

A close-up photograph of pink cherry blossoms in full bloom, with some flowers in sharp focus and others blurred in the background. The blossoms are set against a soft, light background.

GROWING THROUGH THE CHURCH

Encouragement for sisters in Christ

Stephanie Wilkinson



DiLSOZI
Equipping for Faithfulness

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Providing resources to help believers and churches
live faithfully according to God's word.



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Dear sister in Christ, have you ever wondered what it would look like to grow in your faith? Are you discouraged because you're not growing? Perhaps you are even now wrestling with the words of Jesus and the cost of following Him. Thank you for picking up this book. I hope it renews your love for Christ and communicates the importance that the Bible places on local groups of gathered Christians, the local church. If you want to grow as a Christian, you must do it in community with other believers. I pray this book is a blessing and encouragement to your faith as you grow. May you grow in your love for Jesus, and in your love for His Church.

All the testimonies in this book are from Middle Eastern women who have repented of their sins and believed in Jesus. Their names have been changed for their protection.

This book owes thanks to Keri Folmar's book entitled *How Can Women Thrive in the Local Church?* While the main points of this book were inspired by those found in Keri's book, the writing is original to this author. The aim was to provide the same truths, grounded in Scripture and illustrated by the local context, to build up the body of Christ.

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Prologue

The prophet felt the vision descend upon him, with a weighty sense of the holiness of the One who sent it. As far as he looked, he was surrounded by ancient dry bones, the remnants of a great multitude long passed into another realm. The prophet wandered among these bones, marveling at their number.

The voice of God then asked him, “Son of man, can these bones live?”

The prophet replied as expected. Of course, dry bones cannot bring themselves back to life. But when God speaks over them, miracles happen.

Then God said to the prophet, “Prophecy over these bones, and say to them, O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones, Behold, I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. And I will lay sinews upon you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live. And you shall know that I am the Lord.”

The prophet obeyed, prophesying over the multitude of dead bones. And as he did, the bones

began to rattle. They began to join back together, each bone connecting with its accompanying bone. The joined skeletons then formed sinews connecting the bones, and flesh and skin came upon them.

But even after this miraculous event, they were still dead.

The voice of God spoke again, commanding the prophet to speak over the bodies in His name. As the prophet did so, the breath of God came into them. A multitude of living, breathing, humanity now filled the valley that only moments before had been littered with the bones of the dead.

New Life

You Must be Born Again

This vision from Ezekiel 37 is gruesome and beautiful. Why would God impart this to his servant Ezekiel, and then preserve it for future generations of Christians to read and meditate on in the Bible? The answer is simple but so very deep at the same time.

All of humanity is like these dry bones, and only God can bring life out of what is dead.

At the beginning of time, the Holy God created the universe and everything in it by the power of His spoken Word. There was only darkness until He spoke light into existence (Genesis 1:3). He chose to give life to Adam and Eve, who would then repay him by defying His word, resulting in the curse of death being placed on the first man Adam (Genesis 3). Because of this first sin, all of humanity is united by our shared curse and our resulting separation from our Creator. Our first father brought shame to all of us, and we continued this legacy through our own sin. So sin came into the world through Adam, and with sin came death (Romans 5:12).

“For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Romans 3:23).

What is this idea of “the glory of God?” God is Spirit and cannot be seen, and yet we can see aspects of His character, His holiness, His beauty and His power in what He has made. “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard” (Psalm 19:1-3).

So if all of the world can see aspects of who God is through His creation, they should all respond in repentance and worship. But they have not. We have not, and we know in our hearts that we have failed to live and think as God requires. All humanity is spiritually blind, having exchanged the glory of the eternal God for idolatry of various kinds (Romans 1). This idolatry includes anything that we love or honor more than our Creator, even good things like health, a good reputation, or family relationships.

Do you remember that valley full of bones that Ezekiel saw in his vision? That is each and every

one of us in our natural state. We are dead in our sin and separated from God because of our sin.

So the Bible states that because of sin all people, even you, dear reader, are spiritually dead. Without the intervention of God on your behalf, you are dead in your sins, enslaved to passions, covered in the shame of your ancestors and the shame of your own actions. This is like a death sentence for a prisoner. And if this were the end of the story, we would grieve forever and God would be perfectly just to leave us in our sins. We owe God our allegiance and worship. He owes us nothing.

But in the midst of our hopelessness and need, Jesus enters the story. The Bible describes Jesus as the Son of Man, the descendent of King David, the heir of Abraham, and the second Adam. Why are these titles important? Because they tell us who Jesus is and what He came to do for sinful humanity. Jesus is Himself God, the eternal Word of God who has always existed. God the Father sent him to earth to take on flesh and live the perfect life that the first man Adam should have lived but didn't. We are under the curse of sin, and only a representative from our human race can bear this curse. But only God is perfect and powerful enough to bear the punishment for the sin of the entire

human race. Jesus Christ is God's gracious answer to the problem of our sin. "He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). His death is the death that sinners deserve. But because he never sinned, and because he is himself God, death could not hold him. He rose from the dead on the third day to save and rescue every single person who now comes to him by faith. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith" (Romans 3:23-24).

But if you simply hear this good news and do nothing, it doesn't benefit you.

