

CHAPTER FOUR

Strength for Living

*Know that the Lord has set apart
the godly for himself;
the Lord hears when I call to him.*

Psalm 4:3

Another Child for Us

—Anilu from Michigan

After nine years of marriage, three children and four miscarriages, I wasn't sure I wanted to "try again." I had come from a family of seven and had always wanted to have a big family. My husband had come from a small family and had experienced loneliness growing up; he too wanted a big family. But we never anticipated the difficulties we would encounter. I had experienced God's love and mercy through it all, but at this point I felt spent.

Now the specialist's words were, "Go ahead and try again." But I wanted a guarantee that this time everything would be OK. I wanted to trust, but I couldn't. I remember my prayer: "Holy Spirit, guide us."

As I stood at the doctor's office crying, my husband hugged me and said, "I feel that the Lord has another child for us." My husband and I pray together every night, and I knew that I could trust his love for me, but more than that I could trust his desire to do God's will. There in that office, with no guarantee from the doctor but with the assurance of the Holy Spirit in our lives, I agreed to try again.

A few months later I found myself pregnant. Eight weeks into the pregnancy, as I watched my kids play on their swing set, I started to bleed profusely. I was scared and called my husband.

As we drove to the doctor's office, I remembered my husband's earlier sense that the Lord had a child for us. I said to the Lord, "I don't have what it takes to trust at this moment, but I know that your Holy Spirit inspired my husband. I believe that your Holy Spirit is active in our lives today. You need to guide the doctor now."

The baby was still alive, and I was put on bed rest for many weeks. Usually active and able to serve others, this time was hard for me. As the weeks went by, the Lord showed me that this was "my turn" to be on the stretcher and let my friends carry me up to the roof, then down to the feet of Jesus, as in the second chapter of Mark's Gospel. It was my friends' turn to have faith for me.

Every day and night over the next few months, I experienced the Holy Spirit bringing peace and order to what otherwise would be fear and turmoil as I

continued to bleed off and on. With three little ones at home and being confined to bed, I knew it was not up to me. The Lord had to work everything out.

Our daughter was born strong and healthy on the Feast of the Presentation of the Lord. The Holy Spirit was upon Simeon; there are three different references to the Holy Spirit in that short passage of Luke 2:25. Just like Simeon, we blessed God for his faithfulness and for walking with us and teaching us how to wait on him throughout that previous year.

Breaking Through the Small Talk

—*Donna from Canada*

The theme of the prayer meeting was yet another new discovery for me, as we talked and prayed about how to avoid being lukewarm Christians. God wanted us to witness to his presence in our lives, and we were not to be hesitant to speak about him to others.

My initial reaction to this teaching was one of reluctance, and this I immediately brought before Jesus. I told him that I was not prepared to stand on a street corner proclaiming the gospel message. So I asked that, if he ever wanted me to speak about him to anyone, he would please make it *very clear*.

The next morning at work, I was on my way to get a drink from the water fountain when a colleague greeted me and made his way toward me. In the course of our small talk, he asked what I had done

the previous night. My heart began racing as I realized that this was an opportunity the Lord was giving me to witness to him. Despite a momentary fear of being ridiculed, I could not dodge so direct a call to respond to God's message.

"I was at a Catholic charismatic prayer meeting," I said, to which he replied, "Wow, will you take me with you to the next one?"

Awestruck, I inquired if he was Catholic. He said yes. I told him he could join me the following Tuesday evening.

I praised God. I could not get over the beauty of what he had just allowed to happen. Then I began to ask Jesus how this man would respond to the prayer meeting and how I could prepare him for something he probably had never been exposed to. As I was pondering all this, the man appeared at my office door with a bouquet of flowers, thanking me for our conversation. I was speechless with joy.

Much later I found out that this young man was Catholic but only in name. At one time he had been involved with Hare Krishna. We went out that Saturday, and God was the focal point of our conversation and our evening.

The following day was Palm Sunday, and the Lord was beginning to enter this young man's life as dramatically as he had entered Jerusalem two thousand years ago. He felt a need to go back to Mass for the first time in more than fifteen years, and he found a church that offered a 5:00 PM Mass. There it was

announced that confessions were scheduled for 7:00 PM that evening, so he returned to church later for that. Needless to say, he thoroughly enjoyed the prayer meeting the following Tuesday and felt completely at home.

We dated for two years and had countless adventures on our journey of spiritual growth. We were married in the month of May, the month dedicated to our heavenly Mother, on the eve of Pentecost in 1977, a holy year declared by our wonderful Pope John Paul II. We are in our twenty-eighth year of marriage with three children, and our love for God and one another continues to deepen and grow.

Out of the Depths

—*Debra from Minnesota*

I find it extremely difficult to put into words the transformation Jesus has accomplished in me. It's nothing short of miraculous. Jesus Christ is now the center of my life and my world.

Jesus, through the Holy Spirit, took me from the depths of despair to unspeakable joy. I was a person who never touched or hugged because I was unable to let people get close to the real me. On the outside, my life appeared to be together. I had a loving husband, children, a good job and a nice home. But the reality of my hidden life was that I felt totally unlovable and of no value to anyone. I lived in a shell and the walls I built for self-protection isolated me.

When I gave my life to Christ, my walls tumbled down. The name of Jesus had once made me uneasy, but now I long for the opportunity to talk about him and share with others his incredible love. Going to church, which had been a task, became an opportunity to express my love and to discover more about him. The Eucharist has so captured my heart that I became a eucharistic minister. As a way of expressing my gratitude and love for God, I helped start a program in our parish to assist people in need.

The more I give myself to Christ, the more I receive of His unchanging love, mercy and grace. It is such an honor to get up every day and pray and rejoice in the Lord.

My husband and daughter have both given their lives to Christ. We are able to share life together on a whole new level because of this. My husband and I have seen lives changed and we've witnessed God's healing power. We've participated in classes and led groups in the parish and have gone to many charismatic retreats and conferences as part of our annual vacation.

I am honored to know Jesus as my personal Savior. I know of his incredible mercy and I can't wait for each new day to walk hand in hand with my Lord.

Confronting Fear

—Michelle from Michigan

Since the age of eight or nine years, I had struggled with a profound fear of death. I don't know why this was or how it began. I had no traumatic experiences with death in my early childhood that I am aware of. The fear just quietly took hold of my imagination until I had no memory of living without the constant awareness that I am going to die. I will leave my body, and it will become cold and still. I will lose contact with the people and the things that I love. Death, that threatening predator, will seize me and throw me into darkness alone.

Not that I lived morbidly or became depressed. This fear did not paralyze my days, my childhood play, my growth into womanhood, my energy in preparing for a nursing career, my joy in marrying and bearing children. I loved the Lord; my days belonged to him. But my nights belonged to fear.

As soon as I lay down and the world was dark, as soon as sleep claimed my children and my husband—always long before me—then the dread voice would reverberate through my mind: “You’re going to die.” I was afraid to yield to sleep, that foreshadowing of death. Sometimes the mantra brought with it malicious suggestions. “What’s the point? You’re going to have to die. Why go on waiting for the inevitable? End it yourself; at least the fear will be over.”