

## Letter to Readers



*Dearest Friend,*

*Have you ever found yourself racing along the highway of life, believing all is well and, without warning, discover that you were surrounded by danger? Your well-being threatened by a peril you never saw coming? Does one particular event come to mind? More than one?*

*Life is filled with such challenges. At times, you may feel as though terrifying monsters are intent on your destruction and hiding around every corner; waiting to jump out and tear you to pieces.*

*As children, we are taught to trust in the fundamentals of fairness and justice. We grow up believing that if we make an effort to live a good life; good things will come to us in return. This conviction becomes our hope of survival against the monsters of life. Then reality hits and, to our great dismay, we discover that life is not always fair or just. Bad things happen to good people. Good things happen to bad people. In response to this unpleasant revelation, we become intent on gaining some measure of control over the vagaries of life; confident that if we are able to keep everything lined up just right, we will avoid the pitfalls that plague so many others.*

*Consider for a moment the enormous amount of energy we expend on trying to shape our lives and manipulate the people within them into the pattern we want them to follow. It is like trying to herd cats! Once we feel we have gained control over one part of our lives, another part breaks loose and slips away. Yet, we vainly continue*

*our struggle, believing if we can only force our lives to fit an idealized model, we will gain a shield of protection against tragedy.*

*You have probably spent a significant portion of your life, just as I have, conforming to the world's idea of whom and what you should be. We are led to believe this is the path to pursue if we want to achieve enduring happiness. Have you discovered that regardless of how many barricades of this nature you construct around your life, pain can and will find a way in?*

*Call me naïve, but I confess I never suspected the truth. I truly believed I had created a safe place for myself and the people I love; a life filled with loving family and friends, material possessions, and career achievement. I had deliberately chosen to steer my family onto the happily-ever-after track to worldly success; we had almost reached our destination when the entire foundation upon which we were traveling came crashing down.*

*Three years ago, my beloved twenty-one-year old son Stephen made the irreversible decision to take his own life. His suicide plunged my family into a darker night than we ever knew existed. Since I had long ago discounted the importance of a personal relationship with God, when my inner resources proved to be ridiculously inadequate, I had nowhere to turn; and no one to blame except myself.*

*I cannot say I wasn't warned. Raised in a Christian home, I had been taught that placing my faith in the temporary trappings of the world would lead to ruin but I had refused to heed the warnings. Life in the fast lane was enjoyable and exciting. I told myself I didn't need what I thought was an imaginary friend or unsupported promises to satisfy my desires. I was doing quite well on my own so I turned a deaf ear to God. This was a decision I grew to deeply regret.*

*In looking back on my life, it is easy to see abundant evidence of my stubborn and self-reliant attitude. Even as a young child, I was independent and headstrong. Our home was situated on several acres in the country and I loved to take off exploring on my own. I can still hear my mother calling to me as I ran out to play, "Debbie, make sure to stay within the sound of my voice."*

*The reason for her directive was two-fold. Not only did my mother want to make sure she could call me to come home if she needed me but she also wanted to be sure she could get to me quickly if I called*

to her for help. There was a certain sense of security for both of us in knowing that the other was only a shout away.

As we venture into the treacherous waters of life, God knows we are going to face some frightening storms. There are going to be times when we are overwhelmed, desperate, and convinced we are going down for the last time. God is not frightened by storms. He knew the outcome of every challenge we will face before we drew our first breath; He understands the underlying purpose behind every event which remains such a mystery to us. It isn't for His sake that He calls to us as we venture forth. "Make sure to live within the sound of My voice!" The warning is for our benefit.

What does that mean—living within the sound of God's voice? Surely everywhere is within the sound of God's voice, isn't it? There is nowhere He cannot go. True, but there is somewhere He will not go. He will not force His way into a heart that is closed to Him.

God has provided us with the freedom to choose. We can choose to live with Him or without Him. The decision is completely ours. If we want to have a relationship with God, to live within the sound of His voice, we must make a deliberate effort to do so. He stands with arms extended, ready to welcome us into the intimacy and empowerment of His embrace. Yet, if we choose to close our ears, our minds, and our hearts to Him and to go our own way, He will not stop us.

God permits us to embrace a sinful lifestyle if we choose, but He will also allow us to suffer the consequences of our poor judgment. He realizes that once everything else in which we place our hope has failed, our stubborn hearts will be made more receptive to the truth—the truth that there is no life, no happiness, and no security without God. He gives us every opportunity to turn to Him but if we don't, the result will be our destruction.

