

“Rose Marie Miller’s new book is a beautiful trifacta of weakness, faith, and power. Rose Marie seamlessly embeds her writing with these three themes, not through cleverness and willful intent, but rather through the spiritual stealth that only God at work in a person can achieve. This is why I love Rose Marie and read her work. She is a broken soul given over to the renewing love of her Maker. There’s no artifice here—it’s all heart.”

**Charlie Peacock**, Cofounder, Art House America; record producer

“I’ve heard great sermons on nothing being impossible with God; I’ve seen those words from Jesus needle-pointed, done in calligraphy, and written out on three-by-five cards and taped to the front of refrigerators. But there is one person in my forty-five years of knowing the Lord who has been a living validation of this promise, more so than anyone else, and that is Rose Marie Miller, my spiritual mom. That’s why I am thrilled with her new book. Hype-free, spin-free gospel sanity is the best way I know to describe Rose Marie’s new book. If you want to know how the fragrance of the gospel is released through those who have the courage to own their brokenness and weakness, this is your book.”

**Scotty Smith**, Founding Pastor, Christ Community Church; author of *Everyday Prayers: 365 Days to a Gospel-Centered Faith*

“Thank you, Rose Marie, for your powerful words that challenge me to know forgiveness and to forgive, to rest in Jesus when I am weak and desperate, and to persevere in prayer. You met your goal for this book: perhaps I am finally ready to grow in that counterintuitive life in which I spend more time with Jesus when days are especially hectic.”

**Edward T. Welch, PhD**, CCEF Faculty; licensed psychologist;  
author of *Shame Interrupted*

“With characteristic humility and warmth, Rose Marie Miller has written a book sweet with the love of Christ on every page. This is a very personal reflection on how God’s grace continues to unfold in her life through repentance, forgiveness, prayer, and faith. You’ll feel like you’re meeting with a dear friend who both knows your heart and, most importantly, the heart of our Savior.”

**Winston T. Smith**, CCEF Faculty; author of *Marriage Matters*

“At World Harvest Mission, Rose Marie is affectionately known as our spiritual mother. Over the years she has consistently challenged us to a life of dependent prayer where you realize how great and wonderful God’s promises are when you dare to pray boldly. On behalf of all of us at World Harvest, I highly commend this book to you—expect to be changed and blessed as we have by Rose Marie’s ministry to us!”

**Bob Osborne**, Executive Director, World Harvest Mission

“Rose Marie Miller’s transparency in sharing her own struggles and her realization that Christ is our only answer are incredible encouragements. Her writings on the power of prayer, humility, and faith are brought to life in a fresh way by her amazing life stories. This is a book to read over and over to remind ourselves that God can do the impossible for any of us if we will just let him.”

**Betsy Silberman**, Retired Director of Development,  
Girls Preparatory School, Chattanooga, TN

“Rose Marie Miller is both the neediest and the wealthiest person I know. This book records the journey of how her needs have driven her to the source of all riches. This is the true story of a seed falling into the ground, dying and producing much fruit. Read it to draw closer to the God of the impossible!”

**Carolyn Barker Lonas**, along with her husband Jack, worked with  
World Harvest Mission in London from 2001–2009

“Rose Marie Miller writes as she lives: steeped in Scripture, and boldly engaging in the real world. In this book she repeatedly brings the two together in the context of her own life experiences with suffering and weakness, to remind all of us that *Nothing Is Impossible with God*.”

**Dr. Jennifer Myhre**, World Harvest Mission medical missionary

“Rose Marie writes frankly of her struggles with pain, fear, weakness, pride, and unbelief, and recounts vividly her experiences of God’s love breaking through. Then, true to the heart of Jesus, she calls you to go beyond yourself to others with this hope. God breaks into my life time and time again through her. He’s done it again through this book.”

**Andi Brindley**, Executive Assistant to Tim Keller,  
Redeemer Presbyterian Church, New York City

“Rose Marie Miller is a woman who knows her weakness and dependence on God. Out of this weakness comes great courage and faith. If you read this book you will find the true gospel and it will encourage your soul and increase your faith.”

**Diane Winningham**, Women’s Director of Ministries,  
Christ Community Church, Franklin, TN

# Nothing Is Impossible with God

REFLECTIONS ON WEAKNESS,  
FAITH, AND POWER

Rose Marie Miller



New Growth Press, Greensboro, NC 27404  
www.newgrowthpress.com  
Copyright © 2012 by Rose Marie Miller.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopy, recording, or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher, except as provided by USA copyright law.

Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are taken from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*.<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 2000, 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked NIV are taken from the *Holy Bible, New International Version*.<sup>®</sup> NIV.<sup>®</sup> Copyright © 1973, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations marked KJV are taken from the King James Version of the Bible. Scripture verses marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible<sup>®</sup>, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

Cover Design: Faceout Books, faceoutbooks.com  
Interior Design and Typesetting: North Market Street Graphics

ISBN 978-1-936768-68-4  
ISBN 978-1-936768-57-8 (ebook)

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Miller, Rose Marie, 1924–

Nothing is impossible with God : reflections on weakness, faith, and power /  
Rose Marie Miller.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references (p. ) and index.

ISBN-13: 978-1-936768-68-4 (alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 1-936768-68-2 (alk. paper)

1. God (Christianity)—Omnipotence. 2. Spiritual life—Christianity. I. Title.

BT133.M55 2012

248.4—dc23 2012016596

Printed in Canada

19 18 17 16 15 14 13 12 1 2 3 4 5

## FOREWORD

**M**y mom has written a great book on her life's journey since Dad's homegoing in 1996. But the best book is the one I get to watch every day—her life. Paul tells the Corinthians, "You show that you are a letter from Christ" (2 Corinthians 3:3). I love to tell people, "How many 87-year-old women work almost full time as missionaries to Hindus in London?" When she is in London—when weddings or births or visa problems aren't pulling her home—she is regularly serving and meeting with Asian woman. She just loves it.

But it gets better. Mom is not just working in London; she communicates regularly with her family of five children, twenty-four grandchildren, and twenty great-grandchildren. Just getting birthday presents for that horde is a full-time job in itself.

And better. She reads voraciously. She introduced me to the genre of British Indian fiction some years ago. I didn't even know what the Man Booker Prize was until Mom said to me, "Paul, you need to read *Brick Lane*; it was just short-listed for the Man Booker Prize." The what? How many middle-aged sons are kept on the cutting edge of culture by their moms?

And still better. Mom has cultivated about a dozen, maybe even a couple of dozen friendships with women who share their lives with her and she with them. One of those friends, Sandy Elder, said this about Mom, “My friend Shirley and I often say, no matter the age difference—in our case thirty years—she is our peer. What we mean by that is that whatever we confess to her that we are struggling with, she has this amazing way of responding, ‘Oh ladies, believe me, I struggle with the same thing in my heart too, so please pray for me as I pray for you.’ And we know she does. She is also one of the few women I know who has made the Holy Spirit real and accessible through her testimonies and teaching; it is, I suppose, because she really does rely on Christ through the Spirit.”

And for those of you who are familiar with the Sonship course, Mom is constantly rediscovering the gospel. She will battle out of a fog into the clear air of the love of God for her. Her spirits will lift when something from the Word feeds her soul. Another friend, Sandy Smallman, said this about Mom, “I am always challenged and blessed by Rose Marie’s ‘restless’ Christian heart—restless in a good way. She is never willing to simply be a status quo Christian, one who is happy with some blessings here and there. She demands more. She wants more of God, more participation in his ministry, more of his peace and joy. She frequently asks me to pray that she would not depart from a simple and pure devotion to Christ. She says that so often that it has become something like a mantra to me. She often adds that she prays that for me as well.”

Mom has sown a life immersed in the Word, and she is reaping a harvest of faith. All our lives have trajectories; all of us are in a continuing process of reaping and sowing. Old age, though, is heavily weighted toward the reaping side of life. It is the time

in life when, to quote Jesus, “hidden things are revealed.” If I had to summarize Mom’s life I would say, “In the battle of life, she immersed herself in the Word and community, which in turn fed her faith and empowered her love.” Easy to say. Wicked hard to do. She often tells me the back story of what is going on in her life. Mom’s life now is characterized by ongoing forgiveness, surrendering her will, waiting on God, fighting discouragement, and just everyday, ordinary stuff.

Mom’s example has impacted my wife Jill’s assessment of my retirement: Jill informed me that it wasn’t going to happen! It was a no-brainer for Jill. She compared Mom’s life with the lives of Christians who slowed down and drifted into low-level narcissism, and she didn’t want any part of it. The life of a pilgrim is far too attractive. Proverbs captures it best, “The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day” (Proverbs 4:18).

So why tell you all this? Someone once said that the secret to reading John Piper’s books was to hear him preaching the book as you read them. Then it would come alive. Well the secret to reading Rose Marie’s book is to see her living what she is saying. So when she encourages you to believe (since this book is all about faith), remember this is a believing woman. When she encourages you to pray, remember this is a praying woman. So enjoy the book. Learn from the book. (It will feed your faith.) Enjoy watching Mom reap. Enjoy the trajectory of her life. Just remember that the real book is working in London with Hindu women.

