

Stories of Faith to
Draw Women Closer
to Their Savior



Cheri Fuller

gotandem.

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Chapter 8

The Lord Who Sees Me

*God sees you as much as if there were
nobody else in the world for Him to look at.*

CHARLES SPURGEON¹

The thirteen-year-old waved good-bye to her parents as she stood on the porch of her grandma's house in Canada, far from where she had been raised in Brazil. Tears fell down her cheeks and a knot formed in her stomach, one so tight that it didn't go away for many years.

Terri was an “MK,” or missionary kid, who grew up with her six other siblings in a lush green lumber and cattle state of southern Brazil where her parents served for most of their lives. As a young teen, she and her sister and brother were left in Canada with an elderly grandmother while her parents went back to Brazil—back to the work and ministry that was always their first priority.

Throughout her childhood, Terri lacked the security of feeling unconditionally loved and accepted. She felt little warmth or affection, as her parents held their children to high standards of performance. Discipline for minor infractions felt harsh and severe, and sadly, there were few signs of forgiveness or assurance. So

Terri and her siblings grew to know God as severe, demanding, and distant—to be feared but not embraced. To be obeyed but never enjoyed. They were all expected to grow up and be missionaries, and Terri aimed to please. She attended church faithfully and even worked for a mission organization after her marriage. She was content being a “good” Christian.

Until tragedy struck.

“I don’t know what I’d do if anything ever happened to my husband,” Terri had casually commented to a friend one August afternoon. “He helps me so much, I’m spoiled.”

She scurried home that day just in time to kiss Bob good-bye before he left for his night job. But at four o’clock in the morning, something woke her up. She reached for her husband. He wasn’t there. Suddenly she was wide awake, her heart racing. He was due home at three.

The next several hours blurred into a haze of questions coupled with the stubborn self-assurance that God wouldn’t let anything happen to Bob. After all, they’d served Him in a missionary organization. Then after seven years, they’d had a sense God was stirring them to reevaluate their place of service. In the meantime, Bob was working the night shift as an electronics technician in a computer manufacturing company and planned further schooling in September. To save money, he rode a motorcycle to work.

As night became dawn and broke into full daylight, fear slowly knotted Terri's whole being.

Six o'clock. Seven o'clock. *Where is he?*

"Oh, Lord, I'm desperate," she cried. "Please let me know where Bobby is."

Turning on the radio for comfort, she listened to a traffic report. Then she heard it. "An injured motorcyclist is being treated at USC Medical Center."

Questions without answers tumbled over each other in her spinning head. Shaking, she dialed the hospital.

"Yes, there's a Bob Geary here," the receptionist drawled. "But I can't tell you anything. You're gonna have to call later."

While struggling to hold back her tears, she dressed, fed her children, and arranged for their care so she could go to the hospital.

"Mrs. Geary," the doctor said brusquely in the ER waiting area, "your husband's spinal cord is severely injured. He is paralyzed from the shoulders down. And if he lives, he'll never walk again."

If he lives? Paralyzed? Never walk? Disbelief, confusion, shock, and anger flooded over her. He's wrong! God wouldn't let this happen!

Terri was directed to the ICU waiting room to wait until she was allowed to see Bob. Friends stood silently by, and she was encouraged by their fervent prayers.

In the hours that followed, the story was pieced together from newspapers, TV reports, and Bob's

limited input: he left work at 2:00 a.m. Halfway home on the freeway, he looked up just in time to see an eighteen-wheeler truck falling off an overpass. To avoid being crushed to death, he bailed off his bike. As his motorcycle disappeared under the truck, Bob hit the pavement, breaking his neck in the process.

It was several days later before Terri realized that if her husband recovered, he would be a quadriplegic. She hadn't the slightest idea what that meant for their life and family. In her numbness she couldn't know how deep would become the anger, depression, self-pity, and sorrow.

Life had been splintered forever.

