

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 13 • Issue 7

DIFFERENT SHOES

Everyone's experience is unique

The Oasis

Where less is more

Who Can Judge?

The case against censure





PERSONALLY SPEAKING

At 6' 5" (nearly 2 m) and over 500 lbs (225 kg), Sam was an imposing figure. Add his constant, menacing glare and he was downright scary. The first few times we saw him, my wife Caryn and I gave Sam a wide berth. Then one evening Caryn struck up a conversation. After some small talk, Sam told her his story. When he was a child, he and his younger brother were playing in the street in front of their house when his brother was hit by a car and killed. Sam was blamed. "All I ever heard after that was that I was bad. Finally I figured that since everybody thought I was bad, I might as well *be* bad. I didn't even have to turn green like the Hulk to get violent, I was so angry." He was like that for the next 20 years. We have since come to know a very different Sam—sensitive, intelligent, insightful, articulate. With a little understanding and acceptance, he is beginning to blossom. We couldn't have been more wrong about Sam.

Nancy's problem was etched into her features. Long-term addiction will do that. She was a nurse when the younger of her two daughters, then three, was diagnosed with a terminal illness. For ten years Nancy watched helplessly as her daughter deteriorated and eventually died. In Nancy's own words, she "didn't handle it well." She turned to alcohol and drugs. Now, after many years of addiction, Nancy is taking a stand against it. She has cut off contact with anyone from that life and attends support group meetings almost every day. It's a daily struggle, but she fights on.

How easy it would be to write off all the Sams and the Nancys as hopeless losers. Many people do. But God's not like that. And He expects more from us.

Keith Phillips
For *Activated*

Browse our website or contact one of the distributors below to enjoy the inspirational, motivational, and practical help offered in our books and audiovisual material.

www.activated.org

Activated Ministries

P.O. Box 462805
Escondido, CA 92046-2805, USA
Toll-free: 1-877-862-3228
Email: info@actmin.org
www.activatedonline.com

Activated Europe

Bramingham Pk. Business Ctr.
Enterprise Way
Luton, Beds. LU3 4BU, United Kingdom
+44 (0) 845 838 1384
Email: activatedEurope@activated.org

Big Thot Publications

P.O. Box 2509
Faerie Glen 0043, South Africa
+27 (083) 791 2804
Email: activated@bigthot.co.za

Activated India

P.O. Box 5215, G.P.O.
Bangalore – 560 001, India
Email: activatedIndia@activated.org

Activated Philippines

P.O. Box 1147
Antipolo City P.O.
1870 Antipolo City, Philippines
Cell: (0922) 8125326
Email: activatedPI@activated.org

Activated Australia

+61 2 8005 1938
Email: info@activated.org.au
www.activated.org.au

EDITOR Keith Phillips
DESIGN Gentian Suçi
PRODUCTION Samuel Keating

www.auroraproduction.com

© 2012 Aurora Production AG. All Rights Reserved. Printed in Taiwan by Ji Yi Co., Ltd. All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Other Bible references are from the following sources: New International Version (NIV). Copyright © 1978, 1984 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. New Living Translation (NLT). Copyright © 1978, 1996 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I spent two weeks in Sahrawi refugee camps near the oasis city of Tindouf, in southwest Algeria. Ten of us, from teenagers to fifty-somethings, had made the trip from our base in Granada, Spain, to speak and perform in the camps' schools and community centers.

The Sahrawi people are the remnant of the nomadic tribes that roamed the deserts and coasts of the former Western Sahara. During the 100 years that they lived under Spanish rule, they became accustomed to living in more stationary situations and built large communities like Smara.

When Spanish colonial rule collapsed in 1975, Morocco and Mauritania rushed to fill the vacuum. The indigenous Sahrawis fought a losing battle, while most of the international community looked the other way. For over 30 years, nearly 200,000 Sahrawis have lived in

squalid conditions in the *hamada*—a type of desert landscape consisting of largely barren, rocky plateaus. Summer temperatures there reach 55°C (130°F).

We were impressed by the humility of the Sahrawi. They are neither politically nor religiously fanatical. Their plight has been largely ignored for nearly four decades, but they are not bitter. God looks down upon them, they say, and will one day save them.