Paul E. Miller

[www.APrayingLife.com](http://www.APrayingLife.com)



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

**F**our years ago, I began thinking about writing a book comprised of talks, meditations, lectures, and reflections on how God has been with me on the journey of life. I asked seven women to pray for this undertaking. Thank you Andi, Diane, Betsy, Carolyn, Sandy, Holly, and Jan. You prayed, bore my burdens, and believed that God had taught me lessons that should be shared.

To my daughter Barbara and son-in-law Angelo, who faithfully cared for my sister so that I could be in London. The burdens were heavy and you bore them with enduring love. Thank you from my heart.

To Sue Lutz, my editor. Who else could take all the material I gave you and shape it into a readable book! Thank you for believing that what God taught—and you helped reshape—would be an encouragement to God's people.

To Jan Powers, my assistant. What would I have done without your careful eye for detail, your expertise on the computer, and your heart for this endeavor even in the last week of your mother's life? You sat by her bedside and still faithfully gave of your time to meet a deadline.

To Bob Osborne, director of World Harvest Mission, and the Sending Center team, who prayed, encouraged, and believed that I could be effective in London at age 86 and even write a book that would encourage others.

To my Indian friends in Southall, who have been my teachers, helping me to make great truths simple, understandable, and applicable. You are a reminder that, in the hardships of life, Jesus is the only answer. You invited me into your life, calling me Mum and Grandmum.

To my beloved family: Roseann, Ruth, Paul, Barbara, and Keren and their spouses, twenty-four grandchildren, seventeen great-grandchildren and counting! I treasure you though I do not see you as much as I would like. You are kingdom builders. I know you pray.

To my “special needs” granddaughter, Kimberly Rose Marie Miller, who prays for me every day. Thank you, Kim. I still need your prayers.

Last but not least, thanks to the hundreds of people who faithfully prayed, encouraged, and gave. You did so from your hearts.

Rose Marie Miller, July 4, 2011

To my sister Barbara. We miss her joy in simple things and her faithful prayers.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword	iii
Acknowledgments	vii
Dedication	ix
Prologue: A Spring Locked Up	xiii
<b>Rediscovering the Gospel</b>	<b>1</b>
1. My Testimony	3
2. Forgiveness	17
3. Keeping a Good Conscience	29
<b>Facing Loss, Finding Life</b>	<b>39</b>
4. Death Disrupts	41
5. Living in Exile	49
6. Enlarging the Tent, Enlarging the Heart	55
7. Why London? Why Me?	61
<b>Learning to Pray</b>	<b>67</b>
8. Entering God's Presence with Prayer: Luke 11:1-13	71
9. Groaning and Glory: Romans 8	85
10. Teaching Others to Pray	95
11. Kingdom Praying: In Step with the Spirit	101
12. Paul's Prayers	109
13. Prayer: The Spiritual Battle	115

14. Praying the Psalms	125
15. Praying Like a Child	141
<b>The God of the Impossible</b>	145
16. Eve Believed an Impossible Lie	149
17. Sarah Believed an Impossible Promise	161
18. Hannah Prayed an Impossible Prayer	169
19. Mary Was Given an Impossible Task	185
<b>The Ongoing Story</b>	205
20. The Power of Weakness	207
21. Contentment: Living in God's Presence	215
22. The House God Builds	225
23. A Kingdom That Cannot Be Shaken	233
Epilogue	243
Notes	247

## PROLOGUE

# A Garden Locked Up

Nothing is impossible with God. I had always heard this, but for a long time it didn't seem to be true for me. For much of my life I kept God at a distance, building walls of self-protection and self-reliance. I said I was a Christian but my life said, "I can manage without God." When crises came, the walls went higher.

But there came a day when building walls did not work and I was left with, "I don't believe God exists, or if he does exist, he is a dark cloud over my life—a cloud of fear, guilt, condemnation, and loneliness." Into this dark cloud God spoke, not with an audible voice, but with life-giving words.

God, for whom nothing really is impossible—not even changing a self-righteous, independent, desperately-trying-to-keep-it-all-together pastor's wife—gave me himself.

In the early 1970s, my husband, Jack, a pastor and seminary professor, was asked to teach on discipleship to a group of people who wanted to know how "it" worked. The site for the lecture was an auditorium about an hour's drive from our home. Feeling a sense of duty toward Jack, and since we had a guest staying with us, I went along reluctantly. Normally, the drive through

rural Bucks County was beautiful, so I looked forward to that. But the trip was spoiled for me not only because of my attitude but because the person driving with us did nothing but talk about himself. By the time we arrived, I was seriously annoyed. I was not ready for God to teach me anything.

The building was old, typical for the area, with tiers of white painted cement benches. I decided to sit near the top, away from most of the people. I had already decided that I wouldn't learn anything useful anyway, and I wanted to be alone.

