



LAREAU
LINDQUIST

Pastoral Encouragement: Seven Letters To Christian Workers

Letter 1: Growing Through Affliction

It was one year ago today that I had my severe automobile accident. The year has been filled with the full gamut of extremes: lows and highs, difficulties and discoveries. That has been true not only physically, but also emotionally and spiritually. Now in retrospect, I more fully see that it has been a valuable year—in fact, a very valuable year. I am able to agree with the Psalmist who wrote, “It was good for me to be afflicted” (Psalm 119:71). I am careful to observe that he saw the goodness of it all after the affliction was over and not in the middle of the affliction.

Often, friends ask me if I am different now than before. I think they are asking if I see things very differently now. Any significant changes? I answer quickly and certainly, “Yes, in many ways.” Let me give an illustration or two.

First, I have especially discovered the *preciousness* of the Lord. He has been and continues to be so very precious. I have focused on His specific attributes and found them to be warm and true. Like Job, I have found that everything about God has become more real, more immediate, more intimate. Job, after going through multiple losses, witnessed a new self-revelation of God. He *then* said this to God: “Once my ears had heard of you, but now my eyes have seen you” (Job 42:5). There was no longer just a third-person awareness but now a first-hand experience. I can concur with Job’s personal testimonial. I, too, have discovered Him more profoundly.

Second, I have learned more about *appreciation*. After being hospitalized for 11 weeks and significantly restricted for another five months, I took my first intercontinental

Scripture admonishes us to “encourage one another day after day, as long as it is called ‘today,’ lest any of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Heb. 3:13). Here are seven short messages taken from the “flowing font” of letters which the author—an international champion of encouragement—regularly sends to Christian workers around the world. These letters openly address some of the main areas of struggle in cross-cultural ministry. Leaders can use such letters to provide timely, valuable support to their mission personnel.

ministry trip to Austria and Bulgaria with Dick Anthony and Charley Warner. On the flight back to the States, I sat alone. All of a sudden, I sensed how really different things were. My life. My marriage. My ministry. My friends. I had a new sense of appreciation for everything. I no longer could take things for granted. After having almost lost everything, after having been to the brink, things were different. And things are still different.

While still thinking about all of this, I picked up a newspaper from England. I read an article about a woman who discovered that she had terminal cancer at age 25. She said that it was the darkest day of her life. Several years later, she was still living and doing very well. She wrote these words: “Eventually I discovered that my worst day had possibly become my best day *because* it became a turning point in my life. I began to celebrate each day as a special gift and each event as a special event.” I also remember hearing Joni Eareckson Tada say this about her diving accident that left her permanently quadriplegic: “Outside of the day of my conversion to Christ, the greatest gift from the Lord was my accident at Chesapeake Bay.”

I am not saying that all of us need an automobile wreck. Nor am I looking forward to the next wreck. Here is what I am saying: *God can be fully trusted with whatever comes into our lives.* He can bring blessings out of buffetings. He can turn tragedies into triumphs.

Earlier this afternoon, 14 of my Barnabas friends joined me at the tree, the site of the accident a year ago. A friend read from Romans chapter eight. Several of us shared what God had been teaching us through the year. We held hands as we encircled the tree. We sang to the Lord, “Great Is Thy Faithfulness.” We prayed. And amazingly, there was a spirit of triumph in it all. It was a victory celebration. Only God can make that happen. Thank you, Lord.

Letter 2: Overcoming the “I Can’t” Syndrome

Many of us are sometimes plagued with the *I can’t* syndrome, so clearly illustrated in the life and ministry of Moses. When God called Moses to a very specific ministry assignment (Exodus 3-4), Moses repeatedly responded to God with this attitude, *I can’t*. He finally submitted to the Lord, and he began to see the evidences of God’s sufficiency in his life and ministry. There were times, however, when he again lapsed into his old pattern of self-dependency and its related despondency and impotency. Once, he even threatened to quit his ministry assignment (Exodus 33). He often needed to be reminded of the unlimited power of God that was promised to him when he said yes to God. We, too, need to understand the power principle that Moses and other biblical individuals discovered. Power for life, for ministry, for tough times—for everything that God puts in our paths.

