

Unwrapping the Greatest Gift November/December 2011

As we approach this holiday season, we look forward to gathering with family. Our focus turns from being consumed with life to the blessings we have received throughout the year. We stop and recount the times of God's faithfulness when jobs were lost, houses foreclosed, physical needs were at a premium, and hope seemed dim.

It is those stones of remembrances of God's promises to us that keep us putting one foot in front of the other. It makes us rise in the morning to face another day of unknowns. It keeps us from dwelling in the pit that is so familiar to us.

We are reminded in Psalm 145:13, *"The Lord is faithful to all his promises and loving toward all he has made."* In Joshua 1:5, *"As I was with Moses, so I will be with you; I will never leave you nor forsake you."* We cling to these verses as we journey through life when facing difficult circumstances and life does not make sense.

This theme found in the Old Testament comes to full life at the birth of Jesus Christ in the New Testament. *"The virgin will be*

with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him, Emmanuel—which means, God with us." Matthew 1:23 NIV.

Let that word, Emmanuel, fully sink into every part of your being. **God with us!** We are not alone! This is the greatest treasure we could ever receive. This treasure is the sacrifice of God's only begotten Son. It is available to each one of us. All we have to do is believe. God accepts us right where we are. We don't have to be good enough to be welcomed into his royal family. Jesus just wants our heart.

Think back over 2000 years ago, Mary wrapped this baby boy in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger. What a gift she was wrapping! At the time, she did not fully grasp the meaning of this gift that was before her, a gift from on high to her and everyone. As various events happened later, Mary treasured these things in her heart. Mary experienced God's faithfulness and protection.



- The prevention from Mary being stoned for being pregnant before marriage
- Joseph accepting Mary as his wife instead of divorcing her as the culture dictated.
- God's provisional shelter for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem
- Simeon and Anna in the temple confirming who Jesus was.
- Mary, Joseph, and Jesus protected from King Herod's killing rage

These are only a few incidents that revealed God's character and presence.

As we unwrap our presents at Christmas this season, are we noting the gifts of God's presence throughout this year? Think about the times that we knew God was with us.

The time:

- That unexpected monetary gift appeared
- Words of affirmation from a friend were spoken
- Someone faithfully lent emotional support and encouragement
- That God spared our life after taking a bottle of sleeping pills and waking up with no effects
- A church paid a bill and provided transportation
- An unexpected bag of groceries appeared
- That someone listened and didn't judge
- That house repairs were done without cost
- That someone called to check on you and offered up a prayer
- Someone sent a special note of encouragement

The list could go on and on. Sometimes though we become so focused on our difficult circumstances that we miss the evidence of **God with us**. In our mind we are looking for a moun-

tain to appear but miss the "tiny" glimpses of His care and love.

As we end this year, take out a sheet of paper and jot down the times when God faithfully gave to you. Start with January, 2011 and write down the month in which these things happened. The timeline will reveal the steady flow of God's presence throughout this year. Hopelessness will disappear because our focus is on Him.

As we place our presents under the Christmas tree, do we think about what gifts we can give to Jesus? Do we give as much thought to that special gift as the ones we give to those we love? The gifts we could bring to Him are:



Our Heart



Our Love



Our Time



Our Talents



Our Abilities



Our Obedience



Our Money



Our Prayers



Our Praise

There are so many more gifts we could add after careful thought. These gifts need to be given freely to Him not out of obligation. He freely gave to us and we need to do likewise. It is important to take the time to lay our presents humbly before Him as we end a year and begin another.

By Paula Silva

*Emmanuel
God With Us*



Children . . . No Voice . . . No Choice

December 2011

Dear Friends,

People are bustling about making holiday plans. Much time is spent buying just the perfect gift for special friends and loved ones. Christmas lights are adorning our homes. Everywhere we go Christmas music is heard. It is a season of joy and comfort for our Savior was born.

To others though there is no comfort or joy. A child weeps as he hears demeaning words thrown at his mom and sees the fist raised. He scurries into another room where the Christmas tree is lit. He looks to the star on top and silently makes a wish. It isn't a wish for a new video game or bike. He quietly asks for a dad that isn't so mean. He longs for peace and safety but cannot express it in words. **He's a child who has no voice.** He has lost hope of his home changing for so many things are out of his control. Suicidal thoughts appear in his head.

