

C O U R T N E Y   S I L B E R M A N



ONLY GOD  
*makes things grow*

---

A P E R S O N A L J O U R N E Y T O  
G R O W C L O S E R T O G O D

Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotations are taken from the *Holman Christian Standard Bible*®, Copyright © 1999, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2009 by Holman Publishers. Used by permission. *Holman Christian Standard Bible*®, *Holman CBS*®, and *HCSB*® are federally registered trademarks of Holman Bible Publishers.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*®, *NIV*®. Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

Scripture taken from *THE MESSAGE*. Copyright © 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of Nav-Press Publishing Group.

“Neither the one who plants nor the one  
who waters is anything, but only God who  
gives the growth.”

*1 Corinthians 3:7*

  
**ENCOURAGING**  

---

**WOMEN *for* CHRIST**

©2012 Courtney Silberman

---

WEEK ONE

# Forming the Foundation

---

SCRIPTURE REFERENCE

“You are My witnesses” — this is the Lord’s declaration — “and My servant whom I have chosen, so that you may know and believe Me and understand that I am He. No god was formed before Me, and there will be none after Me.”

*Isaiah 43:10*

SONG

“Voice of Truth” by Casting Crowns

# Day One: Who, Me?



## TODAY'S VERSE

“For I know the plans I have for you” — this is the LORD’s declaration — “plans for your welfare, not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.”

*Jeremiah 29:11*

---

For me, this “season of knowledge” is where it all began. I didn’t really know God personally, but He knew me and had been calling out to me as long as I can remember. Even though I attended a church growing up, I was not walking with Him the way that I was made to nor was I walking in biblical truth. But that all changed the same month I celebrated my thirtieth birthday. God had a very different plan for my life, and for nearly a year, He took me on an intense spiritual journey.

This Bible study was God’s plan. If you had told me before I turned thirty that I was going to write a Bible study of my own, I would never have believed you. After all, before I turned thirty, my beautiful, pink-leathered Bible was buried at the bottom of my file cabinet. I may have known two pieces of Scripture at the time—Psalm 23 and the Beatitudes. I used to think First and Second Corinthians were in the Old Testament! I was certainly an unlikely candidate to write a Bible study. But God knew better.

Can you think of a time in your life when God was calling you to do something, and you couldn’t believe He was calling you? Explain.

Read Isaiah 55:8-9. What is God telling us?

Flip back to Isaiah 40:26. Who brings out the night sky? What does this passage tell us about His awesome power?

Beloved Sister, I’m going to leap right out there and proclaim the truth of this very important concept: if there is one most important thing in knowing God, it’s that we cannot place our human reasoning and limited perspective into how God functions. Reiterating Isaiah 55:8-9, the Lord declares:

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, And your ways are not My ways.” This is the LORD’s declaration. “For as heaven is higher than earth, So My ways are higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.”

He is so much greater, knowledgeable, wonderful and mysterious than we can ever understand or imagine. He brings out the stars one by one, and calls them each by name! If He has enough power to do this, He certainly has enough power to guide you in all you do.

Read Psalm 139:1-6. Meditate on these words for a moment. How well does God know you according to these verses?

Sometimes the most unlikely person is exactly the person God is looking for. Because He made us, knows us inside and out, knows every thought we have and every word on our tongues, He knows that He has given us everything we need to accomplish the task He is calling us to do. It may seem scary to realize how well God knows you. But do not be afraid!

For God loved the world in this way: He gave His One and Only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal

life. For God did not send His Son into the world that He might condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. *John 3:16-17*

One of the famous Bible stories to illustrate God's calling to an unlikely person is the story of David and Goliath found in 1 Samuel 17. If you haven't ever read the story directly from the Bible, take a moment and read it now.

When Saul doubted David's ability to fight the Philistine, how did David respond? (verses 34-37)

What did Saul say and do after David's response? (verses 37-38)

Did David accept Saul's help? (verse 39-40) How did this action bring additional glory to God?