Jesus told His disciples, “Without Me, you can do nothing” (John 15:5). We need to have these words deeply written on our minds and hearts. Perhaps we literally need to write them in places where we will see them frequently throughout the course of the day (e.g., at our desks, on our dashboards, above our sinks). Jesus is telling us that we are powerless without Him. *That’s right, we can do nothing, nothing, nothing without Him.*

Paul, in Colossians 1:29, states it emphatically. He writes, “I labor, struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.” Paul is wanting us to grasp an important truth, so he puts a lot of power words together in a single text. Let’s be sure that we know what he is saying. I am emphasizing five power words here in the NIV translation: *labor, struggling, energy, powerfully, works*. Perhaps we ought to look at some other translations too:

■ “I am contending according to His energy which is energizing itself in me with power” (Rotherham’s *Emphasized New Testament*).

■ “I am struggling like an athlete by His power that is working mightily in me” (William Beck’s *New Testament in the Language of Today*).

As Paul loads up this verse with active, intense power words, he is *theologically* stating an important principle. Thankfully, he is also *practically* and *experientially* living out the principle in his life. In every letter, Paul speaks of God’s power in us. He truly believed that God’s power was available for him and us *to do* what He wants us to do, *to be* what He wants us to be, and *to become* what He wants us to become. The life stories of other biblical men and women dramatically illustrate the same truth. Too many of us have never discovered this principle, or perhaps we have simply neglected to make it a part of our lives and ministries. We needlessly live with a *power deficiency*. God’s power is available to us. Yes, His power energizing you and me. Listen again: “I am struggling with all His energy, which so powerfully works in me.” Paul never confused God’s power with his own power. He knew that he was not the superman, but God was the Superman.

When J. B. Phillips did his first translation of the New Testament letters, he became overwhelmed with the way in which the early believers really allowed God to live in them and through them. He stated this observation in the preface to his translation: “Perhaps if we believed what they believed, we would achieve what they achieved.”

Annie Johnson Flint wrote these words, which are familiar to many of us:

“His love has no limit.

His grace has no measure.

His power has no boundary known unto man.

For out of His infinite riches in Jesus, He giveth and giveth and giveth again.”

There is strength available for this day—and for the rest of the journey.

Letter 3: Perspectives on Pain

Two days ago, I spent a couple of hours with Pastor Samuel Lamb at his church in Guangzhou, China. It has been and continues to be the largest house-church in China. When I was there several years ago, I arrived late for a communion service. Hundreds of people were crowded into the second and third floors of the house. The narrow stairway was packed with people. Many others elsewhere listened by closed-circuit television or loudspeakers, some spilling out into the streets. Typically, 500 people attend these services, with a total of over 2,000 weekly. What a joy to meet these Christians, to hear them sing triumphantly to the Lord, and to share the Lord’s table together.

Again this time, our team enjoyed personal time with Pastor Lamb. I asked him to share his personal story with us. What a story! Twice he has been imprisoned, once for 16 months and once for 20 years. Amazingly, he said that after the first imprisonment, there were more people in church. After the second imprisonment, there were even more people in church. They continued to see more growth. He stated and restated this observation several times: “More persecution was followed by more growth.” He writes of this in his recently updated testimony: “Suffering is nothing to us. As long as we have the right attitude toward suffering (1 Peter 4), God will strengthen us. Likewise, it is not difficult to be faithful, but the difficulty is to ‘be faithful, even to the point of death’ (Rev. 2:10). Please continue your intercessory prayers for us. Thank you.”

These words keep coming back to me: more persecution, more growth; more persecution, more growth. In Romans 8:35, Paul mentions a variety of struggles that may come to us. There can be trouble, hardship, persecution, famine, nakedness, danger, or sword, but Paul states that in all these things, we can still be more than conquerors through Christ (8:37). In 8:32, he refers to these difficulties as *grace-gifts*.

Recently, I read the book *A Grace Disguised*, by Gerald Sittser, in which the author tells of an automobile accident that he lived through. His wife, mother, and daughter were killed in the accident. Understandably, he writes of the tragic pain and loss that he suffered—incredible losses. Yet he eventually came to see that God brought some good things out of the initial horror of the event. At the time of the accident and in the early months and years following the event, he didn't see it as a *grace-gift* at all. In time, however, he recognized it as a *grace disguised*, as he entitled the book.