As they left the hospital many months later, Terri and Bob joined the lonely world of the disabled. A world loaded with frustrations, discrimination, and stigma foreign to them. The daily invasion of nurses who cared for Bob's personal needs and infections, the constant waiting on him and their three children, assuming two parents' roles, and the extreme fatigue all became sources of despair. And she passionately dreaded the future.

Struggling with the challenges of life with a quadriplegic husband, Terri would just as soon not get up in the morning. She yearned for trouble-free days and longed to fly away and be at rest.

One day she read the story of Hagar in Genesis 16. Pregnant with Abraham's firstborn son, she was

mistreated by Sarai, so she ran away. Hagar ran as far as she could, but an angel sent by God caught up with her near a spring in the desert, beside the road to Shur. When the angel inquired where Hagar had come from and where she was going, she answered, “I am fleeing from my mistress Sarai” (verse 8).

Terri thought, *That’s what I want to do—run away—far from the constant caretaking, the financial struggles, the ever-present weariness and burdens I face 24-7.* She felt abandoned by a distant, hard-to-reach God and often was angry with Him. Her head knew all the right things about God, but her heart felt like He was a million miles away. Like a yo-yo that couldn’t find a resting place, one day she felt like they’d make it; the next day she was down in the depths with her head spinning out of control—angry at herself, Bob, and most of all, God.

All it took to trigger resentment was for the attendant to fail to show up or some other key need not to be met. *Why us? Why so many extra problems? Why this stupid wheelchair anyway?* she inwardly grumbled. Sometimes she hated that wheelchair and all it represented. And like Hagar, she just wanted to find a place to hide and rest.

As Terri pondered the story, she was struck by what the angel told Hagar—go back to her mistress and submit to her. The angel left her with a promise that God would increase her descendants until they would

be too numerous to count. “You are a God of seeing,” and “Truly here I have seen him who looks after me,” Hagar said (verse 13).

In that moment, Terri realized that God saw her, too, just as He did Hagar in the desert. She wasn’t a second-class citizen or one who was forgotten by God. He remembered her and would revive her and look after her.

Seeing Jesus as One to run *to* instead of *away from*—as her refuge in her daily battles instead of an adversary trying to punish her—Terri’s heart began to be transformed.

Instead of staying bitter and living in a survivor mode, she began a journey of getting to know God in the midst of the challenges. She realized she had a choice to make. She could treat God as a harsh villain, angrily gritting her teeth while stumbling through her day alone, or she could lean on the One who longed to comfort her, help her, and give her peace. It wasn’t an overnight fix. The process of learning to lean on the “God of all grace” came excruciatingly slow. As difficult as Terri found yielding to be, with each cry of surrender her aching heart would declare, *Okay, Lord Jesus, I accept Your will for me today. I’m weak. . . I’m grasping hold of Your strength.*

When Terri offered herself to God in this way, He drew near with His strength. Through encouraging calls and lunch with gentle friends who listened without

judging, notes in the mail, timely radio programs, or simply time to be alone with Him, God revealed His presence and love.

Although there are times when Terri needs to surrender herself to God, she has found that the secret to experiencing His strength comes in trusting Him daily in the struggles that emerge. One day at a time.

No longer was God distant and hard to reach. He hadn't abandoned her or left her in another country while He got on with *His* ministry. And He did see right where she was. Terri finally began to experience the reality of Psalm 73:28: "But for me it is good to be near God; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may tell of all your works."

God graciously brought Bob far beyond medical expectations. Eventually he learned to feed himself and to drive his own electric wheelchair as well as a customized van. He dedicated countless hours of technical advice to missions organizations and became a self-made "computer guru," offering his expertise to many who couldn't afford to take their computers to be repaired. He is now battling acute leukemia.