This story rings true in the families we ministered to this year. Women have come to us concerned about the depression they see in their children. We provide the services that give women the tools to make healthy choices as



we point them to Jesus Christ, their hope and healer. This ultimately impacts the lives of children.

So far this year:

- ◆ 459 new clients have come to us seeking our services of support groups and counseling plus educational resources.
- ◆ We have had over 1500 emails, phone calls, and in person visits.
- ◆ We are now providing 17 support groups for women throughout our nation.
- ◆ 48 people have attended our Partners in the Journey: Train the Trainer (training for support group leaders)
- ◆ We are now able to provide CEU's to counselors and social workers in our trainings and seminars.
- ◆ We have formed a committee to develop our teen program using our TEEN FOCUS cur-

riculum in order to proactively make a difference in the lives of our children.

In this grave economy, we have suffered greatly. Our proposed goal of \$100,000 for the year has fallen short. Currently we have raised \$41,866.12. We are in desperate need of a facility and staff to meet the growing need. We are grateful for our volunteers that continue to assist us.

Think about the child who dreams of a safe and loving home. He is reaching out to you for help. Give him the greatest gift of love by partnering with us in making a tax deductible monthly donation of \$30, \$50, \$100 or more. His voice can be heard through you. Thank you for loving this child like Jesus.

Warmest regards,

Paula Silva
President

Remember: When you help a mom, you are giving a voice to the children who have no choice.



R-E-S-P-E-C-T: Jesus values YOU and Me

Some women think that they are all THAT...and a bag of chips. But that is not the case with most of us. Living in this fallen world, it's practically impossible to grow up without falling prey to someone scaring our souls with cruel words and/or cruel behavior. The negative messages and painful experiences which we experience within our homes, our schools, and among our friends lead us to imagine that we are not worth much at all.

As we go through life, we look for ways to validate our self-worth, mostly by looking for love in all the wrong places as one popular song says.

We desire someone to see us as important, to appreciate us, to value our gifts and to show us respect. God puts that desire within us. Most women look to their mates for affirmation of their importance. However, as fallen creatures, being humans will always disappoint. This is especially true for the woman who is a victim of abuse.

There is one person however, to whom we can look to accurately see our worth as women. That person is Jesus. Jesus values the woman and holds her feminine nature in the highest esteem. In the eyes of Jesus, a woman is valued and He depicts His appreciation for her in ways that might be surprising. A victim of abuse whose psyche or self-esteem have been under barrage can gain an immense sense of freedom and healing in seeing how much Jesus respects and values her as a woman.

Jesus loves, esteems, values, and respects women. Here are some cases below where this can be seen. My hope is that as we look at these cases we women can better appreciate ourselves and appreciate each other. Also, those who minister to women and those who are intimately involved with a woman will see her as the awe-inspiring creature that Jesus sees her to be and

respects her and her feminine qualities as Jesus does.

First of all, Jesus had a love and respect for women, though He lived in a more religious and patriarchal than our society today. It is evident from Jesus' relationship with women, that He had no biases or unfounded negative beliefs about them. *Indeed the archetype of His Church is modeled after the woman, even calling it His Bride (Rev. 21:9).* This feminine symbolism, "The Bride", *is also a figurative representation of Christ (Rev. 22:17)* and also of the *New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:2).*

Secondly, in John 2:1-4, Jesus initiated the work of His ministry signaled by the statement of a need expressed by a woman - his mother. It is even more astonishing that He responded to her even though it was not yet the ordained time for His ministerial duties to begin. He told her "My time is not yet". Despite that, He chose to change His divine pre-ordained timetable at her caring consideration. To me, this is an incomprehensibly wonder - God incarnate differed to a woman and changed *His* timetable to honor *her* concern about a need.

