts our feelings, when we need to go to the hospital for an operation, when a family member dies, when others reject us, when we disappoint ourselves and God.

His promise to be with us always is an invitation to cast our burdens on Him:

*Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest (Matthew 11:28).*

*Casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you (1 Peter 5:7).*

**His promise to be with us always is an invitation to put our faith in Him.** Think about this: The God who spoke the universe into existence is right there with you in your problems. He understands your pain, has compassion on you and asks you to cast your burdens on Him. Not only that,

## LET ME WALK WITH YOU

He also invites you to put your faith in Him because He is able to still the storm, heal the sick, cleanse the leper, give sight to the blind, cause the lame to walk, raise the dead, free the oppressed, change hearts, save sinners, comfort the broken-hearted and make all things new. In the midst of our struggles, we have great hope and confidence, *“for all things are possible with God”* (Mark 10:27).

**His promise to be with us always assures us that He leads us in a perfect way,** even if we don't understand His far greater plan and purpose and even if He answers our prayers differently than we expected. We can trust Him fully. He never makes a single mistake. David spoke of the Lord as *“the God who girds me with strength, and makes my way blameless”* (Psalm 18:32). I have this scripture in a German translation on my wall. It says: *“God arms me with strength and leads me in a way that is without reproach.”* I often read this verse when I could not understand what was happening in my life. It gave me the assurance that God leads me in a perfect way, without mistake.

**No matter what we encounter, Jesus will never withdraw His promise to be with us always.** Dear sister, this truth should calm our hearts and keep us from fear as we walk through each day of 2013. Let us place our hand into the hand of Jesus and trust Him with all our heart. Nothing will happen in 2013 that He does not know about and for which His love and power are not sufficient to see us through.



**Let us pray together** that we will honor Jesus with our life in 2013:

- That each of us will trust Jesus fully, regardless of what we may encounter.
- That we will faithfully live for Him in the place He has assigned for us.
- That He will give us open doors to share the Gospel with those who don't know Him.
- That God will renew our burden for the unreached and fill us afresh with His Spirit to be His witnesses.

May the Lord bless you and encourage you with His Word every day of this new year.

With love and prayers,

*Gisela*

## REMEMBER HOW MUCH HE LOVED US



APRIL 2013

*Dear Sister,*

I came home from India in the middle of February, and life has been busy ever since. In March, we had an international leaders meeting in the United States and a conference for our friends, and both were a great blessing.

Our January Women's Fellowship health care seminar in India went very well. Dr. Daniel, our son-in-law, and Sister Idalene (a nurse) taught and trained our sisters, who came from every region. Now all the teaching material is being translated into various languages, and our regional sisters are preparing for the upcoming training of our district sisters.

After our district sisters study the lessons, they will go and teach them to the women in the villages of their district. No doubt the teaching will be a great help for these women and a wonderful opportunity to introduce them to the love of Christ. With the many preparations necessary, we expect

to be able to start the actual teaching in the villages by the month of July.

**Last month, along with millions of other Christians, we remembered Jesus' suffering on the cross,** and we celebrated His resurrection on Easter. I trust you realized afresh how much Jesus loves you. It will greatly strengthen your faith and walk with the Lord if you often reflect on how His love led Him to die for your sin.

**Jesus decided to become your redeemer before the world existed.** God knew ahead of time that Adam, and the whole human race along with him, would fall in sin. Therefore, He put a plan of salvation in place before He created the earth. The Apostle Peter wrote about this event: "*For He [Christ] was foreknown before the foundation of the world*" (1 Peter 1:20). That means His love for you predates creation.

**Jesus could have changed His mind after living among sinful men.** For 33 years He was surrounded by people's sin, bondage, sickness, corruption, greed, selfishness, rebellion, hatred, violence, oppression, abuse, deception, ungratefulness, spiritual darkness and hardness of heart. Jesus could have been fed up with their bent toward evil, their self-righteousness and their arrogance toward God. Yet He never lost His love or compassion for them. They were God's lost sheep, and He had come to find them.