In that moment of discontent, these words quietly and gently came to my mind: "A garden locked is my sister, my bride, a rock garden locked, a spring sealed up" (Song of Solomon 4:12 NASB). My first thought was, "Where did that come from?" Looking in my Bible's concordance I found the verse in the Song of Solomon.

My mind was captured by the thought of a garden locked up. I thought back through my life to all the times I had felt that way—locked up. My parents were immigrants from Germany. Learning to live in a foreign land where everything was different, losing hard-earned money in the Depression, and dealing with the challenges of raising my mentally challenged sister had left my mother bitter. Over time, the burdens overwhelmed her, and in desperation she tried to take her own life. One day when I was about thirteen years old, I was alone in the house with my mother when I smelled gas. I ran into the kitchen and saw her head in the oven. With fear gripping my heart, I turned off the gas, pulled her away from the stove, and opened all the windows. My voice shook with tears as I called my dad at his garage in San Francisco and told him to come home.

From that day on, my dad and I never talked about what had happened, but it was our unspoken pact that we would do whatever we had to do to keep my mother in the home and keep

her from taking her life. The fact that I couldn't talk about what was happening locked up my emotions. I knew something was seriously wrong but did not know how to express my feelings. I decided to write my mother a note, which I left on the kitchen table. Strangely, I do not remember what I wrote. My mother showed it to my father who sternly asked me why I had written it. I lied and said, "I was trying out my pencil. I didn't mean what I wrote." My father was angry and my mother was hurt. It was many years before I again risked expressing my feelings. Soon my mother showed classic signs of schizophrenia. Again, this was not something my dad and I talked about. Not knowing how to deal with the shame of the situation, I insulated myself from my emotions reasoning that what I didn't feel wouldn't hurt me.

These were the memories that flooded my mind as I continued to read from the Song of Solomon that day in Bucks County. "Your shoots are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, henna with nard plants, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with all the trees of frankincense, myrrh and aloes, along with all the finest spices" (Song of Solomon 4:13–14 NASB).

I wondered if Solomon's words described me. Was I a locked garden full of spices and choice fruits? Could I be, in reality, "a garden spring, a well of fresh water" (4:15 NASB)? Everything this garden needed to flourish was provided. Was God giving me a picture of my life? It didn't seem possible.

Only a handful of times have I known for certain that God was speaking into the core of my heart. This was one of them. I sat on that bench, a dissatisfied, self-righteous failure—so many painful emotions locked up inside me. I knew that God was unlocking the gate, so to speak, to show me a whole new picture of myself. Where I saw rotten fruit and weeds, he saw fruit and

spices. Where I saw mud and sludge; he saw a fountain, a well of fresh water, and flowing streams.

Quiet joy began to make its way into my soul. Yes, the winds would blow, but the spices would also flow. “Awake, O north wind, and come, O south wind! Blow upon my garden, let its spices flow” (4:16 ESV). From my place of discouragement, I was about to learn that nothing is impossible with God.

For the spices to flow out of the garden, the north wind had to blow. And blow it did in the years that followed, to the point where I often lost sight of the plan and purpose of God. But then the gentle south wind would come, giving me courage to continue after the storms.

The passage ends with, “May my beloved come into his garden and eat its choice fruits!” (4:16 NASB). There would be many times in the years ahead when I would resist God’s advances, but when he would finally come in—as he always would—the fruit would ripen, the spices mature, and the water run clean.

What God began to teach me that day was that he had a heart for me. He knew me in a way I did not know myself. He saw me in a way I did not see myself. There was a lot more beauty and hope in his perspective than in mine.

This book tells how God nurtured me and matured me in the years that followed—how he did the impossible in me. It’s a collection of personal meditations, journal entries, talks, and Bible studies that I have written over the years. Together they illustrate what my Beloved Jesus has done in my heart and life. When God began to unlock the garden of my heart, he invited me to join in his mission to make this broken world an inheritance for his Son. His assignments haven’t been easy, but I love and trust my Gardener and I am filled with joy to partner with him. He truly is the God of the impossible.

Perhaps like me, you know many true things about God but don't really know him or taste the fruit of the garden he has planted in your heart. I invite you to let the Lord unlock your heart too. May the things God has taught me flow into your life and encourage you to let the Consummate Gardener come and do the impossible in you.



# Rediscovering the Gospel



When God met me in the last row of that small auditorium, I did not realize the implications of the “north wind” blowing. I just knew that God understood me. But God knew that I needed the truth of who he is to become the center of my life. He is the God for whom nothing is impossible—I needed to know this. At the time, my life was centered on self: what I could and could not do. I was focused on my own kingdom building. I did not understand that it is all about God and his kingdom. In the years that followed, God dismantled my strength. He patiently tore down walls of approval seeking, blame shifting, demanding peace on my terms, and retreating from conflict. He enlarged my heart to believe and trust in his plan, not only for my life and family, but also for his bigger purpose of displaying his glory among the nations.

