

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 13 • Issue 3

OF ORCHARDS AND GARDENS

Providing for the present and the future

Open Doors and Adversaries

Why problems are necessary

Gains from Pains

When your world goes to pieces



PERSONALLY SPEAKING

In *Reaching for the Invisible God*, Philip Yancey writes, “Many Christians quote the verse Romans 8:28, ‘And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him,’¹ with the implication that somehow everything will turn out for the best.”

I firmly believe in a loving God who wants the best for each of us, but the “it’s all for your good” interpretation does sometimes seem too simplistic, too pat, even hollow. How do you tell that to a couple who have just lost their baby, or to a young woman who was crippled and disfigured by a drunk driver, or to survivors of war atrocities? How do you reconcile such a “goodness guarantee” with the realities of an all too imperfect world?

Yancey continues: “The Greek original text is more properly translated, ‘In everything that happens, God works for good with those who love him.’ That promise, I have found to hold true in all the disasters and hardships I have known personally. Things happen, some of them good, some of them bad, many of them beyond our control. In all these things, I have felt the reliable constant of a God willing to work with me and through me to produce something good. Faith in such a process will, I’m convinced, always be rewarded, even though the ‘Why?’ questions go unanswered.”

We are all works in progress, being reshaped continually by our decisions, the events of our lives, and our reactions to those events. Bad things do happen. Sometimes their damage can be offset but never reversed. Sometimes the best we can do is build on the ruins of what was once dear, but that much is always possible with God’s help. The “something good” isn’t entirely up to us, nor is it entirely up to God. It’s something He means for us to do together, one day, one struggle at a time.

Keith Phillips
For *Activated*

1. NIV

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MY LORD'S CARRYING ME

BY ABI F. MAY

LAST YEAR MY HUSBAND AND I LOOKED INTO GETTING A SUMMERHOUSE FOR OUR GARDEN. In England, a summerhouse is usually a small wooden cabin or shed with glass doors and windows—just enough protection to be able to sit out in the garden on the many days when the weather is neither sunny, nor warm, nor dry. After shopping around, we decided to accept a local company's offer to study our garden and advise us.

The representative who visited us was a pleasant, unassuming man who introduced himself as Richard. After he had completed his survey, we sat together in the living room, examining the brochure and discussing prices. It was then that I explained the reason for this purchase: we had recently lost our daughter and wanted a quiet place to sit and meditate, surrounded by peace and nature.

Richard had seen her pictures and the sympathy cards covering the dining table. He asked if I was a believer, and when I said yes, he offered to pray for me. I gladly accepted.

In his prayer, Richard referred to the well-known story "Footprints," in which

life is depicted as a journey over sand dunes. Most of the time there are two sets of footprints, side by side, but occasionally there is only one. The second set of footprints represents Jesus walking beside us. When there is only one set, it is Jesus', not ours. Those are the times when the going is so difficult that He carries us.

This reminder of God's intimate concern and care in our darkest hours brought me tremendous comfort. The fabric of my life had been ripped apart by this tragedy, and for a long while I wasn't able to keep up my habitual spiritual routines. In fact, I could barely speak with Jesus during those agonizing early months of bereavement; my grief wasn't something I could put into words. When I didn't know if I could take another step, He carried me.

I can't say that I have always felt myself being carried, but when I look around, I see the signs—like His sending a stranger to pray for me.

ABI F. MAY IS AN EDUCATOR AND AUTHOR IN GREAT BRITAIN, AND AN *ACTIVATED* STAFF WRITER. ■

I WILL BE YOUR GOD
THROUGHOUT YOUR
LIFETIME—UNTIL
YOUR HAIR IS WHITE
WITH AGE. I MADE
YOU, AND I WILL
CARE FOR YOU. I WILL
CARRY YOU ALONG
AND SAVE YOU.
—ISAIAH 46:4 NLT



Of ORCHARDS & GARDENS

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

NOT LONG AGO, a friend of mine bought a property and planted about 100 fruit trees. He had to clear the land before he could plant the saplings, and now he must drive to the property regularly to tend to them. The trees won't bear fruit until they are about seven years old, but then they will continue to bear fruit for decades. An apple tree, for example, bears fruit for about 35 years, and a pear tree can bear fruit for over 100 years.