You cannot just hear and affirm that this is a beautiful idea. You must receive it for your own life and for the renewal of your own heart. You must confess with your mouth that you have sinned against your holy Creator and have not lived a perfectly holy life. Only those who are holy can live with God forever, because God is holy. You must accept with your heart what God says, that you have sinned and deserve death and to be separated from Him because of your own sin. Your sin, like Adam

and Eve's sin in the very first garden, separates you from God. You cannot wash this sin and shame away through enough prayer, giving money, doing good deeds, fasting, or visiting holy places. These deeds will never be enough to wash your conscience clean and make your heart holy before God. You must turn from your sin and believe in the righteousness of Jesus on your behalf. Only Jesus' righteousness now saves you from God's just wrath at your sin. Only Jesus' honor and worth as the perfect sacrifice for sin can take away your shame and the defilement of sin. If you believe this, you will receive a new heart, a new spirit. You will go from being dead bones in Ezekiel's valley to being a living, breathing, true spiritual being transformed for God's glory. "Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved!" (Romans 10:9)

"But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were DEAD in our trespasses, made us alive together in Christ. By grace you have been saved" (Ephesians 2:4-5).

So dear sisters, the first step to new spiritual life is this: you must first believe this good news. You

must know that you, like me, deserve to be left in your sin and separated from God. You must know that you can never work hard enough to undo your own shame. But know this; if you have confessed your sin before God and believed this good news is for you, God has rescued you because of His great mercy and love. By grace you have been saved.

Listen to this story from a woman very much like you.

**Noor:*

“I was a soldier and my situation was very difficult. I hadn’t seen my family for a long time and I missed them so much. I had a friend who was a fellow soldier, but I didn’t know that she was a Christian. One day I saw a beautiful small book in her hand and asked her what it was. She told me it was a Bible and explained some of the message of the Bible to me. She told me about the life of Jesus and what he did for our sake. She told me that He was God and a human! I was so shocked. What she was saying flipped everything I had learned about God upside down. I had so many questions, so I began to read the Bible. When I read the story of the woman with the bleeding disease (Mark 5), my heart was filled with peace

and joy. Growing up, I often felt like being a woman meant I was nothing and that I had no power. But I saw this truth clearly in the Bible; that God is abundantly merciful towards women and places the same value on women as He does on men. Through reading the Bible, I came to understand who Jesus is and I believed in Him to save me. I saw that I was sinful before God, but that Jesus was the one who was merciful and powerful to forgive me of my sin.”

New Community

What the Church Is

“Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh...let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near” (Hebrews 10:19-25).

The author of the book of Hebrews exhorts us, in light of this glorious gospel, to draw near to God, to hold tightly to our faith because God is faithful, and to examine and refine our faith through the local community of believers. Followers of Christ are to regularly gather with each other to encourage and strengthen one another in what they believe. Notice the strong rebuke against neglecting to gather together with other believers. Neglecting to gather regularly with other believers leaves a believer vulnerable and weak, rather than strengthened and

encouraged. Gathering together regularly with other believers is one of the ways our hearts can be strengthened to continue living life as a Christian, waiting faithfully for the return of Christ. Perhaps in your old way of life, you relied on your own strength and wisdom, preferring to depend on yourself rather than others. Remember that this wisdom did not lead you to Christ, but into sin.

If you have received Christ, you are now, according to the Bible, a new creation! (2 Corinthians 5:17) That means you now have new priorities and goals for your life. You have a new heart that now wants to do what pleases God and feels conviction in a new way when you sin. It's like being given a pair of glasses to help you see clearly for the first time, and new eyes with which to see. Everything is different than you thought it was. You will need help to stay committed to this new way of life, and you will want to surround yourself with friends who can encourage you as you grow. God's plan is for His people to grow through being a part of a local church.

In fact, the normal response when someone enters God's family through faith in Christ is to regularly gather with and live their lives in community alongside other Christians.

The church is more than just a service you attend once a week. Rather, God has designed the Christian faith to be lived out in the context of healthy community. Through sharing life together, believers can see and affirm one another's faith. They can warn one another when they are living in a way that does not honor God, and help each other grow. The local church you are accountable to will, over time, become your new community.

Consider the Christians in the book of Acts. This book of the Bible takes place after Jesus Christ has risen from the dead, appeared to many witnesses, and returned to heaven. In chapter 2, there is a miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Jesus' disciples. "And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:4). These ordinary people began to proclaim the good news of Jesus in languages that they did not know. The Holy Spirit being poured out on them enabled them to communicate the gospel message clearly so a multitude of people from many nations could hear and respond. Emboldened by this power, the apostle Peter gave a sermon, detailing God's plan of redemption and the sinful response of humanity to God's gracious invitation.

Listen in to the next part of the story:

“Peter said, “Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” And Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” And with many other words he bore witness and continued to exhort them, saying, “Save yourselves from this crooked generation.” So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls” (Acts 2: 36-41).

Notice the response of those who received his word. After believing the message, they were baptized. Baptism, or immersion in water, is the outward sign that someone has found and received this new way

of life in Christ. Baptism does not save you, but it signifies to those who see that this is your public statement of identifying with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection. Through baptism, followers of Christ proclaim that they have died to living life for their own will, reputation or glory. They have rejected the sin that previously ruled their heart and mind, and accepted God's rule instead. They have been raised to walk in a new way of life through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit to continue trusting in Jesus every day. They proclaim that they trust this same power to keep them walking with Christ all the way until death and into eternity. For those first believers, and for believers today as well, baptism is like a gateway into the family of God. After being baptized, they were "added" to the other believers and began to publicly gather together and identify with them.

Put yourself in the situation of that multitude who were hearing the gospel preached to them by Peter. Imagine understanding, for the first time in your life, the magnitude of your sin and shame that separates you from fellowship with the God who created you. Imagine the despair of knowing that you participated in the murder of the innocent and holy Savior of the world. But you hear a message that calls you out of despair and shame and into a

new life full of a grateful response to the God who saved you. If this was you, would your life look the same? Of course not. On the contrary, your life would show a change and a new way of living if you truly understood the gospel.