Additionally, in John 4:28-29 and 39 we see how Jesus spoke with the Bible's first recorded missionary, the Samaritan woman. This woman was someone we could describe as "loose" and "shacking up with one man after another". Yet, Jesus confronted her with the truth about herself in such a way that it ignited her to make inquiry about religious things. Meeting Him, brought her to a new life of change, and she in turn was instrumental in changing the lives of others she knew (John 4:28-29). She indeed did what Jesus told her at the well. By going and telling others the good news, she gave Him to drink (John 4:10 KJV)

There are also several other cases where Jesus' life was ensconced by women who ministered to him and whom He showed

his love, his respect, his preference, his value and his esteem. Some of these cases are recorded in Luke 7: 36-50, Matthew 15: 22-28, Luke 8: 1-3, and John 8:1-11 where Jesus showed His love and grace by saving the woman caught in adultery from men who would have killed her.

This tender love and grace is seen in Jesus' ultimate act of love. Jesus loves His Bride, the Church, so completely that He gave His life for Her. God says that this the same way a husband is to love his bride.

From the cases above we can see that Jesus demonstrated His love towards women by keeping them safe, saving them from their abusers, and at times, from themselves. Jesus loves His female creation. He showed her respect, He honors and He values her. Jesus symbolically feminized His Church by calling it His Bride, and He gave His life for Her - His Church.

As women, seeing ourselves through Jesus' eyes can be very healing and restorative to our souls. We no longer have to give credence to woman hating behavior and comments that seek to batter and destroy what Jesus holds dear.

Sisters, mother, daughters, can learn from Jesus and see themselves as the precious creatures that they are.

Aretha doesn't have to be the only one who can sing "R-E-S-P-E-C-T". We can all join in that anthem.

By Dr. Chloe Cummings

Author of *What Would Jesus Do About Domestic Violence and Abuse Towards Christian Women?*

ARE YOU JESUS?

A few years ago a group of salesmen went to a regional sales convention in Chicago. They had assured their wives that they would be home in plenty of time for Friday night dinner.

Running through the airport with their briefcases in hand, one of these salesmen inadvertently knocked over a table which held a display of apples.

Apples flew everywhere. Without stopping or looking back, they all managed to barely reach the plane just in time for the final boarding call.

All but one.

He paused, took a deep breath, got in touch with his feelings, and experienced a twinge of compassion for the girl whose apple stand had been overturned.

He told his buddies to go on without him, waved good-bye, told one of them to call his wife when they arrived home and explain his taking a later flight. Then he returned to the terminal where the apples were all over the terminal floor.

He was glad he did.

The 16-year-old girl was totally blind.

She was softly crying, tears run-



ning down her cheeks in frustration, and at the same time helplessly groping for her spilled produce as the crowd swirled about her--no one stopping and no one to care for her plight.

The salesman knelt on the floor with her, gathered up the apples, put them back on the table and helped organize her display. As he did this, he noticed that many of them had become battered and bruised; these he set aside in another basket.

When he had finished, he pulled out his wallet and said, "Here, please take this \$40 for the damage we did. Are you okay?"

She nodded through her tears.

He continued on, "I hope we didn't spoil your day too badly."

As the salesman started to walk away, the bewildered blind girl called out to him, "Mister..."

He paused and turned to look back into those blind eyes.

She continued, "Are you Jesus?"

He stopped in mid-stride. Then slowly he made his way to catch the later flight with that question burning and bouncing about in his soul: "Are you Jesus?"

Do people mistake you for Jesus? That's our destiny, is it not? To be so much like Jesus that people cannot tell the difference as we live and interact with a world that is blind to His love, life and grace.

If we claim to know Him, we should live, walk and act as He would.

Knowing Him is more than simply quoting Scripture and going to church. It's actually living the Word as life unfolds day to day.

You are the apple of His eye even though we, too, have been bruised by a fall.

He stopped what He was doing and picked up you and me on a hill called Calvary and paid in full for our damaged fruit.

--author unknown

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Words that Heal

“Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.
Worship the Lord with gladness;
Come before him with joyful songs.

Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we
are his, we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.”

