

## Are you ready for a fresh start?

I hope so, because that is the focus God has put on my heart for this newsletter. My friend, even if we have not stood face-to-face, you have a special place in my heart. I can't explain it; it's just the way God made it. I love you and I want you to break out of the bondage this world puts around us. I want you to be crazy for Jesus. I want your heart to cry out for Him and your every breath to depend on Him. I want to some day watch you as you stand before the throne of God, blanketed in unfathomable joy and peace as our almighty, holy and perfect God says to you, "Well done good and faithful servant."

A quote from Erma Bombeck hangs where I see it each time I enter my office. It reads, "When I stand before God at the end of my life I would hope that I would have not a single bit of talent left and could say, 'I used everything you gave me.'"

I'm not a theologian. I don't live a blameless life. You can tell I'm not a writer. But I will not let that stop me from using every bit of what God has given me. I don't want you to let anything stop you either.

Don't hold yourself back. Move forward with me this year. Find the time to print off these emails (it's only two a month!) and give your heart, your soul, your mind, your strength, your life to God.

With a great love for you,  
Jennifer

## A Fresh Start that Doesn't Fizzle

How good a new year feels! A new calendar with crisp edges replaces the smudged and tattered old one. The bulging bills-paid folder gets emptied and fits nicely in the drawer again. The over-eating of Christmas is a thing of the past; it was last year, after all.

The thing is, if nothing changes, it's not a new anything because the calendar will fill-up, the VISA bill will show up, and we'll realize our hips are still blown-up.

Let's truly get a fresh start to a new year and turn our resolutions away from earthly values that will perish. Resolve instead to get a fresh start that will not fade away. No matter who you are or what your life is, you can have a new you in this new year.

You're not going to do it by staying in your comfort zone. Comfort is one of the places Satan best holds us captive. If you're a Christian, don't think Satan has given up on you. He may not be able to claim you, but he'll be satisfied to keep you happy where you are because then he will keep you from winning others to Christ. He will keep you from earning rewards in Heaven. He will keep you from fully experiencing the abundant life God has planned for you.

Yes, if you want a truly new year, you will have to overcome the worldly hold of comfort. To see where you need to do this, you'll have to examine your spiritual life. *Where are you?* If we're honest, every one of us has room for improvement in at least of few areas of our spiritual life.

Get out of the comfortable captivity this world holds you in! Do not let a day go by without reading your Bible. Have several intimate conversations with the Lord each day. Make sure you're calling God more than your friends and husband during the day. And when you show up to church, don't just warm a seat for an hour. Show up to worship and praise your Creator. Be there to listen and learn, letting God speak to your heart during the sermon.

Do it because you're not going to get a new year by just showing up at church. You won't get an abundant life by only praying when you're desperate. You won't stay fresh and strong in trials and suffering if you don't know who God is and what He promises you in the Bible.

My friend, our time here on earth is short. Not only is last year gone, the minute you had when you started reading this is gone. It will never come back. Do not let another day pass without renewing your decision to make Jesus the Lord of your life. Recommit your life to Him. Determine to live each day for His glory. Make each minute count. Be different than you were last year.

Step out of the comfort zone. Be known as the one who takes this Jesus thing a little too far because when you stand before your Creator, Judge, King and Lord, He will not say, "you gave me too much."

Change to a new you in this new year. Live your life like every second depends on Him, because it does. Make every one of them count for eternity.

"Except (in the words of Dr. Seuss) when you don't, because sometimes you won't." Yes, there will be days when your fresh start feels smudged, bulging and bloated instead of crisp and fresh. In those times remember that His mercy and compassion is new every day (Lamentations 3:22-23). My friend, this day and every day is the day the Lord has made (Psalm 118:24). He made it for you, but He didn't make it for you to be held in an exile of comfort. He made it for you to worship Him and rejoice in Him (Philippians 4:4).

Give Him all you've got. Don't hold anything back!

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## Meditate and Study

Grab a notebook and your Bible. Get cozy and stay a while. Let's search the riches and treasures of the Bible and get a start on our new year.

Do these as two separate lessons so your heart can meditate on each of them. Think of it as a marinade for your soul. If you just pour the marinade on and then dump it off without letting it soak in, you won't benefit from lasting effects. But if you marinate overnight or all day, the flavor becomes part of the meat.

Just don't forget to come back for lesson two!

### Lesson 1-1

Read through Jeremiah 29:11-14 twice.

1. Write it out.
2. Underline each 'I' and 'me.' Circle each 'you.'
3. Make two lists; one of what the Lord will do and one of what you will do.
4. What captivity/exile are you living in now?
5. What does Jeremiah 29:11 promise for your future?
6. What does this scripture tell you about your role in finding the Lord?
7. How does this passage change or reinforce your thinking?

### Lesson 1-2

1. What did you learn or apply from the last lesson?

Read Psalm 118:24.

2. Write it out.
  - 3a. What day has the Lord made?
  - 3b. Does the scripture tell us there are days the Lord has not made?
  - 3c. What days in your life do you have a hard time seeing as Lord-made?

Read Philippians 4:4.

4a. Write it out.

3b. Circle the word 'always.'

5a. How many times does this one passage tell you rejoice?

5b. How would you describe a person who is rejoicing?

5c. When should you rejoice in the Lord?

5d. Even when you are living a day that seems like the Lord could not have made it, what should you do and how could you do it?

Read Romans 8:28.

6. Write it out.

7a. Circle 'all things.'

7b. Is there any thing that is not included in 'all things?'

7c. Do you find the word 'except' in this passage?

8. Who is this promise for?

9. Do any of these passages say that how we feel changes the promise?

10. Reread these three passages with Jeremiah 29:11. In your own words, what does God promise you?

11. Write a prayer to God expressing what these promises mean to you and the comfort you find in them.

My friend, being a Christian doesn't make life easy. There is suffering, pain, trials and persecution. You may not always *feel* like rejoicing. You may not always *feel* like the Lord is there. You may not *feel* like you have hope for the future. But don't rely on what you feel. Rely on what you know. We **know** the Lord has plans to prosper and not harm us. We **know** He works for the good of all those who love Him. We **know** He has created each and every day, no matter what they bring our way. And, we **know** we are to rejoice in every one of those days.

Something else you should know – time that you spend in God's word is never time wasted. God will reward you for your desire to know Him better.

Was today's lesson fun for you? I love diving into the Bible and letting God speak to my heart. How powerful and amazing His truth is!

I'm praying for you and look forward to our next meeting!  
Jennifer