**He had a choice to say "no" in the Garden of Gethsemane.** Jesus fully realized what it would mean for Him to accept the cup the Father was asking Him to drink. The cup contained not only the extreme physical suffering of scourging and crucifixion, but also the utmost emotional pain

of being betrayed and forsaken by His closest friends and then being rejected as the Messiah, humiliated, mocked, spit upon, falsely accused of blasphemy and condemned to death by the religious leaders.

It also included that He, who had never sinned, would have to face the unimaginable spiritual agony when the sin of the whole world would be charged to His account and laid on Him. He would have to endure the wrath of God for billions of people and bear their full punishment. And in the end He would die like a sinner, separated from God the Father. Jesus fully understood how great this darkness would be, and as a result, while agonizing in prayer, His sweat became like drops of blood. Yet He said “yes” to the Father’s will for our sake. He loved us more than all the glory of heaven and His own life.

**Jesus could have ended His suffering at any time.** He could have simply walked away or ascended to heaven in the middle of the trial, the beating and the scourging—and definitely before they nailed Him to the cross. He could have annihilated His tormentors with one breath or struck them with blindness and leprosy by speaking one word. Yet the word He spoke on their behalf was not a curse, but a prayer: “*Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing*” (Luke 23:34). Jesus bore the suffering so we could be redeemed by His blood and healed by His stripes.

**He had the power to come down from the cross.** While Jesus hung on the cross, the chief priests and elders were mocking Him, saying, “*If You are the Son of God, come down from the cross. . . . He saved others; He cannot save Himself. He is the*

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*King of Israel; let Him now come down from the cross, and we shall believe in Him” (Matthew 27:40, 42). They considered Him helpless and weak, unable to do this miracle and prove He was the Messiah.*

The truth is, He had the power to come down from the cross, but He chose to stay for you and me. What held Him there were not the nails, but His love for us! He stayed on the cross in order to pay the full price necessary for our redemption, until He could cry out, “*It is finished!*” (John 19:30).

**You are loved by God for all eternity.** There is nothing that can cause Him to love you less or withdraw His love for you. The Apostle Paul wrote:

*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8:38–39).*

Now my dear sister, walk daily in the knowledge of His amazing love. It will cause you to rejoice and be glad, even when people reject you and you feel lonely and misunderstood.



**Please pray with us** for the Women's Fellowship health care teaching:

- For the translation of the health care lessons into different languages.
- For the upcoming training of the sisters from the district level.
- For all the plans and preparation to implement the project in the villages.
- For Sister Jeena and her team, who lead and coordinate the program.
- For the name of Jesus to be lifted up through this new ministry.

May the love of Jesus fill your heart as you live for Him and serve Him.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## DON'T PASS IT ON



SEPTEMBER 2013

*Dear Sister,*

It's been a while since I wrote to you. In June our Women's Fellowship sisters started teaching the health care lessons in 17 states of India. The reports we've received so far are very encouraging, and the women who participate are grateful for the things they've learned. Let's keep this new program in our prayers daily.

Today I would like to share with you a few thoughts from a letter the Apostle Paul wrote to the Romans: "*But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts*" (Romans 13:14).

**We often are satisfied with the fact that our sins are forgiven and we are going to heaven.** And indeed, we should rejoice for all eternity over God's grace toward us. However, there is far more to God's plan for our lives than going to heaven. What God has in mind for us is to "*put on the Lord Jesus Christ,*" which means we are to become transformed into His likeness in all areas of our lives. His love, kindness,

gentleness, holiness, integrity and servant's heart should replace our old character.

What are the consequences when we fail to be transformed into Christ's likeness?

- We are a misrepresentation of Christ to this world.
- God, His Word and the Church will be dishonored by our words and actions.
- We are a hindrance to others receiving Jesus.
- We miss out on living a victorious and fruitful Christian life.
- We pass on what we don't overcome.

All of these consequences are serious. In this letter, we will look at the last one: *We pass on what we don't overcome.*

**We may not take seriously our lack of integrity and holiness, inherited bents and destructive habits.** We may call them weaknesses instead of sins, and we may have many excuses for them. For example: "It's part of our normal culture." "My whole family has this habit." "I inherited this weakness from my father." We live with our weaknesses for so long that we defend them instead of condemning them.