There seems to be a common thread in all these accounts. Samuel Lamb, the Apostle Paul, and Gerald Sittser agree that pain is real. It hurts a lot. They also agree that there is a positive side to pain and hurt. There is a potential blessing buried in the difficulty that could soon be seen as a gift from God.

The greatest illustration of this truth is focused on the weekend of Good Friday and Easter morning. The cross of Christ looked so tragic until Easter morning. Then the victory was apparent. Jesus, “for the joy set before Him,” was able to endure the cross (Heb. 12:2). Beyond the cross, Jesus saw the joy of resurrection.

There is something beautiful beyond your present discomfort. The God of hope guarantees this to be true. As Otis Skillings writes, “Keep on keeping on.”

Letter 4: We Have Christ

Some months ago, my brother, Lynn, and I spoke at the world headquarters for HCJB in Colorado Springs, Colorado. We spent most of one day together, which included a chapel service and several seminars. Before I spoke in chapel, I spent some quiet, personal moments alone in the office of their president, Ron Cline. I was impressed with a motto hanging on the wall, containing these five words: “For this I have Christ.”

Several days ago, I talked with a Christian friend on the telephone. She shared a very distressing personal story with me. Their family is almost picture-perfect. They were a sharp couple in their mid-40s with four children, financially secure, and spiritually alive and alert. Then without any warning, speedily and unexpectedly, she was diagnosed with a potentially severe, chronic, disabling disease. Crash, bang, stop! Speaking of “a bend in the road,” this was it. The Apostle Paul speaks of *troubles* and *hardships* in Romans 8:35. *Troubles* are often painful. *Hardships* are worse—more intense, more severe, perhaps more enduring. Sometimes they are very, very hard. Such was my friend's new plight.

As my friend told me of this difficulty, Ron Cline's motto came to mind, and I shared it with her. Immediately she said, “That's very good. Wait a minute as I write it down. For this I have Christ.” Some time later, I talked with her husband, and he told me that she put this motto on their refrigerator door as a constant reminder of the sufficiency of Christ in their situation.

The Apostle Paul, in the context of personal affliction, wrote these words: “I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:20-21). J. B. Phillips translates a part of verse 21 like this: “For me, living means simply Christ.” Paul's relationship with Christ was real. It was vital. It was personal. In his prison experience and in all other difficulties, he eventually learned to lean on Christ. He found that knowing Christ and trusting Him made every situation a potentially triumphant experience. He never denied the reality of trouble. He did not sweep it under the rug, pretending it wasn't there. Nor did he downplay the painfulness of pain. But he was able to see it in the larger context of the sufficiency of Jesus. Over every personal crisis, he too had this

motto: “For this I have Christ.” He believed it. He practiced it. It made a big difference.

As you face today and tomorrow, perhaps a trouble will visit you. It may briefly touch you. It may even linger a while. It may stay around a long time. At such a time, Jesus says to you, “Here I am.” Respond with certainty, “Yes, even now, for this I have Christ.”

Letter 5: Dealing With Death

Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed unto man once to die and after this the judgment.” Death is a certainty. It is a reality that each of us must face and accept. Although we may rarely think about it, death will eventually come to each of us. Usually we see it distantly, as in the death of a stranger. Or it may be closer, as in the death of a friend, a loved one, or even a family member. In recent days, a number of incidents have raised the awareness of death to me.

- My wife, Evie, and I spoke at the USA headquarters of MAF in California. The remains of Nate Saint’s plane were recently uncovered from the sandy beaches in Ecuador, where Nate and four colleagues were murdered in 1956 by Auca Indians. Now this plane is on display, sitting in sand, at its new home at MAF. The scene of that plane vividly reminded me of that dreadful day, so powerfully told in Elisabeth Elliot’s book, *Through Gates of Splendor*.

- Before we spoke in chapel that morning, Leon, a staff member, shared a prayer request with the congregation. He said, “By now, all of you have heard about the killing of two students by a fellow student just two days ago in a high school here in nearby Santee, California. One of those two boys, Bryan Zuckor, is my nephew by marriage. Please pray for the family.”