Isn't it amazing what God can do in anyone, even the family's youngest son? From the perspective of human logic, what a foolish choice to fight the nine-foot-tall giant! But that's just how God loves to operate, because when unlikely people accomplish impossible feats, then God is fully glorified. We have to acknowledge it was only through God that it was accomplished.

The next time you find yourself asked to do something way beyond your supposed capabilities, remember God has chosen the exact right person. He is perfect and never makes mistakes. And you have everything you need in Him to do exactly what He has so magnificently planned. Conclude today by reading 2 Peter 1:3 out loud.

*Dear Heavenly Father,*  
 Thank you so much for choosing me for this task. Even though I am not completely sure of myself, you have total assurance that I am exactly the person for you, because this task is about your power through me, not about my own abilities without you. I pray that you help me and guide me through each step, and although I may not always understand, it is all according to your perfect plan. Thank you for loving me the way that you do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

---

What is one new truth you learned today?

# Day Two: Take My Fear



## TODAY'S VERSE

“Don’t be afraid, you who are treasured by God. Peace to you; be very strong!” As he spoke to me, I was strengthened and said, “Let my lord speak, for you have strengthened me.”

*Daniel 10:19*

When I filled in the outline for this Bible study, I felt the ironic feeling of fear over writing this lesson. How about that—I felt afraid to write the lesson on fear!

What is it about fear that just takes us over—that makes us forget all the times we’ve succeeded, all the times God has shown us through, all the times where our lives were so much better when we *didn’t* give into it? And yet so easily we forget that next time we’re asked to step out of our comfort zone, and there’s fear again, crippling us, freezing us, making us feel downright incapable.

What would your life look like if you didn’t let fear guide you in your decisions? Take a moment to think about that concept.

What is a fear you’ve been struggling with lately?

For most of my life, from adolescence through my late-twenties, I was terribly concerned of what people thought of me. I wanted people to like me, to respect

me, to think I was intelligent, to think I was pretty. The weight of that fear was absolutely suffocating. I would do things to please others, but the feeling I got from that was only temporary. I realized a very valuable lesson about love and pleasing others: No person can love with the perfect love that only our Father in heaven can love us with. No person can give us the feeling of security that only Jesus Christ can give us.

The apostle Paul felt pressure from the church in Galatia to communicate words that pleased them. Instead of succumbing to the pressure, Paul boldly declared the truth of striving to please God alone. Look up Galatians 1:10 and write the verse below.

When I began to walk with Jesus the way I was made to, I began to realize that this life is not about pleasing anyone else but God. It took most of my life to see that no one has the ability to love and accept me in the perfect way of Jesus Christ. God is my Rock—He never changes with my emotions or the circumstances surrounding my life. He is perfect love. He is freedom from trying to please others. He is unconditional acceptance when I received Jesus as my Lord and Savior.

Read Romans 8:1-2,15. Fill in the blanks below.

**8:1-2** Therefore, \_\_\_\_\_ now exists for those in \_\_\_\_\_, because the Spirit’s law of life in Christ Jesus has \_\_\_\_\_ from the law of sin and of death.

**8:15** For you did not receive a spirit of \_\_\_\_\_ to fall back into fear, but you received the Spirit of \_\_\_\_\_, by whom we cry out “Abba, Father!”

Once we enter into a relationship with God through Jesus Christ, our sins are wiped away and we are forgiven. Jesus died for us on the cross so that, in

receiving His gift of salvation, we don't have to live by fear again. I can always turn to Jesus to set me free from my fears every time they creep in. And He will never leave me because He loves me, no matter what I do, or will do, or have already done. Some of Jesus' final words to His disciples before ascending to heaven were, "*And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age*" (Matt. 28:20). If I study the Bible and ask for His help in following it with a heart that wants to know Him better, then I am obeying His commands. When I make mistakes, which will inevitably happen, He still loves me, takes my hand, and lifts me up to try again.