What prevents us from hearing God's voice? Often, our failure to hear is due to the many distractions in our lives which overwhelm us and compete for our attention. We are so busy we don't take time to consider the existence and sovereignty of God. We become preoccupied with getting everything done that needs to be done and we don't think about how little time we spend on the things which are truly important to us. Does it ever seem to you that life just happens while you are constantly running in place? Have you ever stopped to

*consider there might be a devious purpose behind all this noise and activity? I suspect that much of our busyness is a plot devised by Satan to keep us too preoccupied to hear and respond to God's voice.*

*In this type of situation our failure to hear God might be considered somewhat unintentional. At other times, however, our deafness is quite deliberate. We purposefully erect barriers between ourselves and God because we aren't too sure we want to hear from Him. We suspect He may want us to relinquish a habit, activity, or relationship we enjoy or that He expects something from us we do not want to do.*

*We tell ourselves we would rather not know what He expects from us because with knowledge comes accountability. If we do not hear from Him we believe we are not accountable to Him. Yet even so, despite our best attempts at putting our hands over our ears and muting His voice, He can still be heard. Somehow, His voice continues to insistently ring in our hearts, calling for us to pause and consider the real purpose of our lives. Sometimes we listen for a moment. But for too many of us, those moments are few and far between. Even when we do listen, we remain resistant to the change He wants to bring into our lives. We prefer doing things our own way.*

*Living within the sound of God's voice doesn't just happen. It is a deliberate act and a decision that must be reaffirmed each day. I never understood that it was possible to have personal fellowship with God until everything that separated me from Him was obliterated in a single moment.*

*Into that black void, He came. His voice was the only thing I could hear through my pain and His words became all I wanted to hear. "Can you hear Me now, Debbie?"*

*"Yes, Lord. I can hear You now and from the bottom of my heart, I thank You for being here."*

*Do you know God is also here for you? Do you know that He is God? He is your God; not an impersonal, distant, judgmental figure who stands with arms folded, shaking His head in disgust at your poor choices. No, He is a compassionate and loving God who longs to speak directly and personally with you. The God who created the universe wants to hear your thoughts, ideas, desires, fears, and worries, no matter how insignificant you think they are. He wants you to share everything with Him because He cherishes you. He*

wants to talk to you as well. He wants to teach you, to guide you, and to delight in watching you grow in wisdom and spiritual maturity.

Our Lord uses a variety of methods to communicate with us and to reveal His will for our lives. For those who hunger for His voice, He has provided His Word, the Holy Bible, as a readily accessible means for us to hear the messages He wants to share. Within His inspired and timeless words we find comfort, hope, and answers to the problems of life.

Before I truly came to know the Lord, I imagined the Bible as simply a compilation of ancient stories with little relevance to the struggles I faced in my modern world. Nothing could be further from the truth! But don't take my word for it. See for yourself as we search for personal enlightenment within the compelling examples God has provided for us. As you peer into the faces of these old friends from the Bible, don't be surprised if you see your own reflection gazing back at you.

While there is no substitute for the immense wisdom and the spectacular promises which await our discovery in the Bible, I have to admit that nothing delights me nor causes my heart to race like a personal, tangible touch from God! Quite often, He uses His Word to deliver that embrace but at other times, I have known Him to use unexpected, even startling, methods to reveal Himself to me. I have witnessed the manifest presence of God and each encounter leaves me awestruck, amazed, and hungry for more! I suppose it is indicative of my weak human nature but I thrive on moments such as these! When God's divine hand reaches into my human world specifically for the purpose of communicating with me, it is almost more than I can bear.

If you have not already experienced the wonder of intimacy with our Lord, I would love for you to know that glory. Between each chapter of this book, you will find sections entitled "Hearing His Voice" which reveal specific examples of the many ways my Lord has spoken to me. My decision to share with you the methods He uses to communicate with me and the truth He speaks into my life is not an attempt to present myself as a self-righteous model of virtue. In fact, quite the opposite! I continue to struggle with the same temptations and strongholds you do. Simply think of me as one wretched beggar

*attempting to show another poor beggar where to find a storehouse of warm, fresh bread. And, oh what sweet bread it is!*

*My prayerful hope as you read this book is that a persistent, all-consuming hunger for the Lord will be ignited within your heart. If you truly desire to hear God's voice, I know He will speak to you. Friend, I cannot encourage you enough to get into His Word. Read and absorb the instruction He wants to share with you and look for evidence of His presence in your life. I encourage you to reach for Him with both hands and then listen expectantly for His response. You cannot imagine the difference He will make in your life!*

*You might wonder, "How can she state with such certainty that God wants to speak to me? She doesn't even know me!" I know He does because God spoke of His desire for you in His Word:*

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart."*

Jeremiah 29:11-13

*There you see it; God's invitation to intimacy paired with His unwavering commitment to care for you. With so much to gain, why would you ever consider struggling through life without Him? I invite you to step into an intimate relationship with God. Let's pause together and focus our attention solely on the Lord as we invite Him to pour His truth into our hearts. If you are in need of hope and desire the type of change only God can deliver, I ask you to pray this heartfelt prayer with me:*

*Speak to me, Lord. Reveal to me the purpose You planned specifically for me. I need Your touch Lord, and I am deliberately choosing to open my heart to hear Your voice. Right now, I invite You to transform me with Your love and power. Thank You for what You are going to do in my life. In the holy name of Jesus, I pray, amen.*