- Later that week, we attended a conference where four Columbine students told their story of carnage, which they observed two years ago at a high school in

Colorado in the USA. They shared the details that they observed and experienced. They also told of the varied and powerful impact in their lives: drawing them closer to the Lord; having a greater appreciation for their families; developing an awareness of the brevity of life; possessing a greater alertness for ministry to hurting and lonely people; and knowing how quickly difficulties can suddenly enter our lives. One said, “I’ve heard people say, ‘Into each life, some rain must fall.’ But for us, that day brought a cloudburst of epoch proportion.” He had been shot and wounded in the library where many students were killed. Another told of walking with her teacher down the hall, when one of the shooters approached them and fired. The teacher was killed. Later, while she was being escorted from the building, she stepped over the body of her dead friend, Rachel Scott. As we listened to these students tell their stories, we were again reminded that each of us encounters troubles in a variety of sizes, shapes, and severities. Some have large dosages of trouble. These four had a colossal difficulty placed into their young lives. Yet each one revealed the greatness of God in giving Himself to them in love, grace, and tenderness through the enormity of the event. Though the pain was real and severe, so were the reality and compassion of the Lord.

The Apostle Paul writes, “Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’ No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom. 8:35-37). The quotation in the middle of that paragraph is taken from Psalm 44:22. In spite of the *death* mentioned there, the word *victory* appears four times in the same psalm. Even as Paul writes of *death*, he speaks of being *more than conquerors*. The Old and the New Testaments are speaking of death and victory in the same phrase—in the

same context. Again, Paul states that “death has been swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor. 15:54).

Even in the crescendo of severities in our lives, we Christians can draw upon the resources we have in Christ. Amazingly, we can emerge as conquerors and victors, not because of who we are but because of who He is. An unknown author has said, “God chooses *what* we go through. We choose *how* we go through it.”

Letter 6: There Is No One Like Jesus

Over 600 of us Christian leaders are here together in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. We are delegates to the quadrennial conference of the World Evangelical Fellowship. Registrants are here from almost 100 nations around the world. Additionally, we represent over 100 Christian organizations. Understandably, there have been many moments that will indelibly stay in our hearts. One such time was this morning when 30-35 black nationals from various countries in Africa spontaneously were called to the platform to sing. They sang in a language unknown to me. Their singing, however, was made understandable by their choreography. Enthusiastically they sang these words: “There’s no one like Jesus. I looked to the right, and I looked to the left, and I looked behind me, too. I still found there is no one like Jesus.”

This was a part of Peter’s sermon in Acts 4:12, when he said, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” Other Scriptures tell us that there are many other priceless possessions that can only be found in Jesus. These come to mind, all explicitly stated as gifts from Him alone: peace, joy, fellowship, life (abundant, spiritual, and eternal), forgiveness, and heaven, to mention but a few. No matter where we look for these, we will end up agreeing with Peter that they will be found *in no one else*. You and I have found this to be true. Let’s be

diligent in preaching and sharing this good news with others. We are surrounded by people on dead-end streets looking for realities that will never be found outside of Jesus. Let’s tell them. Maybe you, like me, need to be freely reminded to share the good news. A medical doctor/minister, serving in Africa, once said to me, “Thanks, Lareau, for helping me to get back to the basics. There is something that is even more important than their physical health. It is their spiritual well-being.” So quickly we can forget the best news of all—it is Jesus.

In the Philippines, I met two young pastors who told me of their father’s conversion. One of them, as a child, was very ill. Their father, a tribal chief, took him to the witch doctor. He could not help them. Then they took him to a missionary, whose prayer brought healing to the child. That day, the father decided to follow Jesus. He became an evangelist and was greatly used of God. His two sons are now preaching Christ.

As our black colleagues sang to us this morning, I immediately thought of the numerous testimonials of people I have met all over the world whose lives have been transformed by Jesus. All of them can join us in singing, “There is no one like Jesus.”

Let’s often rehearse for the heavenly choir, where we will surround the throne of Jesus and join others to sing of His unparalleled glory, “You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because You were slain, and with Your blood You purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation.... Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise.... Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb.... Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen!” (Rev. 5:9, 12; 7:10, 12).

Today’s events have brought me closer to that eternal day. Indeed, we are a part

of a “forever family,” widely dispersed around the globe. Let’s believe it and share it and sing it: there is no one like Jesus.

Letter 7: The Lord Is in Control

As Evie, my wife, and I were concluding our seminar at the WEF conference in Malaysia recently, a dear Christian brother from India, John Richard, stood to his feet and asked if he could say a word or two. He generously affirmed us and the ministries of Barnabas International around the world. He then prayed for Evie and me and for the wider ministries of Barnabas International. This phrase, in his prayer, especially caught my attention. He prayed, “Lord, we read in your Word that the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord” (as taught in Psalm 37:23, KJV). Then he continued, “and we know that the stops along the way are also ordered by you.”