In the early 1970s, the Spirit was already working in Jack’s life. He was gripped in a powerful way by his own sin and the power

of the gospel to renew him daily. This led to a decision in 1973 to plant New Life Presbyterian Church. Six years later, it led to a ministry trip to Uganda. We had been invited there by a church leader who had fled the country during Idi Amin's reign and had worshiped at New Life. Once he returned home, he asked us to come to help restore the church and the country.

The Lord blessed the trip in powerful and exciting ways. When we returned to the United States with the good news of what God was doing, many young people wanted to return with us. But Jack realized that a zeal for mission would only go so far. He told those who were eager to go with him, "You will encounter depravity in others and in yourself. The only cure is the power of the gospel. It must grip your heart."

Jack began to teach these individuals what they would need spiritually for such a task. The emphasis was on living as sons and daughters of God, rather than as orphans. As our son, Paul, listened to the talks, he developed them into a series we later called "Sonship." A discipling and mentoring course was born.

What you are about to read are the three talks I typically gave in the Sonship course in its early years. I gave my testimony, talked about forgiveness as a lifestyle, and shared the importance of a clean conscience before God. I include them to introduce you to what I learned during those years, which laid the foundation for everything that has happened since.

No one ever arrives at a place where old sin patterns do not return, but what Sonship emphasizes is that growth in grace is possible when sin is acknowledged, confessed, and by grace, forsaken. As I have discovered, it is a beginning that God uses to send us out into the world with the purpose of exalting him among the nations. I hope these talks will encourage you to let the Consummate Gardener continue his work in your own heart.

# 1

## My Testimony



If you had told me years ago that I would be speaking about living in the freedom of the gospel, I would have laughed. I grew up in a family that knew very little about freedom and a lot about control. My parents were German immigrants, and the most significant aspect of our lives was the fact that my mother was a paranoid schizophrenic. She accused every visitor to our house of being a spy, so people stopped coming. When we went out to dinner, she accused other diners of spying on her. Our family became lonely and isolated, focused on keeping my mother from taking her own life. I believed in God during those years, but I wasn't sure he was particularly concerned about our problems. I believed that Jesus came to die for sinners, but since I didn't see myself as much of a sinner, that didn't have much of an effect on me.

Still, I always went to church on Sunday, and that is where I

met my husband, Jack. When we married, I was freed from the daily burden of caring for my mother. Jack's enthusiastic faith introduced me to God's personal care over our lives. For the first time, I felt safe. God was good.

#### A LIFE OF LEGALISM

These changes were a dramatic departure from what I had known at home, but in many ways I was unchanged from the girl I had been. Jack was so excited about Jesus and the power of the gospel that he didn't realize that the gospel was not *my* working theology. Mine was moralism and legalism—a religion of duty, rules, and self-control through human willpower. The goal was self-justification, not the justification by faith in Christ that the gospel offers. But, as many people can tell you, moralism and legalism can “pass” for Christianity, at least outwardly, in the good times. It is only when crises come that you find there is no foundation on which to stand. And crises are what God used to reveal my heart's true need for him.

As God worked in Jack's life, he immersed himself more and more in ministry. I had thought I was marrying a future college professor, but then Jack decided to become a minister. In fact he became a pastor, church planter, seminary professor, and evangelist. He always wanted me to be involved with him in ministry, and dutifully I tried to comply. But it was superficial compliance, and all the heart struggles I did not express brought an underlying resentment to my relationship with Jack and with God.

The crisis came in the early seventies. God did a work of renewal in Jack's life, and he was filled with boundless confidence that the gospel could change *anybody*. As a fruit of that

conviction, we began to take troubled young people into our big, old three-story house in the outskirts of Philadelphia. These people were in desperate need: drug addicts, refugees, state hospital dropouts, and former members of motorcycle gangs. We saw some dramatic conversions, and from this work sprang the seeds that blossomed into New Life Presbyterian Church.

Jack's role in our ministry to these troubled people was to be the representative of grace. He gave the gospel to everyone in the house. I was the law, motherly but firm and resolute. It was needed. Some of these people were really burdened and it took firm measures to keep them under control. During this time, however, I was a growing puzzle to my husband. He would tell me how gifted I was and how effective my work was becoming, but it only made me feel guilty. I should say even *more* guilty because there was a dark cloud over my life. Even the beautiful conversions taking place in our home and the new lives developing did not give me lasting joy. No matter how well things went for me, I always felt I should have done more. I could see countless flaws in the best things I did. In fact, my private view of myself was that I never could do anything really worthwhile.