And so it did for those first Christians as well.

“And they devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. And all who believed were together and had all things in common. And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved” (Acts 2:42-47).

The response of that first group of Christians was to be *baptized*, and to *gather* with one another!

They had been saved from their sin, washed clean from their shame, and given a new identity as God's honored and holy people. How could they go back to their old way of life and pretend nothing had changed? They came together to hear teaching, to take the Lord's Supper, to eat and pray and worship. The result of this was a holy unity and joy among one another. Even unbelievers recognized that the hand of God was on them.

God's provision of a community of fellow believers was for their good. A Christian in this time was not meant to be alone nor just by himself or herself outside the fellowship of others, nor could they choose to be a follower who would not identify with Christ. There wasn't an in-between option. Very soon after this public miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the church began to be persecuted. But Jesus Himself warned that this would happen when he was here on the earth. Everywhere followers of Christ went, even fleeing persecution, they found other Christians and gathered with them for accountability, worship, teaching and prayer. The new people of God, indwelt by God's Holy Spirit, were formed into a new spiritual family, the church.

What is the church?

What sorts of things define this institution of the church? We see many of them listed in the Acts passage: regularly gathering together to hear teaching from the Bible, fellowship, eating together and taking the Lord's Supper, and prayer. After the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and the salvation of many people, right away the Christians began to gather together. Ever since then, for thousands of years, Christians all over the world have been gathering together to carry out these same privileges and responsibilities.

For many of us, we may understand the word "church" to mean a building where Christian activities take place. However, according to the Bible, the word "church" simply means a gathered group of believers in a specific place who are committed to one another. A true church can exist with or without a building. The important thing to understand is that the church is a local group of the people of God gathering according to His Word.

There are many roles within this body of believers, and each one is vitally important. They are all necessary in order for believers to be growing spiritually. "And he (Jesus) gave the apostles, the

prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood” (Ephesians 4:11-13). The passage goes on to describe how important it is for believers to speak the truth in love to one another in order to grow more and more like Christ, who is the head of the church. When all believers are functioning in this way, it is as if we all form a healthy spiritual body, with all the joints, bones, muscles and vital organs functioning together as they should, for the glory of God. This healthy body (the church) then grows into greater spiritual maturity, with each member helping and being helped by the others.

The book of Titus, written by Paul, describes a category of leader within this spiritual family. In the Bible, these are called elders, overseers, or shepherds. God has given them to lead the church. Listen to the description of what this man must be like:

“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of

good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it” (Titus 1:7-9).

These men are meant to lead the church with integrity, spiritual maturity, and gentleness. Since one of their main jobs is to teach Scripture to the church, they must be devoted to the Word of God and live their lives in a holy way. While only men may fill the office of elder, the Bible teaches that both men and women are made equally valuable in the image of God. In Christ, there is no difference in standing between male and female (Galatians 3:28). Pastors/elders/overseers are called to care for both the men and women in their care. Women in these churches have the right to ask them questions and seek their counsel. Under the careful, Christ-centered leadership of a godly pastor, every woman can flourish and grow in her faith.

Christians have a responsibility to submit to the spiritual leaders that God places over us for our good. We also have a responsibility to call them to submit to the instructions God has given them. If someone is serving in a role within the church that,

according to the Bible, they are not qualified for, we must graciously call them to account for the sake of Jesus' reputation. But we must also seek to humbly build up the church, to use the time and gifts God has given us to help and serve others. The church exists to bring glory to Jesus. With that in mind, each member is called to "submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Ephesians 5:21). As each member grows in their faith, they will no longer be submitting to the worldly ways of thinking that marked their life before believing in Christ. They will instead seek to be like a strong healthy tree branch, with roots going deep into the truth of Christ, bearing fruit for righteousness alongside other fellow believers. "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love" (Eph. 4:15-16). This means working for the health and growth of all the members, and fighting the temptation to build up our own reputation or make ourselves look good.

*Noor:

“When God allowed me to find the church I am now a part of, and once I became a member, I felt so much closer to the other members. My connection with them was deeper and stronger. I have seen that commitment to membership in a local church is so important. We can grow, learn, encourage each other, and love each other as brothers and sisters.”

*Mizhda:

“Through regular attendance in church, the way I view people has changed for the better. Through hearing the sermons and being a member, I have grown closer and closer to Jesus, and my life of faith has continued to grow.”

*Noor:

“Membership is actually a little bit strange for our culture. We have groups and clubs in school and college, but we don’t have membership in our mosques. The idea of membership was strange for me at first, but I have come to view it as a truly special thing. I have understood that this idea of membership allows people to place more

importance on each other. When I sense the responsibility that the other members have towards me and I have towards them, I feel valued. Here I have seen men and women sing and talk together without sin, and encourage each other as members of one body. They complete each other (like the parts of your body complete your body). It's difficult to become used to this idea. Some people still don't understand what membership is and it takes time. But we are trying slowly to teach our people what (biblical) membership is. Membership is a way of placing importance on each other. We can see God's love for us more clearly in how we love each other and live life together, as members of one church."

Sisters in Christ, if you believe in Jesus and love Him, you must love what He loves. And he loves His body, the church. He is the head of it, and if we want to love and honor Him, we must obey him by being in community with other Christians through membership in a local church. The normal pattern for followers of Jesus is for them to regularly gather together; for encouragement in the faith, confession of sin, singing, and hearing the Word of God taught, among other things. It isn't enough to just say you commit to a local church, you must make those

weekly gatherings a central part of your week. Many churches meet on Sundays, some on Fridays or other days of the week for scheduling reasons. The point is to be weekly gathering together with brothers and sisters in Christ to whom you are accountable.