I've never planted an orchard, but I did plant a large garden once. The first year was mostly a learning experience, since I'd never gardened before, but the second year my garden bore about 1,000 pounds of potatoes, hundreds of pounds of zucchini, and large quantities of artichokes, corn, lettuce, beans, tomatoes, carrots, onions, garlic, radishes, and other vegetables. It was a lot of work, but it was fun and fulfilling and made for some healthy eating.



Compared to my friend's fruit orchard, my garden produced quick results. However, my garden had to be replanted from scratch each year, but his orchard will bear fruit for the rest of his life. I admire his commitment to work seven years with no tangible results in order to reach his long-term goal.

When I had my garden, I was living in Canada, in the western province of British Columbia, and I read about the Canadians who had pioneered the apple industry there. They spaced their saplings far apart to leave room for growth. During the seven years before the trees first bore fruit, they used the open spaces to grow vegetables, which they ate or sold for income. Once the apple trees started bearing fruit, they were able to phase out the vegetable patches and live from the profits of their apple orchards.

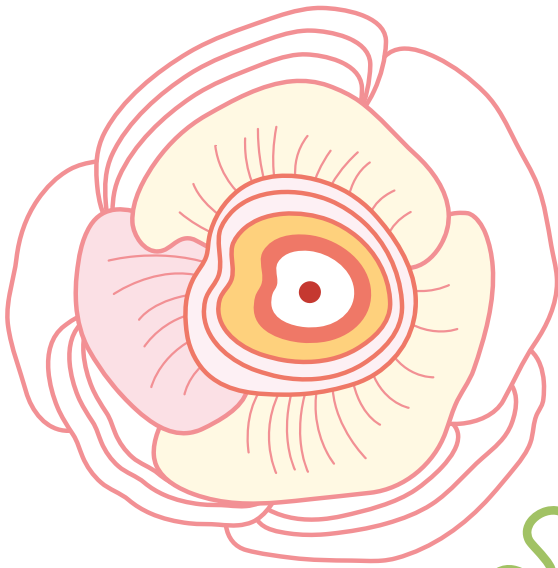
They had found a way to balance working for short-term survival with working toward a long-term goal. This is a challenge that is common to most new business ventures: doing what is necessary to survive today, while also making progress toward a future goal. Both short- and long-term goals and plans are necessary. It takes time and effort to both manage on the short term and work toward a fruitful future, but it pays off.

Something else I learned from growing my garden in Canada was that I needed to tailor my work and goals to the local conditions and to the crops themselves. The weather and type of soil were factors beyond my control, and they determined in part what I could grow. If I tried to grow vegetables that weren't well suited to that region, the plants wouldn't flourish, no matter what I did.

I also needed to take into consideration the various vegetables' planting and growing times. I could plant some vegetables when the weather was still quite cold, but I had to wait on planting others until the soil had warmed up. Some grew quickly—radishes, for instance. Those could be harvested within three weeks of planting, but then they would need to be replanted. Others, like tomatoes or green beans, took months to mature but kept producing for the rest of the summer and into early autumn. And with some, like lettuce, I learned to stagger planting times in order to always have some available. Some plants were attacked by pests or disease, while others were hearty enough to withstand just about anything. I had to learn to deal with a number of factors in order for my crops to grow well.

Life is a lot like that. Some things we try are fruitful, and others aren't. Some ideas work out well in certain circumstances but not in others. Sometimes long-term goals must be put on hold until short-term needs are met.

We also go through our personal seasons—our own versions of spring, summer, autumn, and winter. There are times when all we can do is plant, water, and nurture, putting in lots of time and hard work with nothing to show for it yet. Then there are the first fruits, followed by



times of harvest and times when the land lies dormant, when nothing will grow. Seasons come and seasons go. They are part of life, and we must adapt and change with them as best we can.