**We believe that our private sins, bents, weaknesses and destructive habits don't hurt anyone.** God's Word tells us that this is not true. Even if we try to keep them a secret, what we are on the inside will influence those around us. Most of all, the practice of our weaknesses will set a far more powerful example for our children than all our correct teaching. It will also influence all our relationships as well as the people we lead and disciple in our ministry.

**There is a spiritual dimension to all of this:** When God revealed His name to Moses, He said:

*The Lord God . . . who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations (Exodus 34:6–7).*

We may not understand how spiritual laws works, but we all know families in which stealing, dishonesty, laziness, violent anger, gossip, jealousy or addictions can be traced back for several generations. Somehow these unrepented-of and tolerated bents and weaknesses of the flesh have consequences. They provide an open door for the Enemy to keep on destroying lives beyond our own.

**Abraham had a weakness he passed on to the next three generations—lying.** We greatly respect Abraham as the father of faith, and we are asked to follow his example. However, there was a time in Abraham's earlier life when he resorted to lying, and it obviously influenced his future descendants to practice the same. Twice he lied about Sarah being his wife. At the same time, he thought his dishonesty was a smart move to save his life.

Isaac his son did the very same thing when he lied about Rebecca being his wife. Jacob, Isaac's son, became a master of deception, dishonesty and lying. Jacob's sons were dishonest in their shepherding duties, and they lied to their father for years about what had happened to Joseph, whom they had sold as a slave.

**Joseph broke this family bent toward dishonesty.**

Perhaps what he saw and suffered from his brothers made him hate dishonesty and lies. How did he do it? As a young man in Egypt, he made a decision to not do anything that would dishonor his God. That included not only rejecting the offer of Potiphar's wife, but also being honest and upright in all his service as a slave, prisoner and prime minister. Joseph recognized that God is truth and that he too must choose to walk in truth to honor God. With this decision, he stopped the family bent toward dishonesty and enabled God's lovingkindness and blessing to flow to his own life, the children of Israel and thousands of others.

We must take a good look at our lives and decide that we will no longer tolerate and excuse our *private sins, weaknesses, family bents* and *destructive habits*. Instead, we must determine to overcome them—so we will not pass them on.

God has given us everything we need to overcome every bondage and weakness in our lives:

- The blood of Jesus that cleanses us from all sins and breaks every bondage.
- The Word of God that instructs us how to live a life that is pleasing to God.
- The Holy Spirit, who empowers us to overcome all things.
- His love and grace that never fail.

Our part in overcoming is to:

- Repent and truly turn from our sins, inherited bents, weaknesses and destructive habits.
- Daily say “no” to the desires of our flesh and obey the instructions of God's Word instead.

Don't Pass It On

- Cooperate with the work of the Holy Spirit in our lives.
- Trust in God's grace and promises for our victory.

**When we overcome, we enable God's blessing to flow** to us, our children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren and thousands of others. Dear sister, it's worth living under God's blessings instead of the consequences of our family bents and weaknesses.



**Please join us in prayer for:**

- God to use our sisters who are traveling and teaching the health care lessons.
- The Lord to bless the Women's Fellowship conventions that will take place over the next few months.
- Our willingness to live a life that honors Jesus.

May the Lord keep you close to Himself.

Your sister in Christ,

*Gisela*

## TRAVEL TO NORTH INDIA AND NEPAL



DECEMBER 2013

*Dear Sister,*

I wish you and all your loved ones a wonderful Christmas and God's blessing for the coming year. May God's love and peace fill your heart as you live for the King of kings.

I came to India in October, and I will be here until the end of January. Our whole family will be together in Kerala for Christmas, and we look forward to spending time together with our children and grandchildren.