Seek to obey this pattern that God has set out for your good. If you refuse, you are hardening your heart against your Savior who loves you and shed his own blood for you.

If you desire to gather with other Christians, but because of your life circumstances, you are unable, then begin by praying. Jesus' heart for you is merciful and loving. If there is a fellow Christian that you can trust, then let them know about your struggle. Ask them to pray with you for God to solve this problem that seems impossible and show you how to obey Him. Nothing is too difficult for Him.

Maybe even now you are facing danger or persecution because you are joyfully bearing the name of Christ. Hear this promise:

“What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up

for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died-more than that, who was raised-who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:31-39).

According to these verses, nothing can separate a Christian from the love of God that is for them in Christ Jesus. God knows your heart, and he can grow you even through this painful trial. His love and power, which are for your good, do not change even when your circumstances change. Read your

Bible, and learn His great and precious promises to you. Pray diligently, and ask God to provide for you. He is the perfect Father and is “able to do far more abundantly than all we ask or think” (Eph 3:20). He graciously invites us to ask him for what we need. So if your desire is to obey God by gathering with his people but for some reason you cannot, keep praying and asking. God will be glorified through your obedience and perseverance.

New Center

The Word of God

Women are often servant-hearted by nature. Sometimes this is because we enjoy and thrive in this, sometimes it is because this is the role society has given us. What a joy to know that God's priority for us is not that we would work harder, but that we would rest in his grace and delight in his word! In Matthew 4:4, Jesus describes the Word of God as being more essential to life than eating bread. In Psalm 19:10, King David describes God's words as "more to be desired than gold, and sweeter than honey, even honey from the honeycomb." In the New Testament, believers are encouraged to long for and take in the Word of God like infants drink milk in order to grow. All of this points to the need for a regular diet of taking in God's Word. Every day, as much as you can, in whatever form you can, get the Bible in your heart and mind.

Through Christ, we have been given new eyes and a new heart, a new reputation and identity, and a new spiritual family to celebrate and grow with. We gather together with our physical family to prepare for special occasions, make bread, talk about the news of the family, or comfort each other. Now God's word and His Holy Spirit work within us so

we will desire to gather with those who also love Jesus and His Word! We will want to read it, discuss it, sing it, and understand it more and more. In this life, you will never stop learning about the glories of God and His Word. This is how you grow in your faith, but you cannot do it alone. In His wisdom, God has designed sanctification, or growth in godliness, to be a community event for those who know Christ. Service will then flow out of a heart that is delighting in His truth.

At one point during the ministry of Jesus, he visited the village home of his dear friend Lazarus, who had two sisters named Mary and Martha. They joyfully welcomed him into their home. What an honor for them! Surely there was much to be done; food to make, things to clean and prepare. Martha was “distracted with much serving.” But Mary was not. Mary sat at Jesus’ feet and listened to everything he said, drinking up his words like a deer pants for water. In her busyness and stress, Martha perhaps forgot the heart of Jesus. “And she went up to him and said, “Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me.”

“But the Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, but

one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her” (Luke 10:38-42).

Jesus did not rebuke Mary for sitting and listening. But he gently rebuked Martha for forgetting what the most necessary thing was; to hear and love the words of Jesus. Sisters, in our serving let’s not forget that God doesn’t only want our good works; he wants our heart. And our hearts are transformed by knowing and applying His Word.

Why should we prioritize God’s Word?

The Bible is a treasure for us. The God who created the world by His Word and spoke everything into existence simply by His power, wants to be known by us. He has come near to us and made himself known through His Word. So don’t neglect it. While there are so many reasons followers of Christ should read and delight in the Bible, here are just a few.

It tells us what is true

False teachers are abundant in this world. Many of them might even claim the name of “Christian”. How will you know who is trustworthy? You must

know the Word of God. If we know the Bible well, we can recognize when someone is using it in a wrong way or twisting it to get something that they want. The more we spend time with the Word of God, the more our hearts will be trained by what is true. This will help us recognize what is false.

We also must recognize that each of us has been shaped by a particular worldview and culture before coming to Christ. This is part of who we are, but it comes with its own strengths and weaknesses. As followers of Christ, our ideas about what is true and good, and even our ideas about what is wrong or shameful, must be first based on the Word of God. If there is any area of our life or thinking where our culture conflicts with the clear teaching of the Word of God, what should we do? Remember that our new allegiance as Christ-followers is to Him. He tells us what is true, and what is right, and the primary place He does that is through His Word. As we regularly come to the Bible to allow it to shape our thinking, we will be living according to the prayer that Jesus himself prayed in John 17:17, “Sanctify them in the truth, your word is truth.”

It convicts us of sin and reminds us of the gospel truth

“Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger, for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God. Therefore put away all filthiness and rampant wickedness and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls. But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:19-22).

Is your heart convicted when you read these verses? Remember that the Word of God is like a lamp shining holy conviction into all the corners of our heart. When we read His Word, we will find areas of sin we didn't even know were there. This is exactly what God intends for us! He is slowly but surely making each of his children more holy. But we must not stop at simply reading these precious words. We must confess our sin to the Lord and ask him to heal us. 1 John tells us, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1:8-9). So when you read the

Bible and are convicted of a new area of sin, be encouraged at this growth! Confess it to the Lord, and perhaps to a trusted sister in Christ, and seek to keep growing in the power of the Holy Spirit who lives within you.