I recently spoke with a mother of three who had decided to become a nurse. Once she finishes her studies and training, she will have new skills for helping others, doing something that is both personally rewarding and a good source of income. In the meantime, however, it will probably be difficult for her and her family to make ends meet on her husband's salary alone. Her change of direction will mean sacrifice, but like my friend's orchard, it will pay big dividends later.

I know others who took low-paying jobs in order to survive while they gained experience that eventually made it possible for them to move on to higher-paying work that was more fulfilling—like planting quick-growing crops to sustain themselves until their longer-term crop came in.

Whether you're just getting started or have been working at the same job for years, it pays to stop from time to time and take stock. What are your goals in life? How does what you do for a living relate to the things you want most from life? Are your goals in sync with your abilities, personality, and experience? Do you find fulfillment in pursuing those goals, or do you only hope

to find fulfillment once you achieve them? How does God fit into the picture?

Jesus gave us the key to happy, fruitful, fulfilling lives when He said, "I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit."¹ He also said, "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth."²

If you have Jesus abiding within you, you will bear fruit. If you are following the leading of the Holy Spirit, you will be fruitful. God will help you find your place. He will give you guidance that is tailor-made for you. He will lead you according to what He knows is best, if you are willing to follow. As you do, the fruit will come. It won't necessarily come quickly, but it will come.

If God should lead you to take a new direction in life, it may be like the first few years of an orchard, which will bear much fruit in the future but require a prolonged period of preparation and early growth. Or He may lead you to invest your time and energy in a variety of things, some of which will bear quick fruit for a season, and others that will bear fruit later for a long time. There may be some seasons of all work and no fruit, followed by seasons of abundant fruitfulness.

Some key elements in doing what God shows you to do are faith, trust, and patience—faith to follow where He leads; trust that when you do, He will come through; and patience to wait for the fruit-bearing season.

Abide in Him, and your fruit will come.

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. "OF ORCHARDS AND GARDENS" WAS ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE WRITTEN FOR TFI MEMBERS. ■

1. John 15:5 ESV

2. John 14:16–17 ESV

GOD DOESN'T CHANGE WITH THE YEARS

BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

IN TIMES OF SUPREME TEST, God has revealed Himself to me and I have found Him so real that I could shout with absolute confidence, “I *know* whom I have believed!”¹

God has promised, “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you shall not be burned, nor shall the flame scorch you.”² “So we may boldly say: ‘The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’”³ “If God is for us, who can be against us?”⁴

In sudden emergencies and prolonged trials, God fulfills His promises today just as surely as He did in the past. He is saying, “I will

not fail you. When you are in the midst of trouble or under great stress, just keep courage. I will not under any circumstances forsake you.” And He means that for *you*.

That’s the God I know, the God whom I have proven year after year under all conditions, and He’s standing ready at this moment to meet you in any trial that you may be passing through. He’s speaking to you now. If you feel that you can go no further unless your load is lightened, this message is for you.

God is faithful. No matter what your age, no matter what your trouble, you are a particular concern of God’s at this very moment. You are the one that He longs to help. “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.”⁵

ALWAYS, IN ALL WAYS **A Prayer of Thanksgiving**

O Lord, you made all the delicate, inner parts of my body and knit me together in my mother’s womb. Thank you for making me so wonderfully complex! Your workmanship is marvelous—how well I know it. You watched me as I was being formed in utter seclusion, as I was woven together in the dark of the womb. You saw me before I was born. Every day of my life was recorded in your book. Every moment was laid out before a single day had passed. How precious are your thoughts about me, O God. They cannot be numbered!⁶ ■

1. 2 Timothy 1:12, emphasis added

2. Isaiah 43:2

3. Hebrews 13:6

4. Romans 8:31

5. Matthew 11:28

6. Psalm 139:13–17 NLT

VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG (1886–1968) WAS THE MOTHER OF DAVID BRANDT BERG (1919–1994), FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■



OPEN DOORS AND ADVERSARIES

BY JESSIE RICHARDS

WHEN A FRIEND SENT ME A SHORT BIBLE STUDY BY EMAIL,

one verse in particular stood out to me: “A wide door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many adversaries.”¹ That was an interesting thought: open doors and adversaries are biblically and sometimes necessarily connected.

