




Introduction

Jesus Calling

I first experienced the Presence of God in a setting of exquisite beauty. I was studying at a Christian community in a tiny Alpine village in France. This was a branch of L'Abri, an international ministry that began in Switzerland through Francis and Edith Schaeffer's work. During my stay at L'Abri, I often explored the fairyland-like environment all around me. It was late winter, and the noonday sun was warm enough for sunbathing, but the depth of the snow kept it from melting. Brilliant sunlight reflecting from pure white snow was cleansing my mind of the darkness that had held it captive for years.

Every day I climbed up a steep hill to attain a view that delighted my soul. As I stood at the top, I would lose myself in a panorama of unbroken beauty. Below me was the village that had become my home. Viewed from this height, the village was dominated by a high-steeped church. Turning 180 degrees, I could see Lake Geneva far below me, shouting greetings in refracted sunbeams. When I looked up, I saw icy tips of Alpine



mountains encircling me. I would turn round and round, absorbing as much as I could with two eyes and a finite mind.

The daughter of a college professor, I had been encouraged to read widely and think for myself. I had majored in philosophy at Wellesley College and had almost completed my master's degree in child development at Tufts University. A few months earlier, my brother had asked me to read Francis Schaeffer's *Escape from Reason*. To my great surprise and delight, that small book had answered questions I'd long before dismissed as unanswerable. It was the intellectual integrity of Schaeffer's books that had drawn me to this pristine place. I was searching for absolute, unchanging truth—a foundation on which to build my life.

Shortly after I settled into the home I shared with other students, I met a gifted counselor who had come from the Swiss branch of L'Abri to talk with some of us. I went into the room where she was waiting, and she told me to close the door. Before I even had time to sit down, she asked her first question: "Are you a Christian?" I answered that I wasn't sure; I wanted to be a Christian, but I didn't really understand why I needed Jesus. I thought that knowing God might be enough. Her second question was: "What can you *not* forgive yourself for?" This question brought me face to face with my sinfulness, and immediately I

understood my need for Jesus—to save me from my many sins. Later, when I was alone, I asked Him to forgive all my sins and to be my Savior-God.

One night I found myself leaving the warmth of our cozy chalet to walk alone in the snowy mountains. I went into a deeply wooded area, feeling vulnerable and awed by cold, moonlit beauty. The air was crisp and dry, piercing to inhale. After a while, I came into an open area and I stopped walking. Time seemed to stand still as I gazed around me in wonder—soaking in the beauty of this place. Suddenly I became aware of a lovely Presence with me, and my involuntary response was to whisper, “Sweet Jesus.” This experience of Jesus’ Presence was far more personal than the intellectual answers for which I’d been searching. This was a relationship with the Creator of the universe—the One who is *the way, the truth, and the life* (John 14:6).

The following year, back in the United States, I had another encounter with the Presence of Jesus. I was grieving the loss of a serious dating relationship and wondering whether being a Christian made much difference in the quality of my life.

At that time I was working as a technical writer in Virginia. My boss sent me to Atlanta to attend a conference. I accepted this assignment dutifully and checked into the hotel without enthusiasm. Alone in my room, I felt waves of desolation wash over me. So I

began walking the streets of Atlanta aimlessly, trying to escape my solitude. I glanced at some books in an outdoor stall and was drawn to *Beyond Ourselves* by Catherine Marshall. That night, as I read the book, I no longer felt alone. I knelt beside the bed in that sterile room and felt an overwhelming Presence of peace and love come over me. I knew that Jesus was with me and that He sympathized with my heartache. This was unquestionably the same “Sweet Jesus” I had encountered in the snowy splendor of the Alps.

During the next sixteen years, I lived what many people might consider an exemplary Christian life. I went to Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, where I earned a master’s degree in counseling and biblical studies. While there, I met my husband, Steve, a third-generation missionary to Japan. After graduation, we spent two four-year terms in Japan doing church-planting ministry. We had a baby girl during our first term and a baby boy during our furlough in the United States. After our second term, we returned to the US for three years. We lived in Atlanta, where Steve worked with a local Japanese church and I earned a further degree in counseling at Georgia State University.

As part of my training, I worked at a Christian counseling center in the Atlanta area. I cherished my experiences of helping deeply wounded women find healing in Christ. I was also thankful for my kind,

loving husband and our two delightful children, who were the main joys of my life. However, not once during those sixteen years did I vividly experience the Presence of Jesus.

So I was ready to begin a new spiritual quest. It started with delving into a devotional book, *The Secret of the Abiding Presence* by Andrew Murray. The theme of this book is that God's Presence is meant to be the continual experience of Christians. Murray emphasizes the importance of spending time alone with God in quiet, uninterrupted communion.