It comforts us in suffering

The verses we read earlier from Romans 8 remind us that nothing can separate us from the love of God for us in Christ, not even things that feel incredibly painful and shameful. The Bible tells us many stories of faithful saints who have also suffered for the name of Christ, like those listed in Hebrews 11. Some were rescued out of their trials, but many were not, and even went all the way to death rejoicing because of Jesus' victory on their behalf. Psalm 31:23-24 tells us: "Love the Lord, all you his saints! The Lord preserves the faithful but abundantly repays the one who acts in pride. Be strong, and let your heart take courage, all you who wait for the Lord!" When we go to the Word of God in our suffering, the Holy Spirit reminds us how we can rightly view this suffering, and gives us comfort and power to endure.

How do we prioritize God's Word?

Practically, how do we learn to make time to delight in and learn more of God's Word? The more we taste the goodness of the Word of God, the more we will desire it. As followers of Christ, our lives should be increasingly marked by obedience to and dependence on His Word.

So we should **read** it! Read it to know more of God and more of the whole story of Scripture. We should **listen** to it, in apps or audio files. It can be difficult for many of us to find quiet times to study. While this is true, I would encourage each of us to use the moments that we do have wisely. Perhaps instead of watching the news or a new funny video, we should use our time to draw near to the Lord by reading Scripture, thinking about it, or writing it down to meditate on later. You can listen to Scripture when you are tempted to dwell on the hard things about your life or the things that cause you to fear. God's words are "life to those who find them" (Proverbs 4:22). We will never regret spending time reading or listening to Scripture, but instead "whoever listens to (Scripture) will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of disaster" (Prov 1:33).

We can **sing** it and **speak** it to others.

Colossians 3:16-17 states, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

According to the Bible, you can sing in a way that pleases God! You can sing his words to yourself as you work, as you walk to the market, even while washing dishes or cleaning the floor. When Scripture is filling your heart, it will flow out of you in conversations with other people. This naturally leads to the encouragement of other believers, and the proclaiming of God’s goodness to unbelievers.

We must **memorize** His words as well. Many of us know song lyrics, poetry, or the stories of our grandparents. These things have their own value, but the words of God have eternal value and are able to preserve our souls. As Psalm 119:11-12 says, “I have stored up your word in my heart, that I

might not sin against you. Blessed are you O Lord; teach me your statutes!”

We can **pray** Scripture as well! As Scripture reveals to us what is true, it will show us areas of sin and wrong priorities in our lives. It also reveals the things that God desires Christians to pray about and think about. We can pray like this, “With my whole heart I seek you; let me not wander from your commandments!” (Psalm 119:10)

*Srwe:

“When I first believed in Jesus, it was hard to let my faith affect every aspect of my life. At that time I had many friends, and the style of my life was very different, so it was difficult to show them that the way of my life had changed. I also found it difficult to show my faith to other people. I felt that if I showed people my faith influenced my life, I wouldn’t be accepted among my friends anymore. I was afraid my friends would think I wasn’t a good friend anymore or wasn’t a friend who was fun to be around. Or maybe I would be annoying to them, or they would think I was backwards and uneducated.

But through reading the Bible and praying regularly, I have seen so much growth in my faith. God has called me more and more to let my faith affect every area of my life. And it is still a process that I haven't reached the end of. God is still daily working in all the different parts of my life and calling me to live differently. Through His work, He is showing his glory in my life. I still think the hardest part is allowing my family and friends to see this, especially the friends who have known me for a long time and saw me in a very different season of my life. But praise God for how I have grown through the church. Through having believing friends who are an encouragement to me, I can more and more allow my faith to affect my job, my relationships and many other aspects of my life, especially compared to my life a few years ago."

* Mizhda:

"I am so happy that my faith affects every aspect of my life, because this has the result of me growing closer and closer to Jesus. I see how God is at work in my life to completely transform it.

New Spiritual Family

The Family of God

Love and welcome your new spiritual family

Jesus warned his disciples that his message, when truly understood and followed, would not bring peace within biological families, but division. Through the gospel, God calls us to a new identity, new priorities, and a new spiritual family. If our biological family is also following Christ, then we have the joy of fellowshiping with them. But sadly, especially in this part of the world, this is often not the case. Many times, those who repent of their sins and turn to Christ are persecuted by their biological families and the communities around them. Jesus calls his followers to not be surprised by this. The gospel message does bring peace to those who receive it. It brings peace and eternal life and a new source of joy that is not found in our circumstances. But it then divides between those who believe and those who do not.

In Matthew 10:34-39 Jesus states:

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace on the earth. I have not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to set a

man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law. And a person's enemies will be those of his own household. Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me. And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it."

When Jesus refers to a sword in this passage, he is talking about relationships being divided and enmity being present where before there seemed to be relational peace. He is not talking about using a physical sword. He states elsewhere that His kingdom is not of this world and rebukes his disciples for seeking to use physical strength and weapons to accomplish what only God can do (John 18:36, Luke 9:51-55, Matthew 16:21-23).

This division seems like bad news. And there is real loss when you lose relationships. That is something we should grieve, but we should also continue to pray that God would give new eyes to your biological family to see the beauty and value of Jesus.

But we should take our eyes off our loss for a minute and look to the treasure that God has laid up for us in Christ. Matthew chapter 1 describes the genealogy of Jesus Christ, who came as a man, in the flesh, born to a virgin by the plan of God.

We have now been grafted into the genealogy of Jesus by faith. That means we share in all the honor of our Savior, Jesus Christ. He has given us a new reputation and heritage. We don't stop being members of our physical family, but our spiritual genealogy now takes priority. This new identity includes the ultimate destination of forever life with Jesus.

Alongside that, God has granted us a new spiritual family. John 1:12-13 states, "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God."