It would be misleading if I said that I no longer care what people think of me now that I'm walking with Jesus. This is a fallen world and the enemy can still attack me with this same fear. That's why surrendering a fear to God is a daily process. This is also why the apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:13, "*This is why you must take up the full armor of God, so that you may be able to resist in the evil day, and having prepared everything, to take your stand.*" When this fear begins to shake me again, I do the only thing I know how to do<sup>2</sup> give it to God by proclaiming the truth of who I am in Christ. And I can tell you that this particular fear no longer plagues me like it once did—that I now have an inner strength and courage that can only come from God, and that my security is in Him, not in how others view me. And that, Beloved Sister, is a victory only Jesus Christ can bring.

Going back to the beginning of this lesson—what would our lives be like if we didn't give into fear? Would we be more available to be used by God? Would we experience more freedom that Jesus died for us to have? Would we feel more joy and less burdened?

Are you ready to give a fear of yours away to God? Are you ready to take Jesus' outstretched hand instead of feeling like you have to conquer it all by yourself? Then pray this prayer with me today, and every day, until you are free.

*Dear Heavenly Father,*

I am ready to give you this fear. I am tired of feeling trapped by its weight, and I'm ready for you to take it from me and set me free. Help me to be patient as you work through this in your way and timing. Thank you for your perfect love for me. In your Heavenly Name, Amen.

---

What is one new truth you learned today?

# Day Three: Find a Church



## TODAY'S VERSE

You are the light of the world.  
A city situated on a hill cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and puts it under a basket, but rather on a lampstand, and it gives light for all who are in the house.

*Matthew 5:14-15*

---

When my husband and I moved to Glen Allen, Virginia after he completed graduate school in Raleigh, North Carolina, I felt the need to attend church again on a regular basis. Looking back, that dull ache of being separated from a church had been pulling at my heart for quite a while. I had been on a long hiatus from having a church home—almost ten years. The last church I attended regularly was during my high school years. Perhaps the feeling of being settled in our new home with a baby on the way led me to get serious about attending a church. But even more important than just attending church, He had plans to use the message of the gospel to reach me so that I would receive Him as my Savior.

I was in my first-trimester of pregnancy when we moved to our home in Glen Allen. One day I did an Internet search for churches near our house. I found one and was attracted to its contemporary approach and style. Not knowing anything about contemporary churches, I visited the next Sunday I could. Looking back, God was stirring my heart and leading me to a place where I would first learn about Christianity as a relationship with Jesus Christ.

I remember walking into the building for the very first time and it being so different from what I was used to in the previous churches I attended. The service was in an auditorium instead of a sanctuary.

Inside the auditorium, there were chairs instead of pews, no stained-glass windows and no alter—just a stage, a rock band and a young pastor dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. I tried to make myself feel as comfortable as possible as I sat in the back row, watching lots of young adults walk into the service. The service began and everyone stood up and started clapping and singing to Christian rock music. I remember standing there, clapping along and thinking, “this is church?” It felt so strange to me. Where was the organ music? Where was the processional? I couldn’t get over how different it was. But I stayed through the whole service and found myself enjoying it. And God kept drawing me back there, though not on a regular basis yet. It was over three years later after attending my first service that I became a member and was baptized through immersion (going fully under the water), making my own personal statement and confession that Jesus Christ is my Savior.

About three years later, the Lord led our family to attend a different church. It was a very challenging decision to leave my former church, one that took a tremendous amount of strength and confidence that only the Lord could provide. But I was maturing and growing to trust the Lord more, and He worked through me to move our family to a new place of growth.

I learned a very valuable lesson over leaving our church for a different one: **God knows best.** Even if we have no idea ourselves what the future will bring if we follow Him where He is leading us—trust the Lord! My obedience to Him has brought us many blessings at our current church home.