We lived with three families during our stay, and each treated us royally. The living conditions were basic—there was no running water, electricity was only from solar panels and 12-volt batteries, and the heat was almost unbearable—but the hospitality and camaraderie more than compensated. Family and greater family units were strong. No violence, crime, or drugs were evident. No noisy city traffic or construction work. The blanket of

stars in the night sky was not hidden behind high-rises or obscured by the reflected glare of city lights. We had stepped back in time, where globalization and modern conveniences were nearly nonexistent, yet we were renewed and invigorated spiritually.

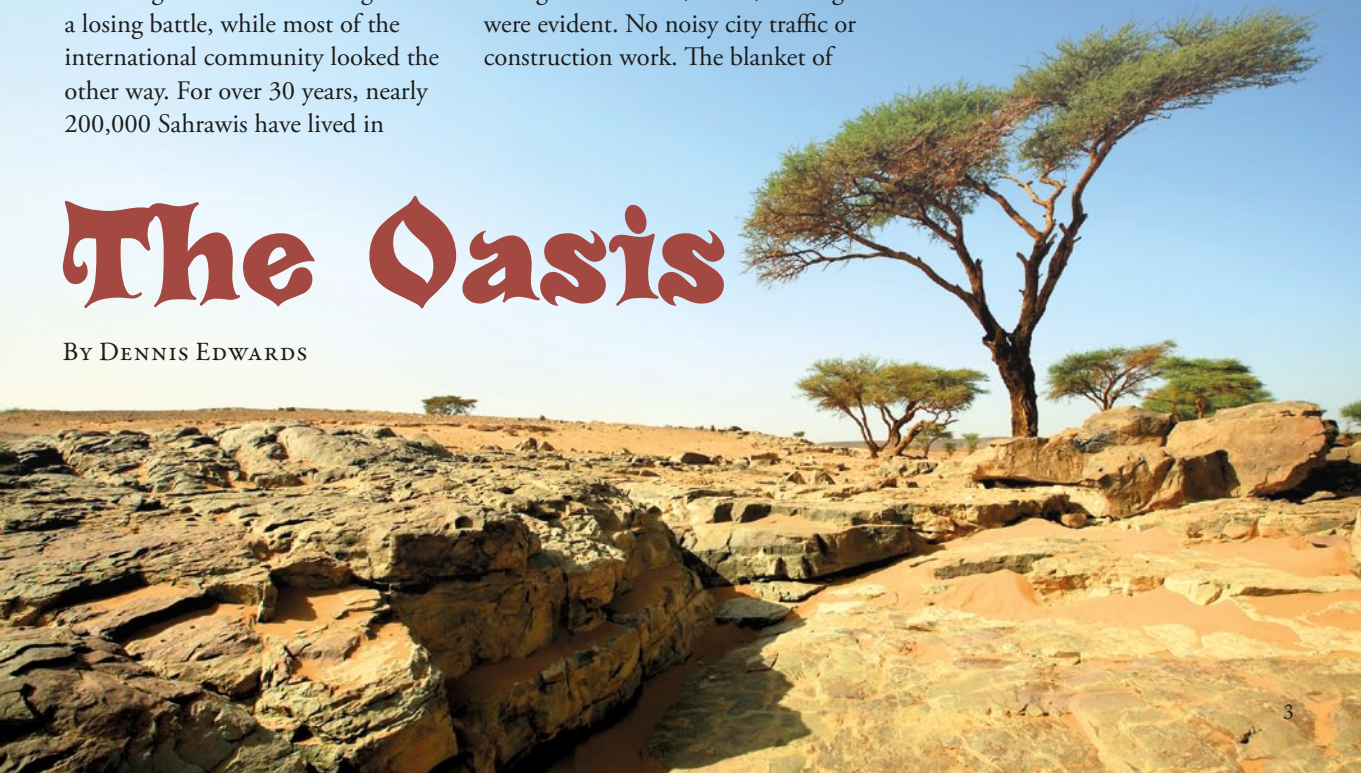
We laughed and danced and sang. We talked and listened. Even the days were tranquil. We had a barbeque by moonlight on the sand dunes, and sang songs together about love and peace and faith in God.

