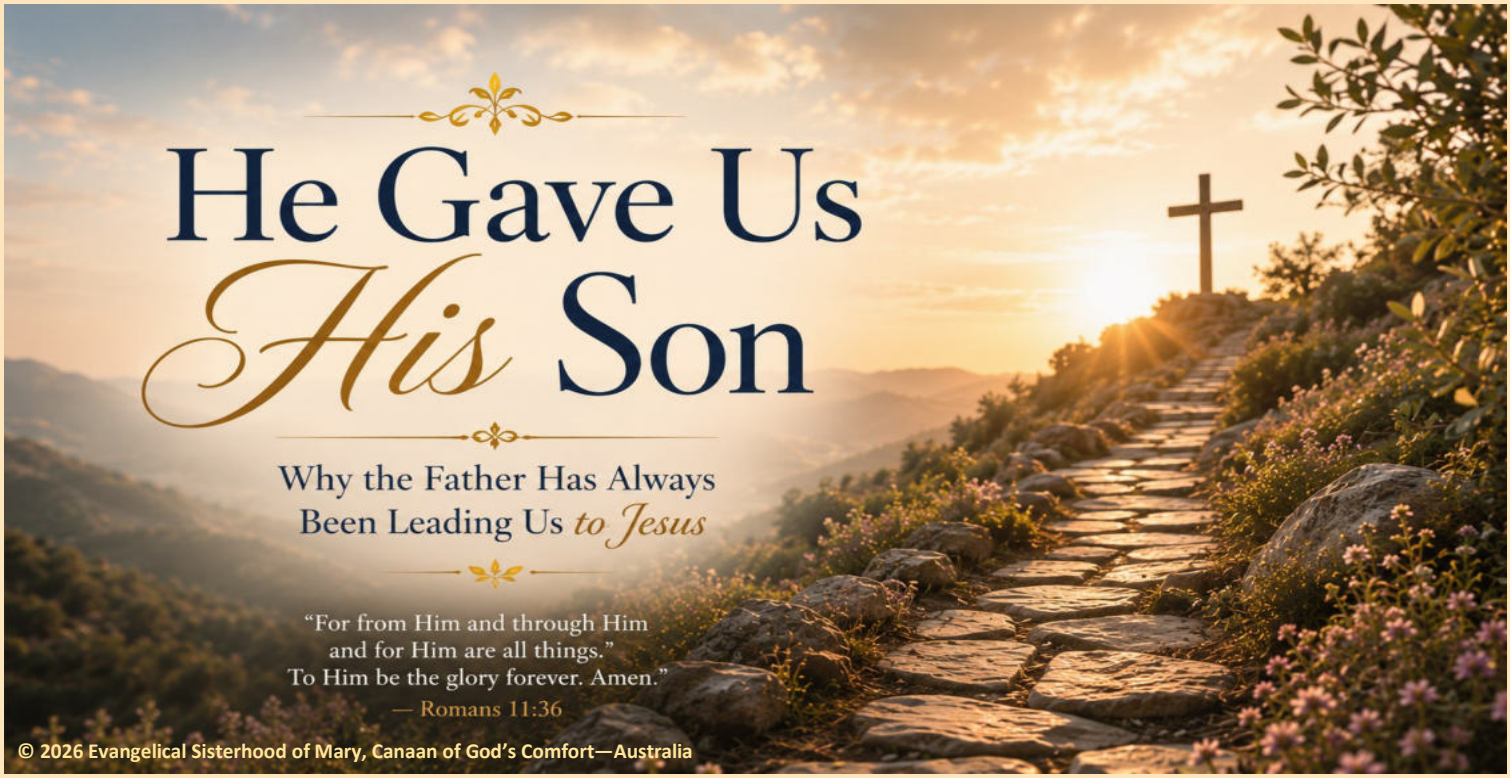



Dear Friends,

There comes a moment in every believer's journey when the questions they have carried for years begin to change.