Look up Proverbs 3:5-6 and write it below. If you aren’t familiar with this very powerful verse, write it on a 3x5 index card as well and carry it around with you. I urge you to take the time to memorize it<sup>2</sup> these verses have brought me peace many times when I have been struggling.

Continuing on, I'd like to make today's lesson personal to your situation. If you currently attend a church, evaluate it on the following basis: Does this church proclaim the Word of God as its foundation for all truth? If not, please prayerfully consider your next step right away. If the church is not based upon God's Word, or if it is teaching something outside or other than what the Bible says, then you need to find another church. A church should stand upon the Bible as the rock of truth, in its entirety, and proclaim the full inspiration and inerrancy of God's Word, from Genesis to Revelation.

According to the International Mission Board (IMB), "Sound, biblical and contextual churches are autonomous groups of scripturally baptized believers meeting intentionally and regularly under identified, plural [more than one leader for accountability], biblically scrutinized leadership to observe the ordinances of the church, worship, pray, study the Bible, minister to and encourage one another in holiness—all in submission to the inerrant Word of God and obedience to fulfill the Great Commission [Jesus' command in Matt. 28:19- 20]."

If you are looking for a church, a great place to begin is to go to <http://sbc.net/churchsearch/default.asp> on the Internet. You can search by your zip code to find a church close to your home. Or if you know a friend who is a Christian, ask him or her where they attend church. Find out if their church fits the definition above from the IMB and ask if you can go to church with them. I'm sure they'd love to have you visit!

God may take some time in leading you to a church home. Be patient and wait for His guidance and direction. Remember He knows what is best for you. Open your heart to Him and prayerfully ask Him, with each church you visit, if this is the church home He wants for you.

Why is attending a church so important? Can't we just grow closer to God through our own personal exploration? Yes, that is all a part of growing closer to God, but we have to remember this journey is not about us as individuals, it is about us as the Body of Christ (the community of followers of Jesus from all around the world). "While your relationship to Christ

is personal, God never intends it to be private. In God's family you are connected to every other believer, and we will belong to each other for 1 eternity."<sup>1</sup>

When you make the commitment to actively attend a church and become a part of God's family in a tangible way, you are demonstrating your role as a genuine believer.<sup>2</sup> At a church, you have an organized outlet to grow in your faith and grow closer to other Christians. You have a Christian family that will help you and strengthen you when you need it, and you are in a place to help and strengthen others when they need it. You are in an organization that fosters loving and serving others in the name of Jesus Christ.

Look up Proverbs 27:17 and write it below.

What do you think God is teaching us in light of being a part of an organized family of believers?

Without a doubt, there would be no way I could have grown in my faith without finding and committing to a church home. I have met some of the most godly men and women who have helped me grow and have helped shape my spirit in ways that I could never have done on my own. These are people who form my true Christian family—individuals that have been put into my life for a reason, who are there to guide me and protect me, to pick me up when I am down and to celebrate with me in times of joy. And I have been placed in their lives for a reason too—to reciprocate in their times of need and their times of celebration.

But I want to be honest with you—these relationships and the closeness that I feel with my church family did not happen overnight. In fact, I attended the contemporary church service on Sunday mornings on and off for almost six months before I grew close to anyone. It wasn't until my daughter was six weeks

<sup>1</sup> Rick Warren, *The Purpose-Driven Life*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2004), 130.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 133.

old that I took a leap of faith, put aside my fears of meeting new people, and attended my first Mothers of Preschoolers (MOPS) meeting. It wasn't easy to enter that classroom by myself, not really knowing anyone well, but God knew that it was something I desperately needed in my life. Even when we don't think He's looking out for us, when we feel very much alone, I want you to know that He is always there. And He brought me to that first MOPS meeting and opened doors for me that changed the direction of my life. It's all about baby steps in the right direction, Beloved Sister, and allowing God to do what only He can.