When we returned to Spain, our friends applauded us. “What a great sacrifice you made to go to those refugee camps,” they said. But we answered, “No, we were blessed!”

DENNIS EDWARDS IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN PORTUGAL. ■

The Oasis

BY DENNIS EDWARDS



THE COLOR OF

BY MICHAEL ROY

IN RECENT YEARS WE'VE ALL SEEN OR READ ABOUT THE HORRORS THAT CAN RESULT WHEN ANIMOSITY ESCALATES BETWEEN PEOPLE OF DIVERGENT RACIAL, ideological, or religious backgrounds. Ethnic confrontations in the Horn of Africa, political violence in North Africa, continued bloodletting in the Mideast, and strained race relations in scores of other countries all raise questions about the present state of the human condition. Most of these conflicts are civil or intrastate wars,

and most victims are civilians. Can't someone put a stop to it all? Don't you wish that someone could decree that all people of every country, color, and creed must respect, accept, and live in harmony with everyone else, regardless of their differences, and that would happen? Unfortunately, even if some international body had the authority to issue such a decree, it would never work. Simply put, righteousness cannot be legislated. Kindness, understanding, and love must come from the heart, not as a dutiful response to a law.

When people have lost loved ones, homes, or land, have been the target of violence, or have otherwise felt the brunt of another group's scorn, no edict is going to change the victims' attitudes overnight. Even if they wanted to reconcile, no amount of willpower can instantly overcome deep-seated resentment or hatred.

So how can prejudice, fear, and distrust be overcome when these things have been so deeply ingrained? The answer is summed up in one word: love.

"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all sins."¹ If you hate somebody, your interactions with them are likely to breed disagreement and conflict. But if you truly love them, even if they have wronged you, it's possible to look beyond their faults and accept and forgive them.

This may sound like a noble aspiration—to overlook and forgive all the flaws and failings of others—but realistically, who is capable of suddenly releasing resentment, hatred, fear, or other deep-seated negative attitudes they may harbor toward individuals or entire groups of people? Most of us lack the resolve and emotional wherewithal to do that. Sometimes we don't even want to do it.

1. Proverbs 10:12

2. 1 John 4:8

3. Matthew 22:37–40

4. Luke 10:25–37

5. Isaiah 9:6

6. Ephesians 2:14

7. Ephesians 4:31–32 NIV

8. 2 Corinthians 5:17

LOVE

I SAY THAT WE SHOULD REGARD ALL MEN AS OUR BROTHERS. WHAT? THE TURK MY BROTHER? THE CHINAMAN MY BROTHER? THE JEW? THE SIAM? YES, WITHOUT DOUBT; ARE WE NOT ALL CHILDREN OF THE SAME FATHER AND CREATURES OF THE SAME GOD?

—VOLTAIRE

The good news is that despite our human limitations, it is still possible for us to truly love, understand, and accept others, regardless of their past or background. The key to such love comes from the ultimate source of love, God Himself. The Bible tells us that “God is love.”² He is the all-powerful Spirit of love who created the universe and brought us all into being.

To show us what He is like, He sent His own Son to earth in the form of a man, Jesus Christ. Jesus’ entire ministry was one of love. He experienced human suffering and had great compassion on the people as He ministered to their spiritual and physical needs. He became one of us.

He taught that we could fulfill all the laws of God by fulfilling just two commandments: “Love God,” and “Love your neighbor.”³

On one occasion, an antagonist overheard Jesus teaching this and challenged Him. “Who then is my neighbor?” Jesus responded with the story of the Good Samaritan, in which He clearly showed that our neighbor is anyone who needs our help, regardless of their race, creed, color, nationality, or cultural background.⁴

The way we can love our neighbors and do our part to bring peace to the world is to ask the Prince of Peace, Jesus,⁵ to give us His love for others. When we are connected with the God of love, He can empower us to do what is humanly impossible: to truly love others the way we love ourselves.

The Bible says of Jesus, “He Himself is our peace, who has made both [races] one, and has broken down the middle wall of separation.”⁶ The supernatural love of God

is what brings genuine peace, unity, and mutual respect.