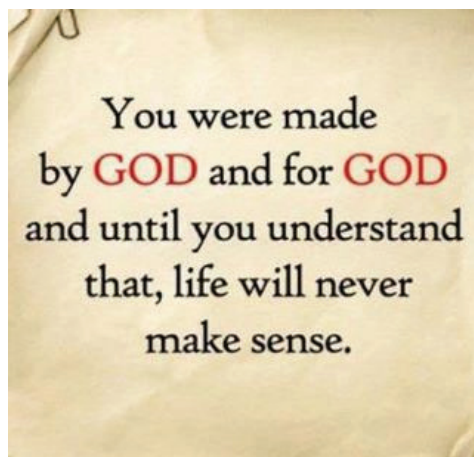
Psalm 100:1-3 NIV

“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the
government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father,
Prince of Peace.”

Isaiah 9:6 NIV

“The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son,
and they will call him
Emmanuel—which means, God with us.”

Matthew 1:23 NIV



Domestic Violence Training for Churches/Groups/Organizations

Topics:

- What is Domestic Violence?—A Closer Look at Verbal, Emotional, Sexual, Physical, and Spiritual Abuse
- Characteristics of an Abuser/Why Does He Do That?
- Recognizing a Victim of Domestic Violence
- Why Women Stay or Leave/Developing a Safety Plan
- How Does Domestic Violence Affect the Family Especially Children
- Teen Dating Violence
- What Can the Church Do?
- Do's and Don'ts of Counseling
- Signs that the Abuser Has Changed
- Church Safety Plan/Risks
- Becoming an Anchor in the Storm/How to Help Someone in an Abusive Relationship

Development of Domestic Violence Program in Churches

- Do's and Don'ts of Counseling Victims and Abusers
- Development of Domestic Violence Policies and Procedures for Churches
- Step By Step Approach for Churches to Address the Issue of Domestic Violence
- Training for support group leaders

Prayer Requests & Urgent Needs

Urgent Needs:

- **New board members** with expertise in fund-raising, marketing, and the law
- **Trainers** to assist in our training seminars
- **TEEN FOCUS team** to develop the teen program
- An **office space** to accommodate the increasing need for the ministry

Praises:

- **FOCUS Ministries** was featured on This is the Day (Moody Radio)

- **CEU Sponsor** for Counselors & Social Workers

Prayer Requests:

- **Pray for our TEEN FOCUS team** as they develop our teen program
- **Pray for a facility** for our FOCUS Women's Center. It would enable us to expand our services and provide more trainings, seminars, and conferences.
- **Pray for funds** to hire much needed staff

- **Pray for board members** as they make critical decisions regarding the direction of the ministry

- **Pray for women and families** who contact our FOCUS Women's Center.

- **Pray for pastors' wives** that are being abused.

- **Pray for individuals, churches, and businesses** to commit to **monthly giving**.

- **Pray for all the FOCUS support**

group leaders

- **Pray for houses** in IL, to be donated for use as transitional homes.
- **Pray for more invitations** from churches to train pastors, staff, and congregations about domestic violence.
- **Pray for churches** to understand the gravity of domestic violence and will develop appropriate responses.



Upcoming Events

Author, Editor and Publisher: Paula Silva
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The mission of FOCUS Ministries is to provide a safe place for teens, women, and families who experience domestic violence and abusive relationships to find hope and healing in Jesus Christ.

Funding: FOCUS Ministries is a not-for-profit 501 c3 organization funded by contributions and grants. **If you would like to help us minister to hurting people through our educational materials, support groups, counseling, and financial assistance to victims of domestic violence, please send your gift to FOCUS Ministries, Inc., P. O. Box 2014, Elmhurst, IL 60126 or online at www.focusministries1.org.** A tax-deductible receipt will be provided for all contributions.

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- **December 2, 2011—Ladies Night Out “Fun”draiser**, Villa Park, IL
- **February 25, 2012—Restoring the Hope Conference**, Villa Park, IL
- **March 30-31, 2012—Partners in the Journey:** Train the Trainer FOCUS (Support Group Leaders Training), Oakbrook Terrace, IL
- **June 29-30, 2012—Partners in the Journey:** Train the Trainer FOCUS (Support Group Leaders Training), Oakbrook Terrace, IL

O Lord, You Alone Are My Hope! Psalm 71:5 NLT

Ways You Can Help FOCUS Ministries



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