"Yet even with the trials, looking back I wouldn't want to return to just sailing along and being a good Christian but not really knowing God," says Terri twenty years down the road. Over and over the struggles she and her husband have experienced have become a doorway to gain a fresh vision of Jesus, to see that

He is her strength when she's weak, her provider when the family has need, her rest when she's weary. She knows her Lord in an intimate way *because of* the trials and difficulties. And she knows that He who sees her loves her with an everlasting love.

Maybe, like Terri did, you feel that God has ignored you or is too busy to care about the pain in your life. The truth is, "God sees you as much as if there were nobody else in the world for Him to look at," said Charles Spurgeon. "If I have as many people as there are here to look at, of course my attention must be divided. But the infinite mind of God is able to grasp a million objects at once and yet to focus as much on one as if there were nothing else but that one. . . . God sees you with all His eyes, with the whole of His sight—you—*you*—You—YOU! are the particular object of His attention at this very moment."²

Whether we feel like it or not, we are an open book to God, and He knows our every thought (sometimes that can be scary!). He counts the number of hairs on our head. And there is no place we can go to avoid His Spirit or be out of His sight. If we climb to the sky, He's there. If we go underground, He's there. If we could fly on morning's wings to the farthest horizon, He is already there waiting! We are never out of His sight (see Psalm 139 MSG).

A Fresh Encounter with Jesus

If God can see you, He can hear you. He hears your prayers, and even if you can't get a word out, He understands your tears and sighs. If it's in the middle of the night and no one is around to care for you, God is there with you. He's not slumbering or sleeping even if the rest of the world is (see Psalm 121:4). What good news—we are not alone. We are not forgotten. We are known and loved by the Lord! Here are some ways to get a fresh glimpse of this aspect of God:

Reflect on times when you feel invisible, discounted, forgotten. What triggers in you a sense that God has left you or is too busy with His work in the universe to care about your problems? For Terri, it was a tragedy that altered her life and her family. For another person, it might be a divorce, a loss of someone she loves, a financial reversal, or a job layoff. Bring these past or present experiences to God and tell Him you want to regain your spiritual eyesight and a sense of His presence. Then meditate on the whole of Psalm 139; Matthew 10:29–30; and Acts 17:28.

No matter how difficult the trial you may go through, you can expect that the Lord will ever guide you with His eye, will support you by His guardian hand, and will keep you from all evil. “The God of all grace, who called you to his eternal glory in Christ, after you have suffered a little while, will himself

restore you and make you strong, firm and steadfast” (1 Peter 5:10 NIV).

Seek the face of God in the midst of trouble. When was the last time you looked for Jesus in the midst of a pressing problem? Often we say, “Lord, fix this. Change this problem. Do something about this mess I’m in!” That’s okay, yet there’s a real difference in praying the life-transforming prayer, “Lord, I don’t understand this situation and I seem powerless to change it. But I want to see You and encounter You. Would You teach me what You want me to know about *You*? Would You draw me near and show me what special life lessons and revelations of Your grace You want me to experience?”

As I think about the challenges or struggles where I’ve grown the most, the turning point was most often when my focus moved from the problem or troubling situation to asking, seeking, and being open to something the Lord wanted to reveal to me about Himself. Translation: having a fresh vision of Jesus that focuses on His character and His sufficiency—*who He is* instead of how I wanted things to change—made all the difference.

Chapter 9

I've Just Seen Jesus!

The man who has seen Jesus can never be daunted. . . .

*Nothing can turn the man who has seen Him;
he endures "as seeing Him Who is invisible."*

OSWALD CHAMBERS

Martha pulled the rough brown shawl around her head as she arranged fruit on a wooden tray, hauled water from the well to fill the pitchers, and did the countless tasks necessary to prepare a meal for her dearest friend, Jesus. She paused a moment to look out the window and search the road for her expected visitors. Jesus and His disciples, on their way to Jerusalem, would be stopping by their village soon. As always, Martha, her sister, Mary, and brother, Lazarus, would warmly welcome them into their home. She wanted everything to be perfect and ready for their arrival.