If you are in the church that God has placed you, won't you open yourself up to His direction and growth within your Christian family? Or, won't you step out of the place you are in now, and see where God will place you?

*Dear Jesus,*

You know what is deepest in my heart and why I have either been reluctant to attend a church, or why I am not growing more because of the church I am attending now. Help me, my Savior, find a church that you want me to be a part of and give me the desire to become a part of a church. Cast away the fears I am having, the lies I am believing, the excuses I am using to not grow with the rest of your children. I know that you have made me to be a part of a community of believers, and I want to follow your plan. In your Precious Name I pray, Amen.

---

What is one new truth you learned today?

# Day Four: The Enemy's Attacks



## TODAY'S VERSE

Resist him [the enemy] and be firm in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are being experienced by your fellow believers throughout the world.

*1 Peter 5:9*

---

The Devil, Satan, Lucifer, the enemy, Beelzebub, Belial—these are all names for the same individual: God's adversary. This opponent of God is desperately trying to keep us in a state of confusion and misery. Growing up, I had certainly heard the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and how the serpent tempted Eve with the forbidden fruit (see Genesis 3:1-13). I remember very clearly the old children's Bible that was on our bookshelf in the family room, complete with illustrations for each of the major Bible stories. And I remember the picture of the serpent in the tree, tempting Eve.

Up until the past several years, Satan was just a fictional character to me. There was never an emphasis nor an acknowledgement of him functioning in the reality of our daily lives in the churches I grew up in, at least, not to my knowledge. But being ignorant or denying the enemy's presence never helped me. It wasn't until I became more aware of his schemes by studying the truth that I was better able to understand my own temptations and shortcomings. And that understanding also helped me feel compassion toward others who did hurtful or damaging things.

Look up Ephesians 6:12 and fill in the blanks below:

For our battle is not against \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the world powers of this

darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavens.

The enemy's attacks have been the same since Adam and Eve. Thankfully for English-speakers, the major ones start with the letter "D" so they are easier to remember: doubt, discouragement, diversion, defeat, delay, and deception.

Gaining wisdom to discern God's voice versus the enemy's voice takes time with God and a consistent study of His Word. The best way to spot the lies is to know the truth. The better we know the truth through God's Word, the Holy Spirit, and a close relationship with Him, the better we will be at spotting an attack of the enemy.

The enemy can be very sneaky indeed, disguising himself as God (2 Cor. 11:14) by telling half-truths or by twisting Scripture to get us to sin (Matt. 4:6-7). Many times, the enemy has tempted me to step out of God's will because I'd fall for similar traps again and again.

Take some time to think about the questions below in your own life.

1. Which time or times of the day are you most susceptible to frustration, anger or exhaustion?
2. Is there a person or group in your life that makes it difficult for you to maintain your peace or that tempt you to do things you know are wrong?

3. Is there a situation you are in regularly that you dread because you tend to react to it in a negative way?

A couple of years ago, as stay-at-home mom with two small children ages three and under, a daily naptime routine was essential for my kids to develop properly and get the rest they needed after a busy morning. It was also a crucial time for me to recharge my batteries. For several months, my daughter was having a difficult time going down for her nap. She would use every excuse to try to get out of napping, and for weeks, the enemy attacked me with the same tactic. I chose to succumb to anger and frustration toward her. It was an awful, vicious cycle that I could not escape on my own. And the enemy got me every single time my daughter would begin her excuses to not take a nap. My anger flashed quickly, and everyone suffered. I'm sure the enemy was very pleased.