I began reading the book at a very unstructured time in my life. We were waiting for our Australian visas to be approved so that we could begin a church among Japanese people living in Melbourne. I had quit my counseling job to prepare for the move overseas, so I was adjusting to the loss of this fulfilling work. In the midst of those momentous changes, I began seeking God's Presence in earnest. My days started alone with God, equipped with Bible, devotional book, prayer journal, pen, and coffee. An hour or two alone with Him seemed too brief.

The uncertainties I faced at that time deepened my increasing closeness to God. My husband and I had no idea how long it would take to receive permanent residency visas, so the waiting period seemed to stretch indefinitely into the future. During that

period, I had four surgeries, including two for melanoma. A Bible verse that comforted me during this difficult time of waiting also accompanied me on the seemingly endless flight to Australia: “You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace” (Isaiah 55:12).

We settled in Australia and began our dual ministries. I supported Steve in planting the first-ever Japanese church in Melbourne, but my main ministry focus was counseling Australian women, some of whom were coming out of terrible abuse and spiritual bondage.

Our combined ministries subjected our family to intense spiritual warfare, and I prayed for protection every morning. One morning as I prayed, I visualized God protecting each of us. I pictured first our daughter, then our son, and then Steve encircled by God’s protective Presence. When I prayed for myself, I was suddenly enveloped in brilliant light and profound peace. I had not sought this powerful experience of God’s Presence, but I received it gratefully and was strengthened by it.

Only two or three days later, a counseling client who was an incest survivor began remembering experiences of satanic ritual abuse. This form of Satan worship involves subjecting victims (who are often young children) to incredibly evil, degrading tortures. My courageous client and I walked together into the darkness of her memories. But God had prepared me

for stepping into deep darkness by first bathing me in His glorious light. I realized that experiences of God's Presence were not only for my benefit but were also preparation for helping others.

The following year, I began to wonder if I could change my prayer times from monologue to dialogue. I had been writing in prayer journals for many years, but this was one-way communication: I did all the talking. Increasingly, I wanted to hear what God might want to communicate to me on a given day. I decided to "listen" with pen in hand, writing down whatever I "heard" in my mind. As J. I. Packer wrote in his book *Your Father Loves You*: "God . . . guides our minds as we think things out in his presence." This is how I was listening to Him—by focusing on Jesus and His Word, while asking Him to guide my thoughts. I was *not* listening for an audible voice; I was spending time *seeking God's Face* (Psalm 27:8 NKJV).

My journaling thus changed from monologue to dialogue. This new way of communicating with God became the high point of my day. Of course, I knew my writings were not inspired—as only Scripture is—but they were helping me grow closer to God. This became a delightful way to *encourage myself in the Lord* (1 Samuel 30:6 NKJV).

As I was learning to seek God's Face, "Be still, and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10) became a

life-changing verse. Alternate readings for “Be still” are “Relax,” “Let go,” and “Cease striving” (NASB). This is an enticing invitation from God to lay down our cares and seek His Presence.

Among other resources, *Praying: Finding Our Way Through Duty to Delight* has been helpful. This book, written by J. I. Packer and Carolyn Nystrom, contains a wonderful quote from Martin Luther—“If the Holy Spirit should come and begin to preach to your heart, giving you rich and enlightened thoughts, . . . be quiet and listen to him who can talk better than you; and note what he proclaims and *write it down*; so will you experience miracles as David says: ‘Open my eyes that I may behold wondrous things out of thy law’ (Psalm 119:18).”

During the years that I’ve been waiting in God’s Presence and listening with pen in hand, I have found themes of His Peace becoming more prominent in my writing. I’m sure this tendency reflects, in part, my personal need. However, when people open up to me, I find that most of them also desire the balm of Jesus’ Peace.

This practice of being still in God’s Presence has increased my intimacy with Him more than any other spiritual discipline, so I want to share some of the writings I have gleaned from these quiet moments. In many parts of the world, Christians seem to be searching for a deeper experience of Jesus’ Presence and Peace. The devotions that follow address that felt need.

The Bible is the only infallible, inerrant Word of God, and I endeavor to keep my writings consistent with that unchanging standard. I have written from the perspective of Jesus speaking, to help readers feel more personally connected with Him. So the first person singular (“I,” “Me,” “My,” “Mine”) always refers to Christ; “you” refers to you, the reader.