Jesus had different relationships with different people during His time on earth, depending on their hunger for Him and God's purposes. The multitudes heard His teachings and were desperate for the "bread" He offered; countless ones were healed by His touch and delivered from oppressing spirits. But the multitudes didn't have an intimate relationship with the Messiah like His disciples did. When they spent time with Jesus

traveling and eating, He shared with them His teachings and parables. Moreover, He told them the secrets and the principles behind the stories.

But there was something extraspecial about Jesus' relationship with Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. Along with John, these were some of Jesus' favorite people, those He was closest to and loved best. That's what made it all the more puzzling why Jesus didn't come when the sisters sent an urgent message telling Him, "Lord, your dear friend is very sick" (John 11:3 NLT).

They just *knew* He would come, since He and the disciples were only two miles away in Jerusalem. Because of His powerful ability to heal and His affection for Lazarus, they had no doubt that before long they'd see Jesus walking up the dusty road to Bethany, and Lazarus would be well again.

For days Martha had labored over her brother's sickbed, wringing her hands in worry and watching at the window. *Surely Jesus got the message. Nothing could prevent Him from coming.* But their beloved Teacher didn't show up. And nothing they did seemed to help. No amount of hot chicken soup or medicinal herbs revived Lazarus.

Finally, the two sisters watched as the color drained from their brother's face and his life dissipated before their eyes, his body growing cold and stiff. Martha and Mary collapsed in a flood of tears. Added to their grief were the painful questions, "Why didn't our friend Jesus

come? This would have all been different if He'd been here! It would only have taken a word, a touch, and Lazarus would have recovered. Didn't He care enough to walk the two miles from Jerusalem to help us?"

The sisters didn't have the big picture. They didn't know that when Jesus got the message, He said, "Lazarus's sickness will not end in death. No, it happened for the glory of God so that the Son of God will receive glory from this" (John 11:4 NLT).

After waiting two days, Jesus told His disciples, "Let's go back to Judea" (John 11:7 NLT). They tried to convince Him not to go because the Jews were out to kill Him, but He wasn't deterred.

"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. I'm going to wake him up," Jesus announced (John 11:11 MSG).

When Jesus finally headed for Bethany, Lazarus had been dead four days. By this time, many Jews were already there, comforting Mary and Martha and mourning with them. Through the grapevine, Martha heard Jesus was coming, and she raced out to meet Him while her sister stayed at home weeping.

Martha, as usual, didn't mince words. Some might say she was bold or arrogant to approach the Savior, but I have to say a few words on this woman's behalf. Often she gets a bad rap: Martha's the driven one, after all, they say. She probably didn't take time to read the Torah. She was the sister Jesus scolded when He said, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled

about many things” (Luke 10:41), and pointed to sister Mary’s devotion as the most important thing. (It is, by the way!) Mary was the more spiritual sister, and her priorities were right. Not like her busy, practical sister, Martha!

But let’s take another look at Martha. First, *she asked*. She didn’t hesitate to send an S.O.S. message to Jesus telling Him she needed His help.

Second, she was honest. When He didn’t come in time, she candidly declared, “Master, if you’d been here, my brother wouldn’t have died. Even now, I know that whatever you ask God he will give you” (John 11:21–22 MSG). Martha didn’t yet know that the One standing before her had the power to raise her brother from the dead. Just as most of those who walked and talked with Christ, she didn’t fully understand who He was. Yet she had an irrepressible faith and confidence in her Lord. She didn’t run from Him when devastated over the loss of her brother—she ran *toward Him*. In fact, she caught up with Him on the road before He even entered the village.

“I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even after dying. Everyone who lives in me and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this, Martha?” Jesus asked (John 11:25–26 NLT).

“Yes, Lord,” she answered, “I have always believed you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one who has come into the world from God” (John 11:27 NLT). Not

a bad response from one who hadn't yet seen His glory! But He must mean her brother would be raised up in the resurrection at the end of time.