Although this situation may seem like no big deal to an outsider, God used it to help me understand how the enemy attacked me in my life apart from just the naptime routine. Through weeks of prayer and perseverance to hear God's voice guide me, I finally realized that there were several lessons He was teaching me that I have been able to extrapolate to other areas of my life. First, He wanted me to put my trust in Him by letting go of the power struggle I was battling with my daughter. Second, He wanted me to realize that the enemy's tactics were similar each time, and only through prayer to Him before I got into that situation was I able to maintain my composure and peace. And third, He wanted me to see that this situation wasn't just about my spiritual development, but about my daughter's too—that she is His child as well, and that He has a plan for her all her own. I am so thankful for these gems of wisdom through perseverance. I am still leaning on His guidance as a parent on these things, and I always will. And because I spent time learning what He was trying to teach me,

He blessed us for it. Eventually, on most occasions (we're still talking about dealing with a three-year-old here) going down for naptime was a very pleasant experience. She would lean on my arm while I read her favorite naptime book. I would sing to her, she would give me a big hug and kiss, then she would wave goodbye as she rolled over to sleep. What a victory, and all because of Jesus.

Read Matthew 4:1-11. Record some of your thoughts below after reading this passage.

Some of my thoughts after reading this were: 1) even Jesus was tempted by Satan!; 2) Jesus knew Scripture perfectly to defeat every attack; and 3) the Father was with him through it all.

First, it's important for all of us to accept that we live in a fallen world here on earth and as long as we are here, **we will be subjected to the enemy's attacks on a daily basis.** If it didn't escape Jesus when He was here, how are we ever to think it will escape us?

Second, Jesus modeled that being knowledgeable in Scripture will help us defeat the enemy when he uses any one of his "D" tricks to tempt us into sin. That is one of the many reasons why spending daily time in the Bible is so essential to living. And here I must admit to you—I am constantly working on getting better at remembering and reciting Scripture. I sometimes get verses jumbled in my head and have to always rely on the Holy Spirit to guide me. However, I'm really good at writing Bible verses on sticky notes and putting them around the house as I need them. I also like to write verses on 3x5 index cards to look at when I'm in the car, waiting at a light or when I'm at the gym. I have been truly and utterly amazed at the work the Spirit has done in me to transform my thinking by putting more Scripture in my head. Romans 12:2 says, *"Do not be conformed to this age, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may discern what is the good, pleasing, and perfect will of God."* Memorizing and meditating on Scripture throughout the day literally transforms our minds! It's like replacing the junk (i.e. the lies of the enemy) with the truth

of God. Amazing!

And finally, always remember that God is with you through every single temptation (1 Cor. 10:13). He is accessible all times of the day, at every instance, and He is deeply knowledgeable about you and your situation. He wants to help you, but you have to take that intentional and purposeful step to allow His help. Sometimes a quick cry for help will do the trick when you don't have time for a lengthy prayer. He knows what you are asking for, and He wants to rush to your aid. In Matthew 14:28-33, Peter got out of the boat to walk on the water to Jesus. When he saw the wind, he grew afraid and began to sink. He quickly cried to Jesus, "Lord, save me!", and immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him.

Beloved Sister, none of us is immune to the enemy's attacks. But Jesus is just a prayer away, and the Bible is our best resource to arming ourselves with God's wisdom. Take some time to truly recognize the patterns in your life where you have suffered the most, and prayerfully invite Jesus to help you discern the truths of those difficulties. Ask Him to point you toward Scripture that speaks directly to you and your situation, and take that verse or those verses and carry them around with you to refer to in a moment's notice.

Several years ago, I found myself in a deep pit that I couldn't escape on my own, and still struggle with these same sins at the enemy's opportune times with me. I am tempted to try to do things on my own without God's help, to be in disbelief, to please others over pleasing God, to give up when faced with difficulties, and to forget what this life is truly about. I typed up this notecard and carried it in my Bible with me (I added my own emphasis where I needed it):

Jesus said, "Remain in me and I will remain in you. If you remain in me and I in you then you will bear much fruit. **Apart from me you can do nothing.**" John 15:4-5 *NIV*