I remember an experience that typified my attitude. In the sixties, Jack received annual invitations to speak at "Skis and Skeptics" evangelistic weekends in the Pocono Mountains. Jack approached the events with typical enthusiasm, earnestly seeking to win every skeptic to Christ. Me? I loved the skiing and at night slipped up to my room with my favorite Agatha Christie novel under my coat. While Jack fought for the lives of the skeptics downstairs in the lodge, I unraveled the mysteries of Agatha snuggled under the covers. Only skiing and Agatha made these weekends bearable. Actually, I used to pray that no money would come in so that I would not have to go. Nowhere in me could I

find the wisdom and compassion needed to reach out to these college students. I felt that I didn't have anything to offer anyone. I felt as if I barely knew Christ as a real person myself. The more I thought about it, the more I was paralyzed. What to say? How to say it? When to say it? And then afterward, Did I say it right?

It was hard to get Jack to hear how I felt. I often complained to him, "You don't listen." But all I gave him to listen to were problems—my own and those of the people who lived with us. Worse yet, I expected Jack to act as Holy Spirit and solve these problems for me. I expected Jack to make the people who lived with us holy, and I expected him to make me happy. Jack, for his part, didn't listen to the deeper struggles of my heart. The pressure built inside me until July 1974 when we vacationed in Tennessee. Walking by the lake one evening, I blurted, "I feel like I am walking under a dark cloud. God seems far away, and I don't even know if I believe he exists." Up to this point Jack usually had had ready answers, but now he was shocked into silence.

#### ANOTHER RIGHTEOUSNESS

As soon as we returned home, Jack handed me a copy of the introduction to Martin Luther's commentary on Galatians. I read, "For in the righteousness of faith . . . we work nothing, we render nothing unto God, but we only receive, and suffer another to work in us, that is to say, God."<sup>1</sup> I was ready to hear about another righteousness that was available to me. At that time we had living with us a charming, cultured young man who continually evaded and resisted our efforts to get him to take responsibility in the home. I could forgive the living illustrations of Romans 1 that we had taken in before, but I couldn't forgive this fellow's

expectations that we serve him hand and foot. I couldn't love him. Legalism can go a long way, but it can't help you love. I saw that I hated my circumstances and the people I couldn't control. I felt so guilty, and I would have loved to have someone give me the desire and power to love, but I didn't know what I had to do to get it.

I kept reading Martin Luther and a year later, during a conference in Switzerland, the Lord made it clear what I needed to do. Jack was speaking at a conference on family relationships and I chose one sunny day to go skiing. I chose the mountain, too—one that was way beyond my skill as a skier. Ten feet from the top I fell and lost one ski. Although I could have turned right around and gone down the mountain on the gondola, I did not. For two hours I slid and bumped and fell down that mountain. When I got back to the hotel, weary and aching, I slid into a hot tub. Typically (for me), I responded by being angry at God. Wasn't it his fault that I had made such a fool of myself? After all, he knew how high that mountain was. He could have kept me from going.

But the Lord had something better to cover me with than all my ready excuses. Sunday morning during a Communion service, Jack broke a large loaf of French bread to pass around. In the crack of that bread, I suddenly saw Jesus broken for me. My moralism, pride, and self-righteousness were exposed and covered at the same time. Finally I understood what Luther was saying: that Jesus' righteousness covered all my unrighteousness. What did I need to do to get it? Just accept his work for me. As I sat there with tears streaming down my face and one small tissue to stem the tide, I saw my trip down the mountain as a dismal picture of my record of self-righteousness and self-sufficiency. I was struck by the obvious fact that I hadn't needed to go down the mountain the way I had. I could have enjoyed a cup of tea in the mountaintop

restaurant and gone down on the gondola, admitting that for me skiing down was an impossibility. I suddenly saw my past as so much self-effort that had produced “good things” but could not deal with failure or defeat. Now I understood that I could turn to Christ and ask for forgiveness, and his righteousness would cover all of that. All my excuses were gone, and I accepted Christ’s perfect record as what I needed. All my self-righteousness made me a spiritual paralytic, but Christ’s righteousness brought peace, healing, and restoration. God reached into my life and dealt with my fundamental sin.

Before this, my way of thinking had been centered on moral failure and success, not sin and grace. I thought of sin as a social failure on my part or on others.’ I felt condemned by these failures, but I defended myself by blaming others when things didn’t go the way I wanted. And then I tried to clear my conscience by getting busy with work and duty. I always wanted God to strengthen my strength and enhance my good record. But now I saw that though I could not love, Christ had loved *for* me. The only worthwhile record was Christ’s record, his obedient life and his death for my sins. Until then, I had never seen, let alone admitted, that I had neither strength nor righteousness of my own. But now I brought my real sins to a real Savior, and I was forgiven. I knew that I was loved unconditionally by a holy, righteous God. What a marvelous relief God’s grace in Christ offered! For the first time, my heart was at peace with God and I was at peace with myself.