Later I found myself meditating on a passage from Revelation 3: “He who overcomes”—we can’t do that without something to overcome—“I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God.”² Toward the end of the chapter is another promise that is one of my personal favorites: “To

him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.”³

Those verses make a beautiful point. First comes an open door—one that has been opened specifically for the person meant to walk through it—and next come adversaries and tests, which we know from the context of the passage can be overcome. Third comes the knowledge that Jesus had to go through His own very particular open door, facing a degree of adversity that I can’t fully imagine, much less imagine withstanding, but He did. He overcame!

That encourages me that whatever open doors lie before me, and whatever the accompanying “adversary,” I, too, can overcome. In fact, “I can do *all* things through Him who strengthens me.”⁴ And because I can

overcome, I can one day sit on God’s throne with Him. I’ve never been big on pauper-to-princess tales, but that sounds pretty attractive!

Speaking of fanciful tales, I’m reminded of a stock element of adventure stories—what I call the “treasure behind the troll” scenario. When does the hero or heroine ever get to achieve his or her goal without first fighting off some villain or monster?

That was certainly the apostle Paul’s experience. First came the open doors. “I went to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ and found that the Lord had opened a door for me,”⁵ he explains at one point. “Pray for us . . . that God may open a door for our message,” he wrote at another point, “so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains.”⁶

Paul clearly understood that with open doors came adversaries, but

1. 1 Corinthians 16:9 ESV

2. Revelation 3:12

3. Revelation 3:21

4. Philippians 4:13 ESV, emphasis added

5. 2 Corinthians 2:12 NIV

6. Colossians 4:3 NIV



he still wanted to get through those doors and was grateful when they opened. And I can understand why. Success and struggle don't necessarily come in separate packages. Neither do open doors and adversaries. Or treasures and trolls. More often, it seems, they come in balanced pairs.

The next time I pray for God to open a door of opportunity, I will realize that with it will most likely come some challenges and adversity. Then when those show up, I can recognize them as a sign that I'm really onto something opportunity-wise. I'll take that treasure of opportunity, even if I have to fight off some trolls to get to it.

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It is interesting to notice how some minds seem almost to create themselves, springing up under every disadvantage, and working their solitary but irresistible way through a thousand obstacles. ... Little minds are tamed and subdued by misfortune, but great minds rise above them.

—*Washington Irving*

We are made to persist. That's how we find out who we are.

—*Tobias Wolff*

Happiness is different from pleasure. Happiness has something to do with struggling, enduring, and accomplishing.

—*George Sheehan*

To be successful, you need to understand the vital difference between believing you will succeed, and believing you will succeed easily.

Believing that the road to success will be rocky leads to greater success because it forces you to take action. People who are confident that they will succeed, and equally confident that

success won't come easily, put in more effort, plan how they'll deal with problems before they arise, and persist longer in the face of difficulty.

Cultivate your realistic optimism by combining a positive attitude with an honest assessment of the challenges that await you. Don't just visualize success—visualize the steps you will take in order to make success happen.

—*Heidi Grant Halvorson, "Be an Optimist Without Being a Fool"*

The sculpting of our lives sometimes requires trials and tribulations of various kinds so that we can learn to seek God's help. We learn that sometimes to make it up the mountain we must also pass through valleys. The path to success isn't always straight upward; it sometimes dips down to the depths and keeps us traveling there for some time. If we find ourselves at a low point in the path, it pays to remember that there's something there that can make us stronger, better.

—*Peter Amsterdam* ■

FEEDING READING

Good Out of Bad

BY SAMUEL KEATING

GOD FORESAW OUR HUMAN WEAKNESSES AND PERSONAL SHORTCOMINGS AND WOVE THEM INTO HIS PLAN FOR OUR LIFE. Nothing is outside God's control, and with our cooperation He is able to bring good out of any situation, even a bad one. In fact, instead of being roadblocks on the road of life, problems often can be turned into stepping stones to bigger and better things.

Here are some biblical examples:

Joseph trusted in God through good and bad times, and in due time the difficulties he faced put him in a position to help his family and nation (Genesis 37–47).