Jesus said, "EVERYTHING is possible for him who believes." Mark 9:23 *NIV*

"Whatever you do, work at it with all your

heart, as working for the Lord, not for men." Colossians 3:23 *NIV*

"...so that by following them you may **fight the good fight**, holding on to **faith** and a **good conscience.**" 1 Timothy 1:18-19 *NIV*

"The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. 1 John 2:17 *NIV*

I love you dearly and from the deepest places of my heart desire God's best for your life and for you to not suffer needlessly in the enemy's clutches. I hope that you take some of these practical steps towards God's will and away from Satan's traps. Remember that you are God's child if you truly have a relationship with Him through Christ and have received the Holy Spirit's guidance. He loves you and wants to free you from captivity. Invite Him in and allow Him to help you as only He can.

*Dear Jesus,*

Please help me. I am tired, frustrated, and desperately searching for a way out of this situation I'm in. I know that you are the only way. Guide me, direct me, and deliver me from these attacks and bring your word and your truths into my life so that you can defeat him for me. Give me Scripture that you have selected just for me, and remind me of your words each time I find myself in another bad situation. I want to be free. Thank you for loving me so deeply and caring for me so much. I trust in your timing to deliver me.

In Your Name, Amen.

---

What is one new truth you learned today?

# Day Five: God is Faithful



## TODAY'S VERSE

Give away your life; you'll find  
life given back, but not merely  
given back—given back with bonus  
and blessing.

*Luke 6:38 (THE MESSAGE)*

---

In the springtime in Richmond, God blesses us with some beautiful days, filled with sunshine and warm temperatures. He also blesses us with rain, and His perfect balance of rain and sunshine produce full trees, green grass, and colorful flowers.

A couple of spring seasons ago, I spent every morning quiet time outside on our deck when it was not raining. The back of our house faces east, so I got to sit outside and watch the sunrise as it came through the trees in the backyard. Sometimes I was out there before the sun rose and saw the bright morning star to the right of the tree line. The star began to fade as the sun came up. But one of them was always visible.

Jesus is described in the Bible as the Bright Morning Star (Rev. 22:16) and the radiance of God's glory (Heb. 1:3). Jesus is like the star I see in the morning and the sun that rises as the star fades. He is always there. And on the cloudy days where I can't see either the star or the sun, I know that they are still there. These are the certainties of life. Jesus is faithfully with us always, even when we can't see him, and even when we can't feel him.

Deuteronomy 31:8 says, "*The LORD is the One who will go before you. He will be with you; He will not leave you or forsake you.*" Have you felt this to be true in your own life? Why or why not?

A little while back I started a prayer journal. I write my prayers, worries, and victories down so that I can look back and see how God responded. Sometimes, He answers prayers right away. Other times, He takes a while. Sometimes the answer is "Yes," sometimes "No, because I have something better." But most of the time the answer is "Wait."

Because daily life can be so hectic, we can easily forget all the positive things that have happened and focus on the negative things. Unfortunately, we are wired to remember the bad more easily than the good. That's why it can be difficult to see the pattern of God working in our lives and be easily susceptible to questioning His faithfulness. When I began to diligently write in my journal on a daily basis, I was better equipped to see all the faithfulness God has poured into my life—all the prayers that He has answered; all the times where He showed me through the challenges I faced. And when I'm faced with another challenge where I begin to doubt His faithfulness, I can look back and see what He did in the past.

Look up Psalm 105:4-5. Write verse 5 below. Circle the word "remember."

A few months after I started writing in a journal, I began to notice a pattern. As my trust in God grew, His demonstrated faithfulness in my life shined brighter. As I chose to trust Him more, His peace poured down more abundantly. Jesus said in John 15:4, "*Remain in Me, and I in you. Just as a branch is unable to produce fruit by itself unless it remains on the vine, so neither can you unless you remain in Me.*" Jesus is telling us that He loves us and will always be here for us, but when we take that purposeful step of faith to choose to believe that He loves us and is here for us, then we see the fruit that we bear more abundantly because of that choice. I often pray, "God, I have no idea what is going on now, but I choose to trust you because you are faithful always."