Moments later, after being alerted that Jesus had arrived, Mary ran out to Him, fell at His feet, and echoed what Martha had said: "Lord, if only you had been here, my brother would not have died" (John 11:32 NLT).

"When Jesus saw her weeping and saw the other people wailing with her, a deep anger welled up within him, and he was deeply troubled. 'Where have you put him?' he asked them" (John 11:33–34 NLT). Then Jesus wept. He wasn't weeping because Lazarus was dead or because He was sad for His friends Mary and Martha. He wept because the answer was standing among them but they didn't see Him.

"Well, if he loved him so much, why didn't he do something to keep him from dying? After all, he opened the eyes of a blind man," said the naysayers in the crowd (John 11:37 MSG).

Nobody could have scripted what happened next. He who had the keys of death performed an awesome, mind-blowing miracle. When Jesus gave the order to remove the stone at the tomb entrance, Martha, ever the realist, protested, "Lord, he has been dead for four days. The smell will be terrible" (John 11:39 NLT).

Looking her in the eye, Jesus asked, "Didn't I tell you that you would see God's glory if you believe?" (John 11:40 NLT).

“Then Jesus shouted, ‘Lazarus, come out!’” And Lazarus emerged from the tomb wrapped from head to toe, with a cloth over his face. “Unwrap him and let him go!” Jesus commanded (John 11:43–44 NLT).

Tears of joy flowed from Martha’s and Mary’s eyes when they saw their brother alive. Awe filled their hearts as they saw the majesty and glory that shone before them.

How do we know Martha was transformed by this experience? The next, and last, time Martha is mentioned in the Bible was at the supper in her home in honor of Jesus and in celebration of Lazarus’s resurrection. With guests crowded around their table, sister Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with expensive perfume. Martha was still serving and was no less productive or hospitable, but her spirit had changed.

We read nothing about her being distracted over tasks or mentally anxious or bustling around. Martha’s practical side didn’t respond to Mary’s lavish demonstration of devotion by saying, “No, Mary! We need the money for groceries!”—even though she probably contributed to purchasing the costly nard. She didn’t side with Judas who said the poor needed the offering more. Her heart was in agreement with this lavish display of worship.¹ Her focus was Jesus, and the vision of His glory had forever changed her.

A Fresh Encounter with Jesus

Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and when we encounter Him and see Him as He is, we can't help but be changed just as Martha was. Let me encourage you:

Don't sink into guilt if you are more Martha than Mary. Perhaps you've felt like a second-class Christian if you aren't like quiet, contemplative Mary who stopped everything to sit at Jesus' feet. Maybe you feel guilty if you're more like Martha, often busy and distracted doing many things. If God wired you to run a children's ministry or company and you always have so much on your plate you never get it all done, He understands. If you are a single parent and juggle multiple tasks and responsibilities, God knows how stretched your time is. Martha's serving was honorable, and as we do our work and service as unto the Lord, with our focus on Him, He receives it as worship.

You don't have to be someone you're not or try to change yourself to be more contemplative or spiritual. *It is in seeing and encountering Jesus* that transformation happens. The Lord met Martha as she was, in the midst of her life, in the middle of her grief over losing her brother, and revealed Himself to her. And just as He knew the longing in her heart, He knows the longings of your heart and will meet you there as you lay them out before Him.

As Mary did, offer all you are to Him who laid down

His life that we might experience newness of life on this earth and life forever with Him. When you turn all of your being in utter, joyful abandon, your life, though outwardly busy, will become a “living prayer”² and you will be increasingly aware of the Lord’s presence. Give yourself again or for the first time completely to Him who created you and loves you with an everlasting love. “I despair when I try to change myself and patch myself up,” said Corrie ten Boom. “I can’t do it and never will be able to do it, but if I surrender myself to Him who made me, I experience miracles!”³