

Here's to the Women Who Walk With Me

Ahead of International Women's Day, I was asked which women inspire the work I do at the International Fellowship of Christians and Jews. And believe me, it is an honor and a privilege to be in the position—as President and CEO of a large international aid organization, as a wife, as a mother—of being asked to be a voice for women today.

So I started thinking about what women inspire me. So many world leaders who I've been blessed to meet. The biblical Queen Esther, who we just celebrated over Purim. Someone even suggested an inspirational Eleanor Roosevelt quote, like what you'd see on a refrigerator magnet. And these women do inspire me—all of the women who've come before me, who've done great things and made great progress and made our world what it is today.

But when I really thought about it, the women who inspire me—who inspire me today, in the present—have always been the women around me.

Raised in a family of three girls—by a rabbi who empowered his daughters—I was always inspired by my sisters and our mother. And now, leading the organization my father, Rabbi Yechiel Eckstein, of blessed memory, founded 40 years ago, I am inspired each day by the women I'm blessed to work with, and by the women we work for.

I've needed their inspiration along the way. When my father unexpectedly passed away, leaving me to lead this ministry he'd devoted his life to, not many people thought I would succeed. People didn't think a young woman would be able to lead this large, international organization that had taken decades to grow into what it is—the world's largest and most

effective ministry providing Christians with opportunities to fulfill biblical prophecy by supporting Israel and the Jewish people with lifesaving aid.

Then God sent wise women my way to inspire me—brilliant, strong and humble women. From The Fellowship's headquarters in Chicago, to our offices in Canada and South Korea, to here in Israel where many of our programs take place, each member of our global leadership happens to be a woman. Each of these women are not only responsible for The Fellowship's substantial growth over the last few years, they are responsible for inspiring me to continue doing our work each day, to continue growing, to continue reaching more of God's people.

Equally as inspiring to me are the women who The Fellowship meets as we carry on our ministry of helping the neediest of these people.

Natalia inspires me. Natalia is a Jewish wife and mother from the Ukrainian city of Mariupol whose husband was killed during the ongoing war in Ukraine, killed by shrapnel on his way to find rescue for his family at the local synagogue. Since Sergei's death, Natalia alone has cared for their young daughter in the middle of a war zone. The two survived more bombings, survived days trapped in a basement with nothing to eat or drink. But, thanks to Natalia's perseverance—and God's protection and providence—the two survived to take a Fellowship aliyah flight to their new home in Israel. Natalia inspires me—if women like her can show such strength, then surely I can too, as a leader, as a wife, as a mother.

I'm also inspired by Evgenia, an elderly Jewish woman who The Fellowship also recently helped in Ukraine. A year ago, at the beginning of the war, Evgenia also found herself on the frontlines, along with her 94-year-old mother, a Holocaust survivor. As the bombs fell, the two elderly women fled the fighting to find safety. I cried when I learned that the

journey proved to be too much for Evgenia's mother. But I was inspired by the fact that Evgenia is a survivor, too. Thanks to help from The Fellowship, this woman who can no longer see because of cataracts, can at last see hope, with a warm place to live and people who love her, none of which would have been possible without her own extraordinary resolve. Evgenia inspires me—if women like her can show such strength, then surely I can, too.

As I reflect on this International Women's Day, I am inspired by the stories of women in the Bible, by the successes of women throughout history, by the words of the women who have come before me. But it's the women around me—the inspiring women who help me in providing lifesaving aid to God's people around the world each and every day, and the inspiring women we meet as we carry out God's holy work—who truly inspire me. So let us find inspiration in, and be inspiration for, the women around us. {eoa}

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*As President and CEO of The Fellowship, **Yael Eckstein** oversees all programs and serves as the international spokesperson for the organization. With over a decade of non-profit experience in multiple roles, Yael has the rare distinction of being a woman leading one of the world's largest religious charitable organizations. In addition to her weekly podcast on matters of faith, Holy Land Reflections, each month, Yael invites thought leaders to discuss Jewish-Christian relations and Israel's significance on her podcast, Conversations with Yael. In 2020 and 2021, she was named to the Jerusalem Post's list of 50 Most Influential Jews. Born outside of Chicago, Yael is now based in Israel with her husband and their four children.*