Joseph's brothers secretly sold him into foreign slavery, where he wound up the property of Potiphar, an officer of Pharaoh and captain of the guard. Joseph rose to prominence in his new position, but when Potiphar's wife falsely accused him of attempting to molest her, he was thrown into prison.

He rose to a position of responsibility in the prison as well, and when he correctly interpreted a dream Pharaoh's cupbearer had had,


the cupbearer agreed to petition his release from Pharaoh. Unfortunately, the man promptly forgot his promise, and Joseph languished in jail for two more years. It seemed like things had only gotten worse for poor Joseph.

But when Pharaoh himself had two troubling dreams that none of his wise men could interpret, the cupbearer remembered Joseph and mentioned him to Pharaoh. When Joseph correctly interpreted the dreams, Pharaoh not only released him from prison but also made him his senior minister, second in command over the entire land of Egypt.

As such, Joseph eventually found himself in a position to save Egypt, his family, and much of the region from a seven-year famine, and he was finally reunited with his family.

Joseph declared that God had brought good from his brothers' evil deed, despite numerous troubles in the meantime, including Potiphar's wife's false accusations, the cupbearer's ungratefulness and poor memory, and famine.

"You [Joseph's brothers] intended to harm me,

A person wearing a white ski jacket, a blue and red patterned knit hat, and goggles is skiing down a snowy slope. The background is a bright, snowy mountain landscape under a clear blue sky.

but God intended it all for good. He brought me to this position so I could save the lives of many people” (Genesis 50:20 NLT).

Through His sacrificial death on the cross, Jesus paid the price for our sins and made it possible for us to enjoy eternal life with Him.

The Jewish religious and civil leaders accused Jesus of blasphemy, decided He should be put to death, and took Him to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor in Judea. Pilate could find no reason to condemn Jesus, but because he feared the hostile crowd that had gathered, he let the people decide Jesus’ fate. Provoked by their leaders, the crowd demanded, “Crucify him!”

Jesus was mocked, struck, and spat upon. He was whipped, and the sharp bits of iron and bone that were tied to the tips of the whip’s thongs mauled and tore His flesh. A crown of thorns was placed on His head. Stripped naked and too weak after all these tortures to carry His cross to the execution site, a bystander was forced to carry it for Him.

At Golgotha, stakes were driven through His wrists and ankles, fastening Him to the cross where He was left to die between two common criminals. Jesus hung on the cross for six hours, during which time soldiers gambled for His clothing and onlookers shouted insults at Him. Nearly all His friends and followers abandoned Him. Feeling utterly alone, He cried out to His Father, “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” But as He died He declared, “It is finished!” Our sins were atoned for. Salvation had come.

“Herod Antipas, Pontius Pilate the governor, the Gentiles, and the people of Israel were all united against Jesus, your [God’s] holy servant, whom you anointed. But everything they did was determined

beforehand according to your will” (Acts 4:27–28 NLT).

Things seemed to have gone horribly wrong for Paul and Silas at Philippi (Acts 16:16–40).

When Paul freed a fortune-teller from the demon that possessed her, the woman’s irate masters stirred up a mob against the Christian teachers, dragged them before the local authorities, and brought false charges against them. The officials had them stripped, beaten, clamped in irons, and tossed into prison, disregarding their rights as Roman citizens. That night there was a massive earthquake that shook the prison so violently that the walls crumbled and the doors flew open.

But after Paul and Silas saved the jailer’s life by not fleeing the scene, the jailer took them to his own house, set a meal before them, tended to their wounds, and listened to what they had to say. That very night, he and his entire household came to believe in Jesus. The next morning Paul and Silas were released from custody, with the apologies of the court.

“He [the jailer] and his entire household rejoiced because they all believed in God” (Acts 16:34 NLT).

SAMUEL KEATING IS *ACTIVATED’S* PRODUCTION COORDINATOR AND LIVES IN MILAN, ITALY. ■

GAINS

FROM

BY ESTRELA MARQUES

WHEN SOMEONE SUGGESTED THAT I TRY TO BE THANKFUL EVEN IN BAD SITUATIONS, it seemed impossible. I was familiar with the biblical admonition to “be thankful in all circumstances,”¹ but it had never dawned on me to take that literally. Was it possible to have a thankful disposition and to vocalize and act on it, even when things were at their worst?