Over the years, we have had the privilege of walking alongside many believers who have sincerely desired to know God's will for their lives. Some have wondered where He was leading them. Others have sought His guidance concerning ministry, marriage, work or a particular calling. These are sincere questions, and we believe the Lord delights to guide those who seek Him.

Recently, one of our Sisters reflected on her own journey and shared something that has profoundly shaped our understanding of the Christian life.

When she first came to Jesus, her prayers were filled with questions about the future. "Lord, what is Your will for my life? Where are You leading me?" Like many Christians, she longed to discover God's calling and to know how she could best serve Him.

Looking back now, she realises that while she was asking one set of questions, God was quietly answering another.

She thought He was leading her towards a vocation. Instead, He was leading her into ever-deepening communion with Jesus. That simple realisation transformed the way she understood the Christian life.

For many years she imagined there was a destination somewhere ahead where, once she had finally discovered God's calling, everything would make sense. Looking back now, she sees how patiently the Lord led her. She had mistaken the pathway for the destination.

The Father was never simply leading her into a particular vocation. In her case, that vocation became religious life, but His greater purpose was never the vocation itself. Every joy, every disappointment and every unexpected change of direction was drawing her ever more deeply into the heart of His Son—Jesus.

As we reflected on her testimony, we realised how easily many of us can make the same mistake.

We naturally seek God's will, long to discover our calling and desire to serve Him faithfully. These are good and God-given desires, yet they can quietly become the focus of our Christian lives, so that we begin pursuing God's gifts more than the Giver Himself.

Ministry, marriage, the local church, Christian community, religious life and every other calling are wonderful gifts from God. The danger is not that we reject Jesus altogether, but that we stop short of Him. We become captivated by His gifts rather than by the One who gives them.

Jesus never handed Peter a ministry plan or Matthew a roadmap. He simply invited them into a relationship that would transform every part of their lives.

**"Follow Me."**

Those two words contain the whole Christian life.

Before we are called to a ministry, a vocation or a particular place of service, we are called to a Person.

Every calling becomes the road upon which we learn to follow Him. Whether our path is marriage, work, ministry or religious life, the destination is always the same: deeper communion with Jesus.

When we begin to see this, every season takes on new meaning. Every joy becomes an opportunity to thank Him. Every disappointment becomes an invitation to trust Him. Even seasons of waiting become part of the Father's loving work of drawing us ever more deeply to His Son.

Perhaps that has been His purpose all along—not merely to reveal His will, but to reveal His Son and transform us into His likeness. Jesus has always been, and always will be, enough.

Yet if Jesus truly is the treasure, why does the journey towards Him so often lead through surrender? Why does the Father so often teach us through waiting, weakness and disappointment rather than through comfort and certainty?

Every believer who longs to follow Jesus will eventually wrestle with these questions.

As we reflected together on the testimony of our Sister, we recognised that these questions are not unique to one person's journey. They are questions that many followers of Jesus ask.

For many years, our Sister quietly assumed that if she was walking in God's will, the pathway ahead would become clearer and easier. Surely obedience would lead to comfort and faithfulness would remove many of life's struggles.

Instead, she discovered something far more beautiful. The Father was not primarily concerned with making her pathway easier. He was concerned with making her like His Son.

She shared how much of her praying had centred on asking Jesus to change her circumstances. She asked Him to open doors, explain His ways and remove the difficult things she could not understand.

Yet over the years she began to realise that while she was praying, "Jesus, change my circumstances," the Father was gently asking, "Will you allow Me to change you?"

That is the loving work of the Holy Spirit. His purpose is not merely to direct our lives, but to transform us into the likeness of Jesus.

This changes the way we understand spiritual maturity. We often measure maturity by knowledge, giftedness or visible ministry. We admire those who preach powerfully, lead successfully or seem to experience extraordinary encounters with God. Yet while these are wonderful gifts of God's grace, they are not the true measure of Christlikeness.