Later that day and often since that day, I have pondered those truths, that the *steps* and the *stops* are ordered by the Lord. God is fully involved in our lives. His attributes are involved in our journeys every day, meaning that His wisdom, His love, His sovereignty, His grace, and His presence are at work on our behalf at all times. Let’s make it personal. He is not at all detached, removed, or uninvolved in my *steps* nor in my *stops*. He is fully engaged in every detail of our lives.

The *stops* refer to our tough times, such as the delays, the detours, the afflictions, and the disappointments. Many Christians find it difficult to accept God’s involvement in our dark hours. They just cannot imagine or believe that God would bring such things upon us. The authors of Scripture, however, carefully affirm this truth.

■ Joseph, after the incredible abuses he suffered from his brothers, said to them, “You intended to harm me, but God meant it for good” (Gen. 50:20).

■ The Psalmist wrote, “It was good for me to be afflicted.... O Lord, in faithful-

ness you have afflicted me” (Psalm 119:71, 75).

■ Job, in his devastating afflictions, immediately said, “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away” (Job 1:21). Throughout the book of Job, in his conversations with God, he often reaffirmed his belief that God was the Source and the Author of his tough times. In the final chapter of his book (Job 42:11), he wrote of the blessings that God gave him after all the trouble the Lord had brought upon him.

God not only *allows* tough times, He *orchestrates* them as well. We sing these words, “He’s got the whole world in His hands; He’s got you and me, brother, in His hands; He’s got you and me, sister, in His hands.” He has all creation in His hands. Listen to Isaiah’s confidence in Isaiah 40:10-11: “See, the sovereign Lord comes with power, and His arm rules for Him.... He gathers the lambs in His arms and carries them close to His heart.” Indeed, He is sovereign. He is powerful. And He carries us close to His heart.

Indeed, our steps and our stops are ordered by the Lord. Just weeks ago, the Christian world was shocked and saddened to read of the ABWE tragedy in Peru. The mission plane was bringing Jim and Roni Bowers to their assignment, when the plane was mistaken to be an illegal drug plane. Repeatedly, gunfire hit their plane, crippling the craft and bringing it down into the river. The pilot was severely injured. Jim’s wife and infant daughter were killed. Jim, reflecting on the horrible incident, said, “It is the love of God that constrains us to go to the ends of the earth. In the will of God and providence of God, there is no such thing as an ‘accident.’ He plans everything that comes into our lives.”

God is the Master Architect. He is in the process of creating a masterpiece out of you and me. He can be trusted to do what is best for you and me. It is not always the easiest for us to accept nor the choice we would have made. But He will do whatever He wills to do. And it will be good.

O Lord, thank you for ordering my steps and my stops. Thank you for grace to trust you in every moment. Amen.

Reflection and Discussion

1. Which of these letters are the most relevant for you right now? In what ways?
2. If you were to write an “encouragement” letter to a colleague or team, what theme would you address, and which Scriptures would you use?
3. How could similar letters (including email messages and email video clips) be incorporated into the member care program of your organization?
4. Identify some other key topics for Christian workers that could be addressed via these types of letters.
5. The seven letters in this chapter emphasize the love and closeness of Christ, and they stimulate us to persevere and not give up. Try summarizing some of these letters in one sentence, and follow each by a key verse from Scripture. Share these with some colleagues.



Dr. Lareau Lindquist and his wife, Evie, started Barnabas International in 1986, a ministry committed to spiritual/pastoral ministry. After 21 years in pastoral ministry and another three years as the President of the Institute of Holy Land Studies (now Jerusalem University), they sensed a call from God to begin a ministry which would exist to bless and build people involved in ministry. Lareau served as Executive Director of this ministry—Barnabas International—for 15 years, traveling to over 100 countries. Currently Lareau and Evie are spending time as Senior Associates via studying, writing, teaching, counseling, and ministering to Christian leaders worldwide. Lareau continues to write monthly letters for Christian workers called **Encouragement**. Email: Barnabas@Barnabas.org.

Special thanks to Dottie Campbell for her help in preparing this chapter for publication.