Even when fear, prejudice, and hatred have been ingrained for years, the love of God can wash it all away. Once you personally know that God loves and forgives you, it becomes much easier to love and forgive others. You can then “get rid of all bitterness, rage, and anger, along with every form of malice, and be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.”⁷

When you open your heart to Jesus, He can miraculously free you from the bondage of hatred and ill will toward others. “If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”⁸

What a wonderful world it would be if the only thing we saw when we looked at others was love—the color of love. ■

THE VIEW

BY NYX MARTINEZ

I STARED PAST THE RUSTY WINDOW FRAME, out of the bus. The day was off to a gloomy start and so was I. Lost in thought, recalling things that would have been better left forgotten, I sank into a dark mood. Sad, isn't it, how when we're feeling down we tend to busy our mind with thoughts that only waste our time and further sap our spirits?

The bus rolled to a halt. Again. Manila traffic. I glanced at my watch. 6 A.M. Too early for traffic to be moving this slowly. I had a deadline to meet and hadn't gotten much sleep the night before. Angrily, I turned back to the window.

A young street vendor was selling black boots that he had shined to a dazzling finish. I could almost read his mind, feel his hopes. Today would be good. Perhaps he'd earn a few more pesos than yesterday and have a better meal tonight. Just maybe.

A prospective buyer stopped. He wore faded jeans and a worn shirt. Slung over his shoulder was an imitation JanSport backpack. He held up a pair of boots and admired them. *Someday, maybe someday*, he seemed to be thinking, *I'll have enough money to buy some boots like these.*

I wondered what his daily earnings came to. Two hundred, maybe three





hundred pesos?—About US\$6, tops. The boots cost twice that much. His money was needed elsewhere. Lots of elsewheres. He probably had a family back home who needed to eat, and debts to get out from under. His money was spent before he earned it. The boots would have to wait.

The man looked wearily at the vendor. His eyes said it all. Not today. And probably not tomorrow. The two made small talk as if they were old friends. They laughed and shared another story before my bus inched down the block and stopped again.

This time, I found myself staring at a wrinkled old lady selling candy.



She sat on a low bench, half obstructing the sidewalk, as the thronging crowd moved around her. Her eyes revealed sadness, about what I didn't know. Maybe the simple fact that today would be just like yesterday and the day before, like all the days that had turned into years, a day just like she knew tomorrow would be.

She would sit on that stool from sunrise to sundown. A few people would buy bits of candy, but nobody would notice her. After dropping coins into her callused hand they would hurry off, strangers still. The day would move on with them. The old lady would grow older and not any happier for it.

As I watched, the corners of her mouth fell even more. She stared off into the distance as a glistening drop formed in her eye and ran down her cheek. I had to look away.

A traffic controller was busy at the corner hurrying pedestrians across the intersection. Was he, too, carrying some unseen sorrow? Was he also haunted by thoughts that would have been better left forgotten? If something was bothering him, he couldn't afford to let it show. He had work to do, traffic to move, order to keep.

A twenty-something woman crossed the street at his signal, and I tried to imagine the world through her eyes. What was her story? Where was she going? What was her name? ... Why did I even care?

My mind snapped back to my own situation and I realized that something had struck a chord inside, against my own will it seemed. It was

odd that I should be feeling someone else's emotion. Or was it? Was it okay to be calloused to the feelings of others, to go through my days as if all the nameless people in the crowds around me were mere props in *my* world? No. Each stranger was someone's mother, someone's child, someone's husband, someone's brother, someone's someone. And they all mattered.

As I thought back on my own problems, whatever had been bothering me before seemed trivial. I don't have a sad, hard life, living and working on the street, with pollution stinging my eyes and hardening my lungs. I don't have to worry every waking moment about how to make ends meet. Sure, I have problems of my own, but by comparison, life has been good to me. And from all indications, it will continue that way.

The bus eventually picked up speed and I got on with my day. But in those few glimpses out the bus window, God had given me something that I hope I never lose—empathy, a heart for what others are going through and a desire to help make their world a little brighter.

Out of life's window, my view may change every day, but there will always be people in need passing there. What can I do for them? Real compassion doesn't just observe and then turn away. And neither should I.