When we returned home, the message of justification by faith began to give me purpose and identity in my marriage and ministry with Jack. I knew we were partners together in the gospel. I could speak with conviction about the power of the gospel to dispel the dark clouds of guilt that hang over our lives: it had done this for me. I began to study the book of Galatians in earnest.

When we took a day off, my conversation was no longer filled with my problems. Now I had things to share with Jack about how Galatians applied to my needs and to the needs of those around me.

#### THE GOSPEL IN UGANDA

In December, 1979, Jack received an invitation from a Ugandan pastor, a former student at Westminster Seminary, to minister to the church in Uganda as it emerged from the bloody violence of Idi Amin's eight-year reign of terror. Jack prepared to go with his usual enthusiasm, and I prepared with fear. I was sure I was going to die; I was just praying that it would be a quick bullet to my head. God was still molding this team!

For several months we stayed in Kampala in a hotel filled with returning exiles, Asians, and Indians. We made friends and prayed with people of all religions through one crisis after another, including insecurity, sickness, loneliness, bad food, and no water. During this time we saw more evil than we had in twenty-three years of ministry. The physical and emotional brutality wore away at my soul. I did not know how to handle all the evil I heard about and saw. My heart was heavy and unsettled, loveless and numb.

I was brought back to reality by another Communion service, this time at a church whose windows had been bombed out during the war. As I sat there wondering if I could ever love the Ugandan people, the answer came again as the bread broke. I was reminded once more of how much I needed God's forgiveness for my faithless, loveless response to what I was seeing. As I took the bread and the cup, his forgiveness filled my heart.

This is always the answer, but I was so quick to forget. Later we stopped at a small mud hut to share the Lord's Supper with an elderly Ugandan widow. She had lost her husband and ten sons under Amin's reign. But there was no complaining, only a sweet love for Jesus. She was a living example to me of God's grace and forgiveness.

But I still had much to learn about relying on God's grace. On our way home from Uganda, we went to Kenya for two weeks of rest. We went to Mombasa, a fashionable resort for Africans, Asians, and Europeans. Our overnight train trip felt like a honeymoon as we awakened to a porter bringing us tea and glimpsed a giraffe outside our window. But for me the mood was shattered on our first evening there. We went with some missionaries to a small park overlooking the Indian Ocean. I was content to rest and enjoy the beauty of the scene, but with us in the park were many Muslims meeting to enjoy friendships and the balmy evening air. Jack and some of the missionaries began to preach, and soon I heard him say, "My wife will now tell you how a Christian marriage works." All the beauty of the evening was gone for me. But submission out of duty took me to where the others were speaking. I spoke reluctantly and later was overwhelmed with a deep sense of guilt, despair, and defeat. Anger and resentment smoldered in me.

#### AN ORPHAN OR A DAUGHTER?

On the way home, Jack and I stopped for a few days in Switzerland, the place where God had met me earlier and a place I love because of the beautiful mountains and the order and cleanliness of the culture. But even that did not bring rest to my spirit because the

Holy Spirit was at work, waiting to teach me something new. As we walked the streets of Geneva, surrounded by sophisticated, well-dressed people, I finally couldn't hold it in any longer. My suppressed anger and guilt came to the surface. With tears streaming down my cheeks I said to Jack, "Why couldn't I cope? Why do I collapse so often and then get filled with guilt? What is wrong with me?" Jack turned to me and said, "Rose Marie, you act like an orphan. You act as if the Holy Spirit never came and could never help you through impossible situations like Uganda and Mombasa. You act as if there is no Father who loves you."

The Holy Spirit took those words and pressed them into my heart. I knew Jack was right. All I could say was, "Lord, I am sorry. Please teach me how to be a daughter." In Uganda I had seen lots of orphans. One had tried to steal my purse as we knelt to pray in the marketplace. They would kill almost as quickly as steal. Because they had no father to look after them, they made sure they took care of themselves by lying, cheating, stealing, and deceiving to get along. I had been acting like them—as if I had no father, as if I didn't have his authority, his power, his Spirit, his heart, and his ear.