So this is a new family being formed, not according to biology, but according to a deeper spiritual reality. Everyone in this family has received Christ by faith, and has received the Holy Spirit who testifies to our hearts that we belong to Christ (Romans 8:16-18). We don't get to choose our

siblings in this family, but we do have confidence that if they are truly changed in their hearts, they will grow in becoming more like Christ just as we will. In this spiritual family, just as in a biological family, we have roles and responsibilities that help us on our way as we seek to honor Christ and live for His glory.

Titus chapter 2 is another passage that describes various roles that men and women of different ages have within this spiritual community. Older men are described with reverence and respect, and older women are to be a model for younger women, teaching them not only what is honorable behavior for believers, but also teaching them what is good and right. Younger men are called to show self-control. This is all so that “in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior” (Titus 2:10).

Do you see how this functions as a new family? Older, experienced ones helping the younger ones. Men and women interacting as brothers and sisters. New fathers and mothers in the faith. This is all for the goal of adorning the gospel and helping each other persevere in the faith. It also brings honor to the name of Christ when his people share life together like a spiritual family. If we truly love

Christ and his word, our lives will reflect his glory. Because of this, God will be praised even among unbelievers.

If you have had the privilege of knowing Christ for a period of time, reflect on how you have come to know more about Scripture and how to live life as a follower of Christ. Most likely, there have been examples that you have learned from and imitated. Even if you still feel new or immature in your faith, you can share what you know and what you are learning about sin, repentance, and obedience with the other women in your life. If you know of a woman who is seeking to learn more about Christ, maybe you are the one who should offer to meet with her to read the Bible. Is there a new believer in your church or community? Ask the Lord to give you a heart that desires to encourage her in her new faith. Meeting with another woman can be as simple as opening up a book of the Bible, praying, and making observations about what you see and how to apply it. Your own faith will be strengthened and refined in a new way as you learn to communicate the precious truths that you love in a way that another woman can understand. By God's help, you can model for them what it looks like to "be watchful, stand firm in the faith...be strong, and

let all that you do be done in love” (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).

What if your biological family is trying to harm you because of your faith?

Christians are told not to be surprised at the fiery trial of persecution and other sufferings that come on them because they bear the name of Christ. “But rejoice insofar as you share Christ’s sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed” (1 Peter 4:13). Throughout Scripture, we see God at times calls believers to stay in a context of persecution, and sometimes he provides a way out to flee. Both fleeing and staying are seen even in the life of the apostle Paul. Either way, know that persecution is the normal experience for followers of Christ. One of the reasons he has given us the gift of the body of Christ is to comfort and encourage one another in our sufferings. Seek the wise counsel of the other Christians around you to help you discern if you should flee persecution or stay in it.

Read this testimony from some fellow believers:

“Hama and Tara tasted in a small amount what it was like for the body of Christ to function as their new spiritual family as they were prayed for, visited, and counseled

in a season of heavy trial and persecution from their biological family. Afterwards, they stated, “Now we understand why you were always talking about church. Our physical family has abandoned us and attacked us. We were alone, except for you all, our believing friends. What would we have done without our believing family? This must be why church is needed.”

Notice that God did not immediately rescue these saints out of their trial of persecution. But he did send brothers and sisters in the faith to comfort and encourage them. This is a small taste of the fulfillment of Jesus’ promise in Mark 10 where Jesus said to his disciples,

“Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life” (verses 29-30)

Forgive the members of your new spiritual family

*Noor:

“I’m sad to say that my people can be very proud. They like to put themselves above others. Believers need time to understand the examples of the mature believers around them. So we also must grow so we can be good examples for them. Like Jesus said, a blind man leading a blind man will lead to them both falling into a pit. Many times I have served or done great work and been exhausted, but instead of being thanked, my work is overlooked. Many times I fix something but someone else gets the thanks and praise. Sometimes I get sad and angry that people don't see the hard work that I do, but when I think of God, I remember that He sees everything. I don't do these things for the people around me to see, but to please God.”

Even when Jesus was alive, teaching his disciples every day and doing miracles, there were those who did not understand his mission. Two of his own disciples came to him privately one day and asked him to give them a special place of honor when he came into his kingdom. When the other disciples

heard it, they were deeply offended. Jesus used this conflict to teach them what true greatness and honor is all about.

“And Jesus called them to him and said to them, “You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45).

Sisters, so often conflict comes because we are seeking our own glory and honor. We want to be viewed as beautiful, or skilled, or praised publicly. When this doesn't happen, or when someone gets this honor instead of us, we may become jealous and offended in our hearts. The apostle James tells us that our passions are at war within us, and this is why we quarrel, fight, and sin. Oh, that we would remember that Christ has given us his honor freely, when we had done nothing to earn it. In fact, when we were still delighting in our sin and hating God and true righteousness, Christ died for us and gave

himself for us. When you are tempted to hold onto a grudge, or complain or grumble against a fellow Christian, please remember what Christ has done to rescue you. He will always welcome his daughter who comes to Him for help in a moment of temptation.

Read this promise from God's word:

“But he (God) gives more grace. Therefore it says, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you” (James 4:6-8).

The Bible echoes with cries of the power and glory of God. He who rules over all creation and has everlasting dominion does not sleep. He knows all and sees the hearts of man, no matter what is hidden from other humans. There is nothing hidden from his sight, and no sin will be excused in holy presence. So if you have been wronged, trust that the Lord will avenge you. Romans 12 gives these instructions, “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all. If possible, so far as it depends on you, live

peaceably with all. Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord” (v 17-19). Seek to trust this truth; that God will bring perfect justice in the right time, according to His perfect wisdom. We must not seek to avenge ourselves.