As a Sisterhood, we have watched the Church over recent years with gratitude for the deep hunger many believers have for the presence of God. We understand that longing. There is something profoundly beautiful about those moments when Jesus makes His presence known in a special way. Such encounters awaken our love for Jesus, renew our hope and remind us of His immeasurable love.

Yet we have also come to appreciate that encounters are not the primary way Jesus transforms His people. Encounters awaken our love for Him; daily discipleship allows that love to reshape our lives.

One of the great temptations facing the Church today is to believe that another encounter with God will accomplish what only years of faithful obedience can produce. We look for the next conference, the next worship gathering or the next extraordinary move of God, hoping that one overwhelming experience will do the deep work that only daily surrender can accomplish.

But Jesus never invited His disciples to live from one mountaintop experience to the next. He invited them to walk with Him.

The Christian life is formed in the ordinary places where we choose forgiveness instead of resentment, humility instead of self-defense, trust instead of fear and obedience instead of convenience.

Peter's life beautifully illustrates this truth. He stood on the Mount of Transfiguration and beheld the glory of Jesus.

He witnessed miracles beyond anything we could imagine. He saw storms stilled, the blind receive sight and the dead raised. Yet those extraordinary experiences did not, in themselves, make Peter like Jesus.

His deepest transformation happened in the courtyard where he denied Jesus whom he loved so deeply. It continued through bitter tears of repentance and reached its beautiful restoration beside the Sea of Galilee, where Jesus quietly asked, "Do you love Me?"

The mountain revealed the glory of Jesus. The Cross formed the character of Christ within Peter.

We often long for the mountain.

God, in His love, so often chooses the pathway of the Cross. Not because suffering possesses some mysterious power—it does not. God never delights in pain, nor does He ask us to seek suffering for its own sake. Yet in His infinite wisdom, He takes even the painful things we would never choose and weaves them into His redeeming work, using disappointment, weakness and waiting to draw us into deeper dependence upon His Son.

Even Jesus walked this road. Although He was the Son, He "learned obedience through what He suffered." If the sinless Son of God walked the way of surrender, why should His disciples expect another road?

The Cross is not merely something Jesus carried for us. It becomes the pattern of the life we now walk with Him. Every day Jesus still extends the same invitation:

*"If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily and follow Me."*

Notice where that invitation ends. Not at the Cross. With Jesus.

The Cross has never been the destination. It is simply the road that leads us more deeply into the heart of the One who loved us first.

As we continued reflecting on our Sister's testimony, another beautiful truth emerged. Jesus rarely asks us to surrender everything at once. Instead, He patiently leads us step by step, revealing more of Himself as we learn to trust Him.

Our Sister shared that there was a time when Jesus asked her to surrender her career. For many years it had given her purpose, direction and a sense of identity. Without realising it, she had begun to draw part of her worth from what she did rather than from whose she was.

Later, He gently placed His hand upon other areas of her life—her financial security, her carefully planned future, her need to understand where He was leading, and the quiet identities she had built around competence, achievement and independence.

None of these things were sinful in themselves. Most of them were wonderful gifts. Yet, little by little, she had begun to rely upon the gifts more than the Giver.

How often the Lord does the same with each of us. Not because He delights in taking things away, but because He longs for our hearts to rest completely in Him.

Yet every surrender can feel costly.

Our Sister shared that there were times when she quietly wondered how much more Jesus would ask of her. Deep within her was the fear that if she kept saying "yes", eventually there would be nothing left.

Nothing familiar.

Nothing secure.

Nothing that resembled the life she had once imagined.

Perhaps you have known that same fear. Perhaps Jesus has gently placed His hand upon something precious in your own life—a relationship, a dream, your future, your health or your ministry. Our first instinct is often to believe that Jesus is taking something away from us.

Then, during one season of wrestling with His invitation to surrender, something changed. Our Sister described it this way:

***"It was as though the Holy Spirit quietly whispered into my heart, 'Not nothing... Me.'"***

Everything changed.

