

## **Letter to Lori: (God is like a really aggressive personal trainer!)**

Life is beautiful. Your prayers are being answered. I am grateful. It's true, I have been going through a lot of stuff. The changes are needed and good, but change can be painful. So it takes more faith. So I am learning to grow my faith. God has the amazing ability to stretch us no matter where we are or where we've been. He's like a super aggressive personal trainer that wants to see us progress, but only by comparison with ourselves. If we are here in this place today, he wants to see us at the next level tomorrow. And he never gives up on us, even if we try giving up on ourselves. He is so committed to our growth that it sometimes feels like we are being hunted! I'm learning, however, to surrender to his relentless, loving, chastening, teaching hand.

When I am tempted to struggle or complain or rebel, I remember all the lessons of the past and how painful and difficult they seemed at the moment. Then I recall the joy of learning a new truth and another piece of overcoming. I remember the miraculous deliverances, and the constant support through seemingly impossible times. Then I take a deep breath, repent of my frustrations, and begin again to practice my faith. Faith must be practiced in order to grow. This is why the plan called for an almost constant stream of nearly impossible challenges! If they were anything less, we would not grow. Our challenges match our current spiritual strength. They are designed to be a little more than we think we can handle. In this way, we are pushed to our limit. As we call upon God in our hour of need, he gives us the next piece of intelligence. This allows us to overcome the challenge and we find peace. Then we go to the next step. This is how we return to God. Constantly climbing, reaching, and growing.

Only he knows how critical it is for us to move forward without delay. We feel like we need or deserve a break, but his love for us is relentless and though we cry for relief, still he asks us to climb. We simply trust that he has a good reason for pushing us to our limits. We trust that he knows more than we do and will be the best and kindest shepherd he can be. It is a lot for us mortals to grasp, but he believes in us. Our job is to believe in him as much as he believes in us! To be as relentless in our faith as he is in challenging us to exercise it. To be as diligent in our exact obedience as he is in allowing our obedience to be tested. The purpose of our covenants with God is to give us the strength to move forward, even when our physical and emotional selves would give up and turn back. We are going through the most intense free-climb ever. The stakes are high, the risks are dangerously close and real, and it often feels like we are alone, blind, hanging on to the bald face of the mountain by just our bare fingertips, it's raining ice, and we've lost our coat!

Then God calls to us, out of the storm: Trust Me.

At that moment, we have a choice. We can ask our hearts to trust, or we can try to get through it ourselves. If we become angry that we are in this predicament, it is almost impossible to ask our hearts to trust. But if we humble ourselves, repent of the anger and ask our hearts to trust, we are then given the information and help needed to go to our next step.

And this IS the plan! It was designed this way to insure that all those whose hearts are pure receive the kingdom of God. And those who would not endure the pain, the challenges, and the constant climbing, would be in another place.

The path to God is the most difficult and the most rewarding. All we have to do is to decide to stay on it no matter what. And if our paths seem hard, unfair, or even impossible, then we ought to rejoice and be exceeding glad, because we know that we are on the path to God!