Although I knew I was justified by faith, I still thought that obedience was more or less up to me. I now began to discover that I could rely on God's promise that he was always with me and, by "faith working through love," do my work. During this time I dug deeper into my study of Galatians. I no longer asked, "How can I study this to help other people?" Instead, it was life and breath for *me*. I had to learn how to live the Christian life and be on the front lines with my husband without always collapsing. I also began to study the book of Romans, another book that for years I had avoided because I couldn't understand it. Now it too was a delight to read, study—and teach. I began a class on Romans

for women from our church. I was only one step ahead of them as we gathered around our big dining room table, but our hearts were awakened to joy as we realized the truth of Romans 8—that because of Christ, God could never be angry with us again. All his wrath was poured out on Jesus; there is nothing left for his children. Though he may prune us as branches to bear more fruit (John 15), he never does so in anger or to punish us; it is always in love and only to make us more fruitful.

The ways God was blessing me were wonderful. I could never have anticipated what he would teach me next. Jack and I had been going to Uganda twice a year since 1979. But the challenges of ministry in that war-scarred country began to wear on me again. In December 1982, driving to Kenya in our old Land Rover, I said to Jack, “This is it! I’m never coming back to this country. This ‘team ministry’ is over.” God gave Jack the grace to be quiet and just say, “Well, I’ll have to go alone for shorter periods of time.” And in June 1983, Jack, our son-in-law Bob, and another young man returned for a month together. On the day before their scheduled return, the telephone rang. Bob was on the line. He said, “Dad has had a heart attack.” It did not take me long to decide what to do. “Tell Jack I’m coming out,” I said. But before I went, I said, “God, you know how I feel about this country. Please go with me.” And in the quiet of my heart the promise came very sure: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest” (Exodus 33:14 NIV).

The next day I was on my way, not knowing what I would find when I got there. I knew what the hospitals were like; I had been in them. I knew the scarcity of medical care, but this time I *knew* that God was with me, and that his presence was far more real than the evil and the problems I would encounter. I can honestly say I went with joy. Our whole congregation and many others

were praying. The church even sent a doctor, an old friend, to accompany me and care for Jack.

I now began to understand in a fuller way what it meant that I was not an orphan. I have the Spirit, I have the promises, and I have the Father's love. I have the sacrifice of Christ. My husband lived, and our ministry together became more effective than before and not so riddled with my confusions and unbelief. Perhaps Jack's perspective on our partnership at the time says it best:

While I lay on a hospital bed in Uganda, Rose Marie's presence was like a light to fill the room. I am now up to about eighty percent of my workload, but it is a load Rose Marie shares with me.

In her part of our ministry Rose Marie does counseling with women, but even more important to her is her Bible teaching. Her uniqueness is that she lays a sound theological foundation in justification by faith and sonship in all that she presents. She has a wealth of illustrations from her struggles and triumphs with people who have lived in our home and from the country of Uganda.

But I think there is another basis for God giving us unity as we serve together. We pray together a great deal. We have a rule: "Never sit on a problem waiting for it to hatch a lot of worries." Stop and pray. We also have prayer meetings for the church in our home. I believe that prayer is, along with justification and adoption, the primary foundation for our ministry. Personally, I do not see how it is possible to have an effective ministry without the freedom given by justification through grace and the power given through prayer.

What did I need to do before this team ministry was

possible? As a husband, I had to repent of my dominance and learn to listen to my wife—to show love in that way. I also had to teach her justification by faith and the meaning of our sonship through union with Christ. Once I repented, I expected her to be liberated with me. No way. So after a time, in desperation I gave her Luther on Galatians, and the change was amazing. I have seen some great changes in people, but Rose Marie’s whole being was liberated by the truths that Luther taught.

#### LIFE CHANGES

The gospel also changed my expectations for us as a couple. I no longer expected Jack to be the Holy Spirit. *I have the Holy Spirit.* I know I am already “justified freely by God’s grace.” I did not constantly demand Jack’s approval and sponge off his emotional life. I could give love to him as well as receive it. I didn’t expect Jack to be perfect. If he made a mistake, I knew that his sins as well as mine were covered by the righteousness of Christ. I no longer expected to find wisdom or compassion in myself. It’s all in Jesus, and he has enough for everyone I meet.

So deep is my sense that God accepts me just as I am that I can live unburdened by the expectations of others. As I talk to women in ministry from different parts of the country, they tell me about what others expect of them: to be the model wife and mother as they also minister in the church. I know that the expectations of others can be overwhelming. If I were to give you a list of practical tips on how to serve, it might only add to the pressure you feel. Instead I tell women that they don’t have to be perfect because Another is perfect for them. They respond with such wonder and

joy that I'm convinced that this is the overwhelming need today: *for everyone to hear the gospel—Christians and non-Christians alike.*

The gospel is the only anchor that will keep us in God's presence amid the stress of life. We all have longings for stability, approval, acceptance, security, and significance. Faith in Christ is what meets the true need beneath those longings and brings us to Jesus, enabling us to grow in grace. It is all we need. Jesus is enough.