Consider this story in Matthew 18:21-35.

“Then Peter came up and said to him, “Lord, how often will my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? As many as seven times? Jesus said to him, “I do not say to you seven times, but seventy-seven times. (or seven times seven). Therefore the kingdom of heaven may be compared to a king who wished to settle accounts with his servants. When he began to settle, one was brought to him who owed him ten thousand talents. And since he could not pay, his master ordered him to be sold, with his wife and children and all that he had, and payment to be made. So the servant fell on his knees, imploring him, “Have patience with me, and I will pay you everything.” And out of pity for him, the master of that servant released him and forgave him the debt. But when that

same servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred denarii, and seizing him, he began to choke him, saying, "Pay what you owe!" So his fellow servant fell down and pleaded with him, "Have patience with me, and I will pay you." He refused and went and put him in prison until he should pay the debt. When his fellow servants saw what had taken place, they were greatly distressed, and they went and reported to their master all that had taken place. Then his master summoned him and said to him, "You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. And should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" And in anger his master delivered him to the jailers until he should pay all his debt. So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart."

Do you see the shame of the first servant in this story? The first servant owed an enormous debt, equal to 20 years of wages. When he pleaded for mercy, it was granted. But this wicked servant then went and found a man who owed him the equivalent of 100 days of wages and demanded he

pay it back immediately. When the second servant could not, the first servant had him thrown in jail. The master heard of this and confronted the first servant. The master's mercy should have led the first servant to show mercy to those around him. But he did not understand the value of the mercy he was shown, and so it was taken away.

Do we see ourselves in this story?

Sisters, we must not be like the first servant when we view other women in the church. We must remember the enormous debt of our own sin and shame against God, and the priceless value of the blood of Jesus that was shed for us. When we remember this, we can forgive the women around us of their small debt against us. It is hard, but not impossible. What God commands us to do, he empowers us to do with the help of His Holy Spirit living inside of us (Philippians 2:13).

Jesus' people are known as those who have been forgiven by Him and saved by Him. So we must seek to protect the reputation of the church, of those believers who have committed to each other. The honor of the God who saved us is more important than our own personal issues with one another. But God has made a way for us to have

peace with each other through the shed blood of Jesus the Messiah. “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding” (Romans 14:19).

Share in the honor of your new spiritual family

*Noor:

“When I first went to church, I didn’t want to sit and make myself seem important and make others serve me. I wanted to serve in whatever way I could. I love to sing songs for worship. In the future, I would love to write new worship songs for the church, or any other way that I have skill, I would love to serve in the church. Jesus came to serve, and so we follow his example and serve others. This is not so that people will praise us, but so that God will be praised.”

Usually, within our families, the individual members have different jobs and roles. We all see this happening every day, even if sometimes we wish our roles were different. Your father probably doesn’t know how to make dolma, and your mother isn’t sitting in the tea house swapping news, giving advice, and learning the latest political news. Just

as we have natural giftings, roles and identities within our biological families, we are given a new identity by Jesus within His family.

But the whole family shares in the honor when an honored guest comes to the home. Even though the mom makes the rice, the daughter cleans the guest room, the younger son brings the water, and the father sits with the guest and talks with him, all share in the honor. In the same way, the Holy Spirit gives spiritual gifts to be used for building up the church and the reputation of our Savior, Jesus.

Our value within the body of Christ is not based on our service. The value of each individual member is given because each one is made in God's image. The precious and wonderful blood of Jesus was shed for each member of the body of Christ. This means if there are seasons when we are not able to serve for various reasons, our value in the body of Christ does not diminish. We are all, together, being built up as the body of Christ. There may be times when God calls you to bear a heavier burden of service for the sake of a weak brother or sister. There will also be seasons when you experience the grace of being served by others when you yourself are weak. You are just as much a member of the body of Christ when you are being visited in the hospital as you are

when you are hosting guests. Christ's love for you as an individual is steadfast and does not change based on your skills or service.

1 Peter 4:10-11 states, "As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace...whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies-in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." Look at this beautiful language, sisters. We can bring God glory through the way we serve Him as Christians. Everything we do is worship because our lives have been set apart for His glory. So if someone has a need within the body of Christ, and God has given you the skill to meet that need, or the desire to try, do it for His glory.

There is no divide between important and insignificant people in God's kingdom. All are equally saved and valuable because of the honor of the blood of Jesus that covers each of us. Paul challenges the church in Corinth in this way when he calls them to humility and not to be puffed up with pride because of their spiritual gifts. "What do you have that you did not receive? If then you

received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Corinthians 4:7)

Within this same letter, Paul calls the Corinthians to remember that there are many ways Christians can serve within the church, but there is only one Holy Spirit who empowers this service. These spiritual gifts are given to honor God in the sight of all the believers. Just as our physical bodies have two eyes, two hands, and various other parts that each have a specific role, so believers within the church each have a specific role to fulfill. And while we can ask God to increase our fruitfulness, we are not to compare our giftings with the giftings of another brother or sister. In God’s wisdom, we are incomplete without each other. There is not a single Christian in the world who has everything he needs within himself. We are given to each other, to build each other up and help each other see and experience more of the glories of God. “All these (gifts) are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills” (1 Corinthians 12:11).

For example, you can build up the church through opening your doors and welcoming the church into your guest room. If you feel God has given you the gift of wisdom, learn your Bible deeply and test

what you feel and know against the Scriptures. Let your words be full of His wisdom. If you feel a special burden to pray, set aside extra time to pray for the growth and protection of other believers. If you are a teacher and love young children, think through ways to communicate the goodness of God to young ones. These are just a few of the many ways we can build one another up and help each other grow.