NYX MARTINEZ IS A TRAVEL WRITER AND TV HOST FOR LIVING ASIA CHANNEL. FOLLOW HER JOURNEYS ON WWW.NYXMARTINEZ.COM. ■

DIFFERENT SHOES

BY CARYN PHILLIPS

OFTEN OUR WORLD IS ALL WE KNOW. Our world has been shaped by our experience—where we have been, who we have known, what we have done—as well as by our habits, standards, and aspirations. When we see a man sleeping in a doorway or a woman asking for help in a slurred voice, we compare their condition with our world. We may assume there is something fundamentally wrong with someone in such a state.

In truth, poverty puts people into a different world. The homeless person sleeping in the doorway may not have been able to rest the night before because he was guarding his few possessions. That woman may have an untreated medical condition that affects her speech.

Chelle Thompson writes, “Human beings seldom step outside of themselves to really grasp the needs and fears of others. We often project

our own thoughts and beliefs upon strangers, and make judgments based upon how we think they ‘should’ be living their lives.”

Someone has suggested that to understand others, we should walk a mile in their shoes. But can I walk in the shoes of a single mother who is homeless, sick, battling an addiction to prescription drugs that she acquired in the hospital, and has had her children taken from her and placed in foster care? How can I possibly ever feel what she feels? I can’t walk in her shoes, but I can ask if she’d like to talk, to tell me her story, to tell me how it feels in her shoes. We may both benefit.

“I think we have to own the fears that we have of each other, and then, in some practical way, some daily way, figure out how to see people differently than the way we were brought up to.”—Alice Walker

THE PROBLEM IS NOT THE PERSON

A dear friend, Quentin, suffers from Parkinson’s disease. He has had hallucinations that made him think, for example, that ten people were in the bed with him. Then, because he thought there was no room for him, he rolled onto the floor and called for his roommate to help him up. He has also thought that several women wanted to marry him (not an unpleasant fantasy). Once when he thought an old enemy was coming after him with an AK-47, he pulled the building’s fire alarm, and panic ensued.

Everyone had a hard time convincing Quentin that what he thought he was seeing wasn’t there. His reaction was to get stubborn and very anxious about his needs. His roommate got fed up with all of this and began saying things like, “Quentin is losing it,” or “He’s a jerk!”



PEOPLE TAKE DIFFERENT ROADS SEEKING FULFILLMENT AND HAPPINESS. JUST BECAUSE THEY'RE NOT ON YOUR ROAD DOESN'T MEAN THEY'VE GOTTEN LOST.

—H. JACKSON BROWN, JR.



Quentin eventually moved to a nursing home, and the staff there understood his physiological condition. One caregiver explained to Quentin that, in simple terms, some brain cells were sending him false signals. This placed the fault where it belonged, on his sickness rather than on Quentin himself.

At a conference on mental health that I attended, one speaker said, “Don’t say, ‘He’s a schizophrenic,’ but ‘He *has* schizophrenia.” By the same token, I have multiple health issues but don’t want to be defined by them. I don’t want to be referred to as “the sick woman.”

This perspective changes not only our words but our attitude. Can we separate the person from whatever condition afflicts them, whether it’s mental illness, drug addiction, poverty, or physical disease? Can we find who is inside and treat that person with respect? If we can look beyond

appearances or assumptions, we have a chance of uncovering something good, even beautiful, beneath a rough or unattractive exterior.

When my husband and I began volunteering at a local homeless shelter, my own preconceptions melted away as I learned the reason that this single mother or that older man was there. Often the confluence of unfortunate events that could happen to anybody had left them with no place to live and no one to take them in.

When I asked one man what he had done previously, he said that he had been an auditor, “back when I was a person.” He had actually been the overseer of a government department of auditors, before depression cost him his job and eventually everything he had. After receiving treatment at the shelter, he found a job and now has his own home again.

The staff at the shelter politely addresses those staying there as Mr. or Ms. So-and-so, Sir, Miss, or Ma’am. When we show respect, we bestow dignity. Dignity helps people see themselves more positively, and that yields hope. Hope gives the will to try and keep trying. In this way, our respect can help someone find a new life.