For the first time, she realised that Jesus had never been asking her to choose between Himself and the things she loved. He was asking whether she truly believed that He Himself was infinitely greater than every gift He had ever given.

Suddenly she understood. He had never been trying to empty her life. He had been making room for Himself.

Every surrender became an exchange.

Not less life.

His life.

She had thought He was giving everything away. Instead, He was giving her Himself.

That discovery transformed the way she understood every calling.

One of the greatest misconceptions in the Christian life is that one particular vocation will naturally bring us into a deeper relationship with Jesus. Some imagine that if only they entered religious life, another ministry or another Christian community, they would finally flourish spiritually.

Yet the New Testament points us somewhere entirely different. It points us to Jesus.

Religious life is a beautiful calling for those whom Jesus invites to walk that path, and as a Sisterhood we are deeply grateful for the privilege of living that calling. Yet one lesson has become increasingly clear to us through the years:

***Religious life does not bring us closer to Jesus.***

***Jesus brings us closer to Himself.***

Religious life is simply one of the places where He patiently teaches us to surrender, to love more deeply and to depend upon Him more completely.

Living closely with others does not remove our pride; it exposes it. It reveals our impatience, uncovers our selfishness and reminds us again and again how deeply we need Christ's transforming grace.

The same is true whatever path Jesus has called us to walk.

Whether we are married or single, serving in ministry or faithfully living for Jesus in the workplace, intimacy with Jesus is never the reward of a particular vocation.

It is the fruit of a surrendered heart.

As we reflected on our Sister's journey, we recognised a thread that runs not only through her testimony but through the lives of countless believers. Whether we recognise it at the time or not, the Father is always leading His children to His Son.

When He closes doors we long to walk through, He is leading us to Jesus.

When He asks us to surrender something that has become part of our identity, He is leading us to Jesus.

When He loosens our grip on security and teaches us to trust Him through seasons of waiting, He is leading us to Jesus.

Even when we cannot see His purpose, His purpose never changes.

As we have reflected on the Scriptures, we have come to see this same pattern woven throughout the lives of God's people.

Abraham was not ultimately being led to a land, but to trust the God who had called him.

Peter was not simply being prepared for ministry, but transformed into a man who loved Jesus more than his own life.

Paul's greatest desire was not success in ministry, but to know Jesus and become like Him.

Though their paths were wonderfully different, the One they came to know more deeply was always the same—Jesus.

These reflections have also led us to ask ourselves some searching questions:

- Are we pursuing Jesus, or simply the things we believe will bring us closer to Him?
- Are we more captivated by ministry than by Jesus?
- Do we long for experiences with Jesus more than we long to obey Him?

There is an important difference.

It is possible to devote ourselves to spiritual things while quietly losing sight of the One to whom they are meant to lead us.

Every genuine encounter with Jesus is an invitation into deeper discipleship. He never calls us simply to admire Him. He calls us to follow Him.

Perhaps today you are praying for God's direction. Perhaps you are wondering whether another church, another ministry or another path might bring you closer to Jesus.

May we gently encourage you not to mistake the pathway for the destination.

The Father may indeed change your circumstances. He may call you into something new. Or He may ask you to remain exactly where you are.

But whatever road He chooses, His purpose never changes.

He is leading you to His Son.

One day every earthly calling will have fulfilled its purpose, and we will stand before our Bridegroom face to face. Then we will understand that no joy, no sorrow, no surrender and no season of waiting was ever wasted.

Through them all, the Father was answering the deepest longing of our hearts.

He was giving us His Son.

Perhaps that is what He has been doing all along. Not withholding life from us. But rescuing us from settling for anything less than His Son.

As we concluded our conversation around our Sister's testimony, one final thought remained with us.

Looking back, she no longer remembers the cost as much as she remembers the kindness of Jesus. She no longer sees a story of everything she surrendered. Instead, she sees the patient love of a Bridegroom who was gently removing every obstacle that prevented her from knowing Him more deeply.

Years ago, if someone had asked her what she feared most, she would probably have answered, "That Jesus will ask for everything."