During the last part of November, Sister Jeena (our main Women's Fellowship leader), Sarah (my daughter), little Hannah (my 18-month-old granddaughter) and I traveled together to Chandigarh in Punjab, India, for our Women's Fellowship convention. We had a lot of fun, and Hannah entertained us along the way. Her brother David, age 5, couldn't come with us because he had to go to school. He stayed with his father, who volunteered to take care of him, so Sarah and Hannah could go with us on the mission trip.

When our train from Delhi arrived in Chandigarh, our leaders took us to our seminary, where our seminary staff, students and 275 Women's Fellowship sisters had gathered together to welcome us. We enjoyed watching our students perform a traditional Punjabi dance. They danced with all their might along with drums and bells. It was great!

The next day, our three-day Women's Fellowship program began, and we shared lessons from God's Word (along with practical applications) and Women's Fellowship reports and stories with pictures from many different parts of India and other countries. Sister Jeena also met with all our Women's Fellowship leaders to discuss ongoing programs and procedures. In addition, the sisters had report and discussion times, group prayer and lots of fellowship along with very tasty Punjabi food. Our leaders and staff in Punjab blessed us and all our sisters with their love, care and support. Hannah especially enjoyed playing with Pastor Martin's two sweet daughters.

After this, Sister Jeena and I traveled on to Nepal for another Women's Fellowship convention. Sarah and Hannah returned to Kerala, because Hannah had come down with a fever and cold. I had also caught a cold, and my voice had become very "small" and scratchy and I was coughing a lot.

When we arrived in Nepal, we were surprised and welcomed by our leaders and their wives. In fact, at every place we went, we felt like we came "home" to our wonderful close family.

The next afternoon was the inauguration of our convention. Our more than 400 churches were able to send "only" 500 delegates, because that was all the space available in our seminary facility. Even as it was, 80 sisters were housed in each

dormitory—two assigned to each bed. They were so happy to be there that they didn't mind their long and difficult travel through the mountain regions, sleeping in the unheated seminary building or sitting all day in a tent for the meetings. In fact, for them, the climate was quite comfortable and “warm” for this time of the year.

Sister Jeena and I, on the other hand, very much appreciated the heating in the hotel where we stayed at night, and we wore all the warm clothes and shawls we brought with us during the meetings! In addition, during the colder morning and evening hours, our dear caring leaders put a large portable heater in front of us in the tent or on stage behind us to keep us going. The Lord was very good, and my voice improved enough to last through all the sessions.

We were so blessed by our Nepali sisters. They listened so carefully to all the teaching sessions, even though they were doubly long because of translation, and they made many personal decisions to practically apply what they heard.

We missed Sarah and Hannah during our Nepal trip. I taught the lesson Sarah had shared in Punjab since it was such a relevant theme for young busy mothers. However, her teaching was far better than mine because she spoke from her own present life experience.

On the last evening, our sisters put on a cultural program. It was fun to see the joy and celebration of their faith in Jesus expressed in songs and dance. Surely heaven must have enjoyed watching it as well.

We were very grateful for the support of our Women's Fellowship convention given by our respected bishops Narayan and Gopal, along with other pastors, as well as their

involvement. They not only attended the sessions, but they also blessed us and our sisters with their teaching, encouragement, exhortation and prayer for those in need. Many of our brothers and pastors, including Pastor Manja, cooked the meals for our sisters. What a testimony that was of the love of Christ our believers have for one another.

During our trip back to Kerala, Sister Jeena caught my cold, and her suitcase didn't arrive for two days after we reached home.

It is our desire and prayer to be able to visit many more Women's Fellowship conventions in the future and spend time with our dear sisters. We were planning to travel to Siliguri, West Bengal, in October, but the convention was canceled because of a severe outbreak of dengue fever.



**I invite you to join us in prayer:**

- For all the sisters who attended the Women's Fellowship conventions, that they will follow through with the personal decisions they made.
- That many people will be touched by the love of Christ through the Christmas programs and outreaches of our churches and local Women's Fellowships, and will come to know the Savior.
- For our hearts to be thankful this Christmas that our Heavenly Father sent us Jesus our Redeemer.

It is my joy and privilege to serve Jesus together with you.

In Christ's love,

*Gisela*

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