Beloved Sister, a lack of faith in God is a major ob-

stacle for us not seeing His work in our lives. Because God is love (1 John 4:16), and true love is not forced love, He is not going to force us to believe Him. He wants us to love Him and believe Him by our own free will. We need to take the steps that only we can take toward God, and He does the rest. To illustrate this, let's look in the Bible at how God interacted with Zachariah.

Read the story of Zachariah, John the Baptist's father, in Luke 1:5-20. When the angel of the Lord appeared and told him that his wife would bear a son in her old age, how did he react (verse 18)?

How did Gabriel respond and why (verse 19-20)?

Continue on with Luke 1:57-66. When did Zachariah speak again?

Do you think this lesson from God strengthened his faith (see Luke 1:67-80)?

Even when Zachariah had the angel of the Lord standing right in front of him, he had a difficult time believing! Unbelief is such an obstacle for us in our contemporary world. The more we have glimpses into the unknown through modern means, the more we expect proof to believe. But Beloved Sister, God wants you to believe Him despite the world's standards and excuses to the contrary. And steps in faith toward Him, even when you can't see Him or feel Him, will always be blessed and will strengthen your faith, so that He does become more real to you.

Over three years ago, I began to struggle in my ca-

reer as a college textbook sales rep. My son was a few months old, and I could no longer juggle the stressful work environment and the heavy travel schedule, knowing that I had two little ones at home who were very sick that particular winter season. While I loved many aspects of my job, the most appealing aspect was the money. With salary plus commission, I had a yearly potential of earning six figures. I considered quitting a few times after my daughter was born, but shrugged it off because I was fearful of the financial impact it would have on our family.

God knew I wasn't where He needed me to be, so in order to get my attention, He allowed some very difficult and painful things to happen that gave me no choice but to seriously consider leaving my job as a sales rep. After several weeks of prayer, guidance from close friends and my pastor, as well as discussions with my husband, I realized that I had to take the step of faith and trust God and His plan for my life. I had no tangible evidence that leaving my job was the right choice, I just had to live by faith and trust in the peace God was giving me in my choice to leave. I didn't know what the future would bring, but I chose to believe in God's direction for me. It was, without a doubt, the biggest leap of faith I had ever made up to that point. It was also the leap of faith that brought me into a true relationship with Jesus Christ where I received his Holy Spirit and salvation for all eternity.

If I had continued to let fear drive my choice to stay at my sales job, then this Bible study would not have been written. I would have never realized that God had a very different plan for me than I had for myself, and I would not have grown closer to Him as a result. Now I am finishing this Bible study, I just graduated from seminary, and I'm beginning an online women's ministry called *Encouraging Women for Christ*. And all because I chose to walk by faith, and not by sight.

In Mark 9:22-24, a father begged Jesus to free his son from the clutches of an evil spirit. The father said to Jesus, "But if You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." Jesus responded, "If You can? Everything is possible to the one who believes." Immediately the father exclaimed, "I do believe; help my unbelief!" I think of this story often and pray this same prayer to

Jesus when I am faced with doubt. Please Jesus, help my unbelief!

Write 2 Corinthians 5:7 and change the "we" to "I."

Make the choice today to walk by faith, and not by sight, and ask God for His help. I promise you that you will see blessings that you never thought possible. Choose faith, and choose to believe that God is faithful. Your Bright Morning Star will always guide you.

*Dear Heavenly Father,*  
You know what I am afraid of and why I am not choosing faith. Help me to see that you are faithful, perfect love and that you want so much more for my life. I want to make the choice to trust in you.  
Help me overcome my doubt.  
Thank you for the life you've given me. Help me to live it according to your will, and help me to believe.  
In Jesus' name, Amen.

---

What is one new truth you learned today?