I began to understand the be-thankful-for-everything principle while reading *Power in Praise*, by Merlin Carothers. According to his findings, it’s what releases God’s miracle-working power, not only in regard to the circumstances we face but also in our own hearts, giving us the peace and faith we need to go through life’s storms.

I wanted more of God’s power in my life, so I determined to try thanking Him for everything. Little did I know how difficult this would prove to be.

When our second child was four months old, my husband was involved in a terrible accident. On my way to the hospital, I was informed that he was already undergoing emergency surgery. Tears welled up in my eyes as I realized I might never see him again in this life.

I spent the next hours trying to pray for him and the surgeons, but I could barely focus. Then Jesus spoke to my heart, reminding me to thank Him even for this situation. I forced a “Thank You, Jesus,” but I knew I didn’t really mean it. How could I?

After four excruciating hours, I was told that my husband was in a coma, in critical condition. He had suffered multiple fractures on his skull that could result in brain damage, as well as a fractured hip, arm, and jaw, and deep wounds on his back. They had been able to save most of his mangled right hand, but he had lost one finger. They had done all they could, they said. Only time would tell how his body would respond. I tried to be strong and have faith, but I was shattered and in shock.


I couldn’t help but question how a loving God could have allowed this to happen. I tried to trust that my husband was in God’s hands, that He loved and cared about us and knew best, but I also felt that if I did so, that would mean I was supposed to be thankful for whatever outcome He may choose. I struggled with that all night. How could I be thankful if my husband died? Or if he survived but was unable to walk, or talk, or function normally again? How could I say I would be fine with whatever might happen? I wouldn’t be!

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:18 NLT

2. Luke 22:42

3. Philipians 4:7 NIV

PAINS



As I watched the day dawn, Jesus reminded me of His own struggle in Gethsemane. He had asked His Father to spare Him the crucifixion He knew was coming, but He had ended His prayer with, “Not My will, but Yours, be done.”² Jesus wasn’t asking me to walk a path He hadn’t walked Himself. I was about to experience what countless others down through the ages have discovered: God is able to use every trial to help make us better.

As soon as I latched onto that thought, an incredible peace flooded my mind and spirit. Each of the next five days I went to the ICU to talk to, read to, and pray for my husband, even though he was still in a coma and the doctors’ daily reports were not hopeful.

After five days, he awoke and began to recover rapidly. He had short-term amnesia, but could move all of his limbs and talk. A blood clot in his brain disappeared without surgery. He stayed in the ICU for only 10 days, even though the doctors had expected him to be there for at least a month.

When he first began to speak again, he often didn’t make sense. Still I kept trusting that God had a loving plan, and I thanked Him for that. And God came through. My husband regained full use of his right hand, and his reasoning and speech became normal again. The doctors were amazed.

I gained a new perspective on life—one like Albert Camus described when he wrote, “In the depth of winter, I finally learned that there was within me an invincible summer.”

In the depth of anguish, I was wrapped in love that didn’t leave me for an instant. When I chose to replace sorrow and despair with praise and gratitude, I experienced a sustaining power that was far greater than anything I had known existed—“the peace of God, which transcends all understanding.”³

ESTRELA MARQUES IS A MEMBER
OF TFI IN BRAZIL. ■

A Perfect Day

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

TODAY WAS PERFECT!

It wasn't a perfectly lazy day (I've enjoyed a few of those, sleeping late and not doing much of anything), or perfect in terms of accomplishments, or without its problems. Still, it was so perfect from start to finish that I now feel compelled to retrace my steps and try to figure out what made it that way. Maybe I can make it happen again.

I woke early and greeted the new day with a two-mile walk, thanking God for my loved ones and praying for them as I got both body and spirit going. Afterwards I read some devotional material, contemplating what I read and praying that it would change me. I listened to recordings of some beautiful songs, and their lyrics of praise to God filled my soul. I spent a few

more moments feeling Jesus' loving presence and watching as a prism hanging in the window caught a sunbeam and sent ethereal rainbows floating around the room.