Share the burdens of your spiritual family

Consider that Jesus, having purchased you for himself at the cost of his own blood, now calls you to live your life according to what He calls good. This means welcoming fellow Christians into your home who may be beneath you socially. All are now equal before God, paid for with the precious blood of Christ and promised eternal life in heaven. This means spending your time and money to help fellow members of the church, just like you would help a biological sister or brother. This means that when one member of the church is hurting or suffering, everyone should gather around them to remind them of the honor that is theirs in Christ and help them bear their burden so they are not alone. “If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. Now

you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:26-27).

We must fight our tendency to distance ourselves from some things our culture calls shameful, like weakness, poverty, suffering, losing a job or even being disinherited from families because we claim the name of Christ. Jesus promises that those who suffer in this life for his sake will be blessed for all of eternity. And we know this is true because Jesus Christ himself died and rose again, breaking the power of death. Our honor is now bound up in Him. And he has been given ultimate honor. So we can treat fellow members of the body of Christ with honor and respect that we share in Christ as a new spiritual family.

The believers spoken to in the book of Hebrews suffered great persecution after believing in Christ. This would have come with a heavy burden of public shame. How did they respond to this? “But recall the former days when, after you were enlightened, you endured a hard struggle with sufferings, sometimes being publicly exposed to reproach and affliction, and sometimes being partners with those so treated. For you had compassion on those in prison, and you joyfully accepted the plundering of your property, since you

knew that you yourselves had a better possession and an abiding one. Therefore, do not throw away your confidence, which has a great reward” (Hebrews 10:32-34).

The believers responded to their public shaming by honoring and loving one another. They cared for one another in their sufferings. There was no benefit in this situation for them, they simply acted out of the love that was in their hearts for their fellow Christians. This is true honor, and this shows that the Holy Spirit of God was truly at work in them.

Consider the words of Jesus himself, when he noticed how those around him were quick to take places of honor for themselves. He said to them,

“When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, “Give your place to this person,” and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he may say to you, “friend, move up higher.”

Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

“He also said to the man who had invited him, “When you give a dinner or a banquet, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbors, lest they also invite you in return and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you. For you will be repaid at the resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:7-14).

Sisters, invest now in the building up of Jesus’ bride, the church. This is what has eternal significance and honor. So often our cultures tell us that the things that are truly honorable are what people see and reward us for in this life. But Jesus flips this logic upside down. He calls us to store up treasure in heaven by being rich in our mercy, hospitality and love in this life towards those who cannot repay us. We can do this because God Himself sees and will reward.

Serving your biological family for the honor of God

In Matthew chapter 5, Jesus sat on a mountain and taught the many people who came near to listen to him. As a part of that sermon, he compared his followers to salt and light. We all know the value of salt in preserving and flavoring food. Without salt to enhance taste and keep food from spoiling, meals would be less enjoyable and even dangerous at times. What about the value of light? Light's purpose is to reveal, to enhance, and to chase away darkness. Followers of Christ can and should seek to live in this way in whatever situation they find themselves in. By the power of the Holy Spirit that has been given to us, we can live and work by the light of the gospel. Listen to Jesus' words: "You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house" (5:14-15).

Many women will spend much of our day serving and caring for our biological family. There are tasks to complete so the members of our family can thrive and flourish. They need to eat and have clean clothes. There are countless opportunities in a day to serve, and the good news is that in serving our

families, we can be serving Christ Himself. “Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ” (Colossians 3:23-24). As we go about our daily work, with our hearts filled with the truth of the gospel, the Holy Spirit empowers us to “let our light shine before others.” Let the light of the gospel bring peace and transform the way you vacuum the floor, wash dishes, make tea, and live your life. Rather than doing these things with a grumbling heart, or a heart that wants to count up all the ways you are serving others and making them indebted to you, remember that Jesus has freely given you everything! May you learn to do your daily work with joy, trusting that God sees and that all your good works can be done to please Him. As you grow in this, I pray that your family will see the difference. May they “see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).

Conclusion

In the last book of the Bible, the book of Revelation, the prophet John saw a vision of what heaven will be like. This is his recording of his vision.

“Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out,

“Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him the glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure”- for the fine linen is the righteous deeds of the saints. And the angel said to me, “Write this: Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.” And he said to me, “These are the true words of God” (Revelation 19:6-9).

Dear sisters, you are not the only ones who will be present on that final day, when Jesus returns and makes all things new. All those who are washed by the blood of Jesus will gather around His throne and rejoice with inexpressible joy because of what

He has done. A multitude of ransomed souls will cry out in worship and adoration. Those who were once like dry bones in Ezekiel's valley will proclaim the excellencies of Him who called them out of darkness and into His light. Gathered with us will be some from every tribe, nation, language, and people. There will be young and old, those who have faithfully followed Christ for many years or even a few days. Those from thousands of years ago, those throughout the ages, and those who worship alongside you even this week-all will rejoice before the throne of Jesus Christ. We are members of one another, and there is a great cloud of witnesses cheering you on as you run the race of faith, until the day when you see Jesus face to face.

Sisters in Christ, remember the value of the gospel. Rejoice today that the Holy Spirit has given you a new heart to understand and accept Jesus Christ as your Savior. He has saved you as a part of his new people, who worship him in spirit and in truth. Don't cut yourself off from the joy and growth that comes when you commit to a gathering of fellow believers and learn to live out your faith with them. If you want to thrive as a Christian, and keep persevering in your faith, seek to partner with and build up Jesus' body, the church.

*If you want to thrive as a
Christian and keep persevering in
your faith, seek to partner with
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church.*



new life in Christ

new community in the Church

new center in the Word

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