I have included Scripture references after each daily reading. As I waited in God’s Presence, Bible verses or fragments of verses often came to mind. So I interwove these into the devotions. Words from the Scriptures (some paraphrased, some quoted) are indicated in italics. Certain Bible verses figure rather heavily in my writing. That is because God often uses these passages to strengthen and encourage me, raising my sights from my “light and momentary troubles” (2 Corinthians 4:17) to His eternal perspective.

Themes of thankfulness and trust recurred often during my listening times. These themes are quite prevalent in the Bible, and they are essential for a close relationship with the Lord.

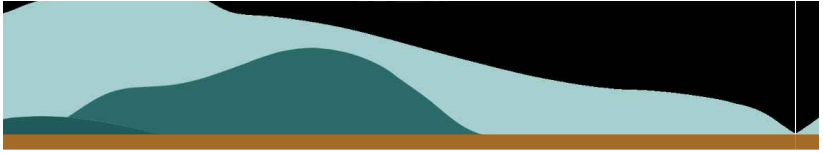
The devotions in this book are meant to be read slowly, preferably in a quiet place—with your Bible open. Remember that Jesus is Immanuel, *God with us*. May you enjoy His Presence and His Peace in ever-increasing measure.

— Sarah Young

January

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the LORD, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

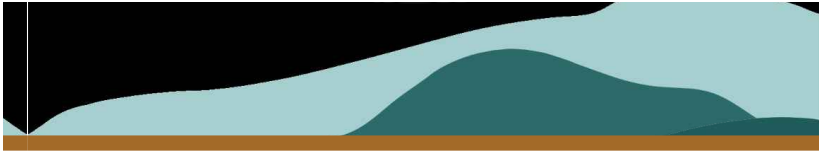
JEREMIAH 29:11



January 1

COME TO ME with a teachable spirit, eager to be changed. A close walk with Me is a life of continual newness. Do not cling to old ways as you step into a new year. Instead, seek My Face with an open mind, knowing that your journey with Me involves being *transformed by the renewing of your mind*. As you focus your thoughts on Me, be aware that I am fully attentive to you. I see you with a steady eye because My attention span is infinite. I know and understand you completely; My thoughts embrace you in everlasting Love. *I also know the plans I have for you: plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future*. Give yourself fully to this adventure of increasing attentiveness to My Presence.

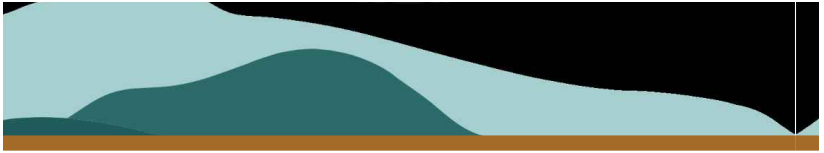
PSALM 27:8 ESV; ROMANS
12:2; JEREMIAH 29:11



January 2

RELAX IN MY HEALING PRESENCE. As you spend time with Me, your thoughts tend to jump ahead to today's plans and problems. Bring your mind back to Me for refreshment and renewal. Let the Light of My Presence soak into you as you focus your thoughts on Me. Thus I equip you to face whatever the day brings. This sacrifice of time pleases Me and strengthens you. Do not skimp on our time together. Resist the clamor of tasks waiting to be done. *You have chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from you.*

PSALM 89:15; PSALM 105:4; LUKE 10:39-42

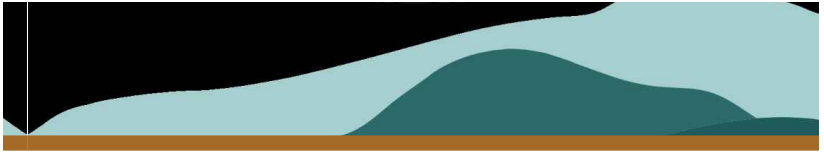


January 3

REFRESH YOURSELF in the Peace of My Presence. This Peace can be your portion at all times and in all circumstances. Learn to *hide in the secret of My Presence*, even as you carry out your duties in the world. I am both with you and within you. I go before you to open up the way, and I also walk alongside you. There could never be another companion as devoted as I am.

Because I am your constant Companion, there should be a lightness to your step that is observable to others. Do not be weighed down with problems and unresolved issues, for I am your burden-bearer. In the world you have trials and distress, but don't let them get you down. *I have conquered the world and deprived it of power to harm you.* In Me you may have confident Peace.

