

Christmas Eve, 1943

It is half past nine in the evening; I have been spending a few lovely peaceful hours, and thinking very thankfully about your being able to spend the day together. . . .

One of my greatest joys this Christmas is that we have again been able to exchange the *Losungen*<sup>26</sup> for the coming year. I had already thought of it and hoped for it, though I hardly thought it would be possible. And now this book, which has meant so much to me in the past months, will be with us throughout next year too, and when we read it in the morning we shall think especially of each other. Many, many thanks. . . .

I should like to say something to help you in the time of separation that lies ahead. There is no need to say how hard any such separation is for us; but as I have now been separated for nine months from all the people that I am devoted to, I should like to pass on to you something of what I have learnt. . . .

First: nothing can make up for the absence of someone whom we love, and it would be wrong to try to find a substitute; we must simply hold out and see it through. That sounds very hard at first, but at the same time it is a great consolation, for the gap, as long as it remains unfilled, preserves the bonds between us. It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap; he does not fill it, but on the contrary, he keeps it empty and so helps us to keep alive our former communion with each other, even at the cost of pain.

Secondly: the dearer and richer our memories, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude changes the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy. The beauties of the past are borne, not as a thorn in the flesh, but as a precious gift in themselves. We must take care not to

<sup>26</sup> *Die täglichen Losungen und Lehrtexte der Brüdergemeinde*, published yearly since 1731.

wallow in our memories or hand ourselves over to them, just as we do not gaze all the time at a valuable present, but only at special times, and apart from these keep it simply as a hidden treasure that is ours for certain. In this way the past gives us lasting joy and strength.

Thirdly: times of separation are not a total loss or unprofitable for our companionship, or at any rate they need not be so. In spite of all the difficulties that they bring, they can be the means of strengthening fellowship quite remarkably.

Fourthly: I have learnt here especially that the *facts* can always be mastered, and that difficulties are magnified out of all proportion simply by fear and anxiety. From the moment we wake until we fall asleep we must commend other people wholly and unreservedly to God and leave them in his hands, and transform our anxiety for them into prayers on their behalf:

*Mit Sorgen und mit Grämen. . . .  
lässt Gott sich gar nichts nehmen*<sup>27</sup> . . .

Christmas Day

. . . Once more all my beautiful presents are arranged on the edge of my tipped-up bed, and in front of me are the pictures that I enjoy so much. I am still relishing, almost uninterruptedly, the memory of your visit. . . . It really was a *necessitas*. The mind's hunger for discussion is much more tormenting than the body's hunger for food. . . . A few pregnant remarks are enough to touch on a wide range of questions and clear them up. This ability to keep on the same wavelength, to play to each other, took years to cultivate, not always without friction, and we must never lose it. It is an incredible gain, and extraordinarily helpful. What a

<sup>27</sup> "With cares and grief . . . God will not be received" (from *Befehl du deine Wege*, by Paul Gerhardt).

in being empty impacted things are maintained - trust in God