Quentin’s severe hallucinations were found to be the result of improper medication; when the dosage was decreased, he stopped seeing so many strange events unfolding around him. He still behaves oddly at times, but he is understood and accepted at the nursing home—and he’s happy.

CARYN PHILLIPS DOES VOLUNTEER WORK WITH THE HOMELESS AND OTHERS ON THE MARGINS OF SOCIETY IN THE U.S. ■



Who Can Judge?

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

SOME CHRISTIANS GIVE CHRISTIANITY A BAD NAME BECAUSE OF THEIR STRONGLY JUDGMENTAL ATTITUDES,

which come across as self-righteousness. Such people may think they are upholding the faith or standing for good causes, but their pronouncements are often harsh and overlook the fact that God loves all people, including those who have rejected or not understood Him. When we interact with people whom we feel are in the wrong,

God still expects us to respect them as people whom He created and loves.

God doesn't condone evil or wrongdoing and neither should we, but we also need to bear in mind that Jesus taught through both word and example that judgment should be tempered by mercy and forgiveness.¹ We may be convinced that someone's actions are wrong or misguided, but God still expects us to be compassionate with the person.² We may not agree with others' beliefs or approve of their actions, but that doesn't make it right to adopt a judgmental attitude toward those people. We need to consider how Jesus would respond, and act accordingly.

Doing so isn't always straightforward or clear cut. Jesus cautioned us to not judge or condemn others,³ but He also told us to "judge righteous judgment,"⁴ which involves discerning, evaluating, and

differentiating between right and wrong. How do we know when to apply each admonition?

If someone does something that is obviously morally reprehensible, it is reasonable that you would feel compelled to speak out, especially if others are being harmed or led astray as a result. Or if you see that something evil or destructive has a foothold in someone's life, such as drug or alcohol abuse, you would probably feel responsible to try to wake the person up to where that path is leading.

But there are some situations when right and wrong aren't so clearly delineated. Something that is wrong under most circumstances might be necessary under other circumstances, such as committing violence to defend oneself or other innocents. In other situations, only time will tell. Jesus said that we would be able to judge people and situations by their fruits,⁵ meaning

1. John 8:3–11; Matthew 12:10–14
2. Matthew 9:13; 12:7;
Luke 10:30–37; Galatians 6:1
3. Matthew 7:1
4. John 7:24
5. Matthew 7:20
6. James 4:12
7. 1 Samuel 16:7
8. Romans 3:23
9. 1 Peter 4:8
10. Galatians 5:22–23 NLT

we will know only after the situation has played out.

We also need to guard against common pitfalls in the judging process, such as the temptation to make blanket judgments about certain types of people or situations, or to make issues more black-and-white than they actually are.

We shouldn't feel compelled to judge every person we encounter whose life seems to have gone wrong, or condemn others because of the poor choices they seem to have made. We should be more concerned about helping them than about judging them. We can't know the burdens and weights that people carry, or all the reasons they make the choices they do. Only God is in a position to pass wise and fair judgment.⁶ He knows their hearts.⁷ He understands everything about them in a way that we would never be able to.

We can offer advice or support when appropriate, but it's not likely

that people will be receptive to offers of help if they aren't presented lovingly. We need to remember that we are also sinners⁸ who need God's love, mercy, and forgiveness, which can cover a multitude of sins.⁹

Judgmentalism portrays the opposite of God's unconditional love. Judging or labeling people by their perceived weaknesses, or their past, or their physical characteristics, or their age, or their ethnicity, or their beliefs, or any other factor works against the inclusiveness and spirit of love that should be the hallmarks of our lives as Christians. We should be known for our love and lives that manifest the fruits of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.¹⁰

“WHO CAN JUDGE?” IS ADAPTED FROM PETER AMSTERDAM'S ARTICLE “THE WORD OF GOD: JUDGMENTALISM.” ■



SIZING UP THE ELEPHANT

There is an Indian fable about six blind men who encountered an elephant for the first time. One man felt the elephant's leg and said, "An elephant is like a tree." Another grasped his tail and said, "No, an elephant is like a rope." The third bumped into the elephant's broad side and said, "I'm telling you, an elephant is like a wall." The fourth man felt an ear, smiled, and said, "Ah, I am now aware that the elephant is like a leaf." The fifth man grabbed one of the elephant's smooth, sharp tusks and declared, "The elephant is definitely like a spear!" The sixth man caught hold of the elephant's trunk and said with certainty, "You're all wrong! An elephant is like a snake."