PSALM 31:19–20 NASB; JOHN 16:33 AMP



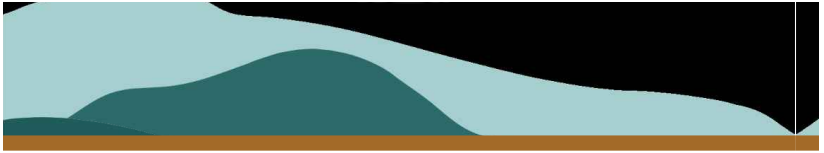
January 4

I WANT YOU TO LEARN A NEW HABIT. Try saying, “I trust You, Jesus,” in response to whatever happens to you. If there is time, think about who I AM in all My Power and Glory; ponder also the depth and breadth of My Love for you.

This simple practice will help you see Me in every situation, acknowledging My sovereign control over the universe. When you view events from this perspective—through the Light of My universal Presence—fear loses its grip on you. Adverse circumstances become growth opportunities when you affirm your trust in Me no matter what. You receive blessings gratefully, realizing they flow directly from My hand of grace. Your continual assertion of trusting Me will strengthen our relationship and keep you close to Me.

PSALM 63:2; ISAIAH 40:10–11;

PSALM 139:7–10

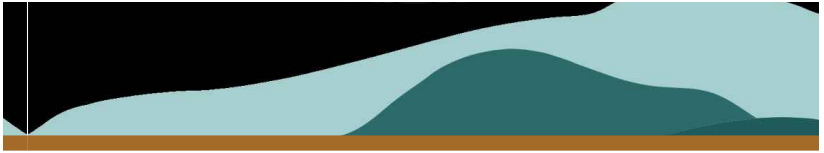


January 5

YOU CAN ACHIEVE THE VICTORIOUS LIFE through living in deep dependence on Me. People usually associate victory with success: not falling or stumbling, not making mistakes. But those who are successful in their own strength tend to go their own way, forgetting about Me. It is through problems and failure, weakness and neediness, that you learn to rely on Me.

True dependence is not simply asking Me to bless what you have decided to do. It is coming to Me with an open mind and heart, inviting Me to plant My desires within you. I may infuse within you a dream that seems far beyond your reach. You know that in yourself you cannot achieve such a goal. Thus begins your journey of profound reliance on Me. It is a faith-walk, taken one step at a time, leaning on Me as much as you need. This is not a path of continual success but of multiple failures. However, each failure is followed by a growth spurt, nourished by increased reliance on Me. Enjoy the blessedness of a victorious life through deepening your dependence on Me.

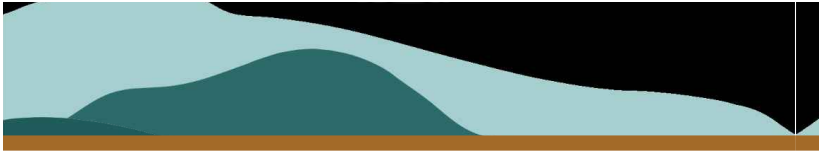
PSALM 34:17–18; 2 CORINTHIANS 5:7 NKJV



January 6

I AM ABLE to do far beyond all that you ask or imagine. Come to Me with positive expectations, knowing that there is no limit to what I can accomplish. Ask My Spirit to control your mind so that you can think great thoughts of Me. Do not be discouraged by the fact that many of your prayers are yet unanswered. Time is a trainer, teaching you to wait upon Me, to trust Me in the dark. The more extreme your circumstances, the more likely you are to see *My Power and Glory* at work in the situation. Instead of letting difficulties draw you into worrying, try to view them as setting the scene for My glorious intervention. Keep your eyes and your mind wide open to all that I am doing in your life.

EPHESIANS 3:20–21; ROMANS 8:6;
ISAIAH 40:30–31 NKJV; REVELATION 5:13

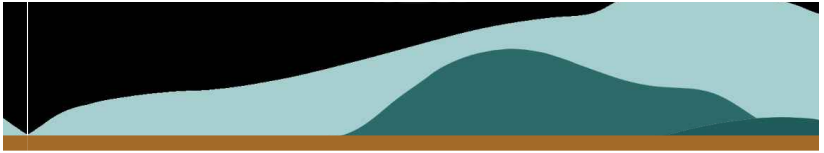


January 7

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PRAISE OR THANK ME TOO MUCH. As it is written, *I inhabit the praises of My people*. Sometimes your adoration is a spontaneous overflow of Joy, in response to radiant beauty or rich blessings. At other times your praise is more disciplined and measured—an act of your will. I dwell equally in both types of praise. Thankfulness, also, is a royal road to draw near Me. A thankful heart has plenty of room for Me.