After breakfast I planned the coming school year and ordered study materials for my homeschool students, and then I helped them with their first, seventh, and ninth grade classes. It was a very full morning, but surprisingly free of pressure. That time I had taken with Jesus surely paid off.

I was beginning to sag as I cut vegetables for lunch, but I found myself thanking God for healthful food and my family's good health. My hands were busy, but gratitude lifted my heart and mind to heavenly places. That was just the boost I needed.

I listened to some uplifting piano music as I did an errand in the car. I kept pace with the traffic, but without the usual tension in my shoulders.

Back home, between email, phone calls, and a short visit from a neighbor, I cooked, cleaned, and spent some extra time with my teenage son. Sometimes I worry about

him, but as we sat together and he shared his opinions, concerns, and dreams, Jesus helped me see a sweetness and depth in my son that I sometimes overlook.

My husband and I went for an evening walk, and as we held hands and watched the setting sun paint the clouds lavender and pink, we counted our blessings together.

I know I can't expect every day to be so perfect, but I now know how to increase my chances: I'll take time to connect with Jesus and renew that connection throughout the day by turning my thoughts to Him and His goodness.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A TEACHER AND WRITER, AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, TEXAS. ■

GOD'S PUZZLE ROOM



BY ANITA HEALEY

I WOKE TO THE SOUND OF MY ALARM REMINDING ME TO PUT IN THE EYE DROPS MY DOCTOR HAD PRESCRIBED. Out of habit, I covered my good eye to test the vision in the infected one. To my great alarm, my sight was very blurry, much worse than the previous day.

Memories of a painful hospital procedure the day before flooded back. What further tests and procedures would I have to undergo? How had something that had started so small get this bad?

I couldn't go back to sleep. I lay in bed, trying to resist the fears that threatened to overwhelm me.

"Look at Me," Jesus spoke to my mind. "Look at Me."

I closed my eyes and imagined Him. I felt myself being drawn into His gaze, transported to another place. In my mind's eye I could see a large room filled with many walls

and screens. "What's this place?" I asked Him with interest.

"It's My puzzle room." He seemed excited.

He drew my attention to one of the screens where I could see a little boy playing with building blocks, each a different shape, stacking and fitting them together. Then he chose one that looked like a gold brick, which he appeared very happy with. He was quite intent on fitting it into his puzzle, but whichever way he tried, it simply wouldn't fit. I watched his frustration mount until Jesus finally reached in and took away the gold block. Then He showed the boy how all of the other pieces fit together nicely, without that one, to make a beautiful, glowing design.

How like my own life that was. Many times I wish for something or want something to happen. Usually I have my own idea of when it should

happen as well, and sometimes I try to force the situation instead of asking God to help it work out in His time, if He knows it's good for me and everyone else involved. Try as I may to fit certain things into my life, if they aren't part of His plan, it doesn't work; I only make myself frustrated, unhappy, and discouraged. That's what had happened when I expected my eye to get better instantly. I had wanted it on my timetable, not His.

Now whenever I'm tempted to fret, I remember the glimpse He gave me into His puzzle room. He's involved in every aspect of my life, and He will help me fit things together beautifully, His way and in His time, if I will let Him.

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Through the storm

I can't promise to spare you from the storms of life, but I can promise to be with you through them. My help comes in a variety of forms. It may not always come in the form you expect, but it will come. I will never leave you to struggle on your own.

When you ask for My help, I will answer your prayer. When you are fearful, I will give you faith to trust Me, peace of mind, and courage to go on. When you are weak and weary, lean on Me and I will give you strength like you've never known. When your heart is broken, I will mend it.

I can't keep you from all hardships and sorrows, but I can make the troubles of life bearable and bring about good in the end. I can help your spirit rise above the storms of life. Above the clouds—up here in heavenly places with Me—the sun is always shining. I am sunshine on a rainy day, the rainbow after the storm. I am the bright ray of hope that puts the sparkle back in your eyes.

The present storm will pass. In the meantime, let Me keep you through the storm.