We laugh, but we have all jumped to conclusions when we only saw part of the "elephant." ■

FEEDING READING

Tolerance

BY SAMUEL KEATING

ONE DEFINITION OF TOLERANCE IS “a fair, objective, and permissive attitude toward opinions and practices that differ from one’s own.”¹ It’s fairly easy to be tolerant of others when your differences are minor; it becomes more challenging when the differences are major and there is little common ground.

GOD WANTS US TO LIVE AT PEACE WITH ALL.

The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born.—*Leviticus 19:34 NIV*

In everything, do to others what you would have them do to you.—*Matthew 7:12 NIV*

If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.—*Romans 12:18 NIV*

Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.

—*1 Thessalonians 5:15 NIV*

BEING TOLERANT REQUIRES PATIENCE AND FORGIVENESS.

Then Peter came to him and asked, “Lord, how often should I forgive someone who sins against me? Seven times?” “No, not seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven!”—*Matthew 18:21–22 NLT*

Even if that person wrongs you seven times a day and each time turns again and asks forgiveness, you must forgive.—*Luke 17:4 NLT*

Clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Make allowance for each other’s faults, and forgive anyone who offends you. Remember, the Lord forgave you, so you must forgive others.

—*Colossians 3:12–13 NLT*

A WILLINGNESS TO ADAPT IS ALSO AN IMPORTANT PART OF TOLERANCE.

Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace

and to mutual edification.

—*Romans 14:19 NIV*

When I was with the Jews, I lived like a Jew to bring the Jews to Christ. When I was with those who follow the Jewish law, I too lived under that law. When I am with the Gentiles who do not follow the Jewish law, I too live apart from that law so I can bring them to Christ. When I am with those who are weak, I share their weakness, for I want to bring the weak to Christ. Yes, I try to find common ground with everyone, doing everything I can to save some.

—*1 Corinthians 9:20–22 NLT*

WE SHOULD BE ESPECIALLY TOLERANT OF THOSE WE HAVE A HARD TIME GETTING ALONG WITH.

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do

1. <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/tolerance>

**POINTS TO
PONDER**
Finding the best
in others

If you try to make your circle closed and exclusively yours, it never grows very much. Only a circle that has lots of room for anybody who needs it has enough spare space to hold any real magic.
—*Zilpha Keatley Snyder (b. 1927), American children's writer*

good to you, what credit is that to you? For even sinners do the same.
—*Luke 6:32–33*

TOLERANCE IS PART OF GODLINESS.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.—*Matthew 5:9 NIV*

You have heard that it was said, “Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.” But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.
—*Matthew 5:43–45 NIV*

Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.
—*Ephesians 4:32*

SAMUEL KEATING IS THE PRODUCTION COORDINATOR FOR *ACTIVATED* AND LIVES IN MILAN, ITALY. ■

If you judge people, you have no time to love them.
—*Mother Teresa (1910–1997), founder of Missionaries of Charity, who now minister to “the poorest of the poor” in over 130 countries*

The greatest and noblest pleasure which we have in this world is to discover new truths, and the next is to shake off old prejudices.
—*Frederick II, the Great (1712–1786), king of Prussia*

How far you go in life depends on your being tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving and tolerant of the weak and the strong. Because someday in life you will have been all of these.
—*George Washington Carver (1864–1943), American botanist, inventor, and educator*

I always prefer to believe the best of everybody—it saves so much time.
—*Rudyard Kipling (1865–1936), English poet and novelist*

Until you have learned to be tolerant with those who do not always agree with you; until you have cultivated the habit of saying some kind word of those whom you do not admire; until you have formed the habit of looking for the good instead of the bad there is in others, you will be neither successful nor happy.
—*Napoleon Hill (1883–1970), American author* ■



BE LIKE JESUS

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

BEING A CHRISTIAN MEANS DOING WHAT WE CAN TO BE LIKE JESUS. We will never be perfect and without sin as Jesus was, of course, because we have our human nature to contend with. But as Jesus' followers we are supposed to try to resemble Him in the way we live our lives and interact with others.