When you thank Me for the many pleasures I provide, you affirm that I am God, from whom all blessings flow. When adversity strikes and you thank Me anyway, your trust in My sovereignty is a show-piece in invisible realms. Fill up the spare moments of your life with praise and thanksgiving. This joyous discipline will help you live in the intimacy of My Presence.

PSALM 22:3 KJV; PSALM 146:1–2;
1 THESSALONIANS 5:18

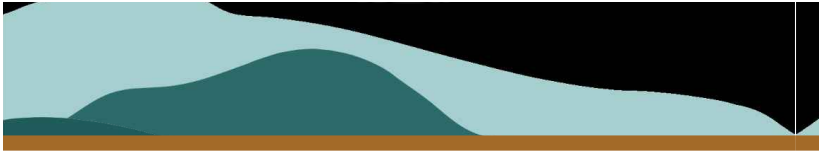


January 8

SOFTLY I ANNOUNCE MY PRESENCE. Shimmering hues of radiance tap gently at your consciousness, seeking entrance. Though I have all Power in heaven and on earth, I am infinitely tender with you. The weaker you are, the more gently I approach you. Let your weakness be a door to My Presence. Whenever you feel inadequate, remember that I am your *ever-present Help*.

Hope in Me, and you will be protected from depression and self-pity. Hope is like a golden cord connecting you to heaven. The more you cling to this cord, the more I bear the weight of your burdens; thus, you are lightened. Heaviness is not of My kingdom. Cling to hope, and My rays of Light will reach you through the darkness.

PSALM 46:1; ROMANS 12:12; ROMANS 15:13

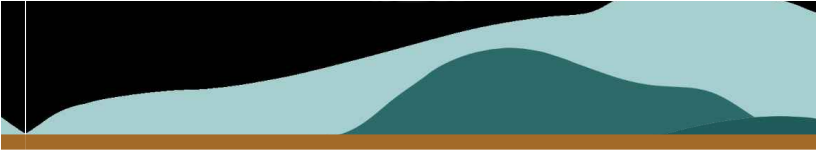


January 9

I AM WITH YOU AND FOR YOU. When you decide on a course of action that is in line with My will, nothing in heaven or on earth can stop you. You may encounter many obstacles as you move toward your goal, but don't be discouraged—never give up! With My help, you can overcome any obstacle. Do not expect an easy path as you journey hand in hand with Me, but do remember that I, your *very-present Helper*, am omnipotent.

Much, much stress results from your wanting to make things happen before their times have come. One of the main ways I assert My sovereignty is in the timing of events. If you want to stay close to Me and do things My way, ask Me to show you the path forward moment by moment. Instead of dashing headlong toward your goal, let Me set the pace. Slow down, and enjoy the journey in My Presence.

ROMANS 8:31; PSALM 46:1–3 NKJV;
LUKE 1:37

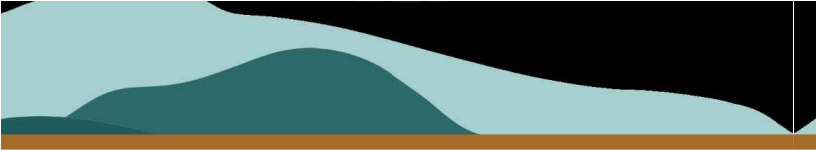


January 10

EVERY TIME YOU AFFIRM YOUR TRUST IN ME, you put a coin into My treasury. Thus you build up equity in preparation for days of trouble. I keep safely in My heart all trust invested in Me, with interest compounded continuously. The more you trust Me, the more I empower you to do so.

Practice trusting Me during quiet days, when nothing much seems to be happening. Then when storms come, your trust balance will be sufficient to see you through. *Store up for yourself treasure in heaven* through placing your trust in Me. This practice will keep you in My Peace.

PSALM 33:20–21; PSALM 56:3–4;
MATTHEW 6:20–21



January 11

TRUST ME by relinquishing control into My hands. *Let go, and recognize that I am God.* This is My world: I made it and I control it. Yours is a responsive part in the litany of Love. I search among My children for receptivity to Me. Guard well this gift that I have planted in your heart. Nurture it with the Light of My Presence.

When you bring Me prayer requests, lay out your concerns before Me. Speak to Me candidly; pour out your heart. Then thank Me for the answers that I have set into motion long before you can discern results. When your requests come to mind again, continue to thank Me for the answers that are on the way. If you keep on stating your concerns to Me, you will live in a state of tension. When you thank Me for how I am answering your prayers, your mind-set becomes much more positive. Thankful prayers keep your focus on My Presence and My promises.

PSALM 46:10 AMP; COLOSSIANS 4:2;
2 PETER 1:3-4