Today her answer is very different.

Her greatest fear would be to settle for anything less than Him.

As we reflected on her testimony, we realised that this has become the quiet testimony of our own community as well. Though each Sister's journey has been different, the Father's purpose has remained the same. He has always been leading us to His Son.

The greatest gift God has ever given is not a ministry, a calling or a particular vocation. His greatest gift has always been His Son.

Jesus never asks us to surrender so that we are left with less. He asks because He longs to give us Himself.

For He never leaves those who trust Him with nothing.

He gives them Himself.

## Prayer:

*Father,*

*Thank You for giving us Your Son.*

*When our hearts are drawn to lesser things, turn our eyes again to Jesus. Lead us along the pathway of discipleship until we discover that He is our greatest treasure, our deepest joy and our eternal hope.*

*May every surrender bring us closer to Him, every trial teach us to trust Him, and every blessing cause us to love Him more.*

*Keep our hearts wholly Yours, until the day we see our Saviour face to face and worship Him forever.* **Amen.**

***Thank you for your prayers, friendship and support.***
***May God bless each one of you abundantly!***

The Evangelical Sisters of Mary

## He Gave Me Himself

I thought You called me to a distant place,
To follow dreams I could not understand.
I searched for purpose, I searched for Your will,
Yet all along You simply held my hand.

Through every doorway opened and then closed,
Through every answer still concealed from view,
I thought You led me to a greater life,
But every step was leading me to You.

### Chorus

*You gave me more than all I hoped to find,*
*More than the dreams I carried in my heart.*
*You did not leave me with an empty life;*
*You gave me Yourself.*

*When every gift was gently laid aside,*
*Love still remained, forever strong and true.*
*Now all my heart can joyfully proclaim:*

***You gave me Yourself.***

You never hurried all my fears away,
You never forced the things I could not see.
Patiently You asked one quiet question,

*"Will you trust Me?"*

Each costly "yes" became another step,
Not into loss, but deeper into grace.
The Cross became the pathway of Your love,
Until I saw Your beauty face to face.

### Chorus

*You gave me more than all I hoped to find,*
*More than the dreams I carried in my heart.*
*You did not leave me with an empty life;*
*You gave me Yourself.*

*When every gift was gently laid aside,*
*Love still remained, forever strong and true.*
*Now all my heart can joyfully proclaim:*

***You gave me Yourself.***

### Bridge

*Not ministry.*

*Not calling.*

*Not success.*

*Not even answered prayer.*

*But Christ.*

*Only Christ.*

*The Treasure of my soul.*

*You have always been enough.*

Now every road is drawing me to You.
Every surrender opens heaven's door.
Nothing I've entrusted to Your hands
Has ever truly been lost.

For every cross has led me to Your heart,
Every waiting season taught me trust.
I feared that I would finish life with nothing.

Instead...

You gave me Yourself.

You gave me Yourself.

**Jesus...**

You gave me Yourself.

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# 31 DAILY JOURNEY WATCH WORDS

1. Come to Jesus.
2. Hear His invitation.
3. Follow Me.
4. Walk by faith.
5. Trust His heart.
6. Rest in His love.
7. Seek His presence.
8. Listen for Him.
9. Wait patiently.
10. Choose obedience.
11. Embrace the Cross.
12. Let Him transform you.
13. Surrender your plans.
14. Receive His peace.
15. Delight in His grace.
16. Abide in His love.
17. Keep your eyes on Jesus.
18. Trust Him completely.
19. Let go of fear.
20. Hold fast to hope.
21. Worship with joy.
22. Serve with humility.
23. Love Him above all.
24. He is enough.
25. Keep saying "yes."
26. Walk with Him.
27. Discover His faithfulness.
28. The Father leads you to His Son.
29. Jesus is your greatest Treasure.
30. He gave you Himself.
31. Jesus is enough.



*For from Him and through Him*
*and to Him are all things.*
*To Him be the glory forever! Amen.*

ROMANS 11:36