To "be like Jesus" means trying to live according to Jesus' teachings and example. It means applying our faith to the everyday events of our lives. It means doing our best to align our thoughts, our attitudes, and our reactions with His. It means looking to Jesus' instruction and example before drawing conclusions or making

decisions. It means pausing from our own activities and thought processes in order to enter into His Spirit, so He can live in, guide, and work through us. It means following in the footsteps of the Master, doing our best to be like Jesus in every area of our lives.

Being like Jesus goes deeper. It's more than merely copying His "style." It involves Jesus living in us, and *us* living in *Him*. He told His followers, "Abide in Me, and I in you. ... I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in Me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing."¹ So to be a fruitful Christian is to live in Jesus and to allow Him to live in us.

We partake of Jesus' divine nature through developing and maintaining a deep relationship with Him, absorbing and applying His Word,

and looking to Him for guidance and instruction. When we do these things, our thoughts and actions will be aligned with His. The apostle Paul talked about having the "mind of Christ,"² which implies thinking, reacting, and acting like Jesus would.

The more we "abide in Jesus," the more of our nature we relinquish and the more of His nature we take on, the more His thoughts, His attitudes, His actions and reactions will become our own. We will take on more of His characteristics, more of His love, kindness, meekness, and all the other fruits of the Spirit.³ We will do as He would do. We will be more like Him.

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. ■

1. John 15:4-5 ESV
2. 1 Corinthians 2:16
3. Galatians 5:22-23



ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

God sees the individual

Q: *When there is a natural disaster like an earthquake or hurricane that claims many lives, some people say that God is judging those people for their sins. Does God really operate that way?*

A: Only God knows why certain events happen to people in one country or area and not to those in another, or to certain individuals and not to others. Paul said that the judgments of God are “unsearchable, and His ways past finding out! For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?”¹

1. Romans 11:33–34
2. Romans 14:12
3. 1 John 4:8
4. 2 Peter 3:9
5. Genesis 1:26
6. John 3:17

It’s not our place to apportion blame and sin, or to pass sweeping judgments as to why people suffer in natural disasters or other catastrophic events. God alone knows all the factors and all the reasons those things occur, and only He has the ability to judge these situations.

Also, the Bible makes it clear that each person stands before God as an individual.² God doesn’t hold every person in a nation accountable for the ills and evils of the nation, or for the mistakes and sins of its leaders. Governments may be misguided, morally bankrupt, corrupt, or evil in some cases, but that doesn’t mean that all of the people in those countries are guilty of these things collectively.

“God is love,”³ and “He is not willing that any should perish.”⁴

Each person is a unique individual, created by God in His own image,⁵ and God loves each one as if they were the only one. Each person is someone Jesus died to save.⁶

God takes people where they’re at and works in their hearts and lives accordingly. He loves every single man, woman, and child, no matter who they are, where they live, what color their skin is, what their ancestors did or didn’t do, or what they believe or don’t believe. He still loves them, even if their lives are consumed with sin or they live in spiritual darkness.

When a disaster happens, the Christian graces of love, compassion, sympathy, caring, kindness, generosity, and goodness should most be on display. ■

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

JUDGE RIGHT

Life is a series of judgment calls, big and small. “Is my colleague telling me the truth?” “Can I believe this advertiser’s claims?” Nearly every day you have to pass judgment on some situation, and your opinions and decisions often have consequences for the other people involved. The stakes may not be as high or the judgment as final, but like a magistrate in the judicial system, your judgment matters.

I once told My critics, “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”¹ What is righteous judgment? It is judging fairly and honestly, applying the right rule to that particular situation and sometimes looking beyond the facts to see the hearts and true intentions of those involved.

Before passing judgment it’s important to remain impartial and get all sides of the story. The better informed you are, the better chance you will have of judging correctly.

And of course it’s always wise, even in seemingly small matters, to talk it over with Me before passing judgment. Remember, I am the great, all-seeing, all-knowing Judge who will judge the world at the end of days, so I know quite a bit about making righteous judgment.

1. John 7:24

