

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 13 • Issue 11

THE ROAD TO HAPPINESS

Choose right

A Love Note From God

Message on a clothesline

Good Lord!

God turns the other cheek





PERSONALLY SPEAKING

When asked what it means to praise God, my four-year-old grandson Logan explained, “It’s when we tell God, ‘Good job!’” I chuckled when I heard that, but it got me thinking. Why are we told time

and again in the Bible to praise God, to tell Him “Good job”? He deserves it, of course, because He certainly did a good job when He created us and our infinitely complex universe, and moment by moment He does a good job at holding it all together.

He deserves our praise and thanks for a job well done, that much is clear, but sometimes I wonder what *He* gets out of it. I’ve seen what praise can do for Logan or me or anyone else. I know how it builds us up, but does *God* really need that? He’s all-powerful and all-knowing. Surely He already knows how great He is. Why would He need to hear that from us?

I think it’s mostly for our benefit. I think *we* need to hear it from us. We need to think about His goodness, and to put it into words. We need it, and for at least three reasons.

First, it puts things in perspective. It reminds us of our human limitations and frailties, and of God’s power and goodness toward us.

That leads to reason number two: it puts us on a positive path, in a hopeful frame of mind. That’s important because we can’t even begin to be happy until we realize that none of the things that stand in our way are insurmountable, with His help.

Third and best of all, it brings us into loving communion with our Creator, whom to know is life eternal.¹ That’s the purpose of this life, His reason for it all. It’s His ultimate goal and His daily wish for us. That’s what’s in it for Him and us both. When we tell God “Good job,” think about what we’re saying, and really mean it, we create a little bit of heaven on earth for ourselves.

Keith Phillips
For *Activated*

1. John 17:3

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A Love Note from God

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

MY BACK ACHED FROM SITTING SO LONG IN THE SMALL METAL SEAT OF THE BUS, and my face flushed from the blazing sun that beat on me through the open window. The bus jostled as it followed the dusty road through a half-deserted section of town, where drab, dilapidated houses and fields overgrown with weeds seemed to be a reflection of my life. The last few weeks had been especially stressful as some friends and I struggled to make progress on a new community volunteer project. We had been having more setbacks than successes, and that, coupled with personal

problems, had brought a heavy cloud of discouragement over me.

As the bus passed another row of houses, something on the outdoor laundry line of a run-down house caught my eye. It was a bright yellow towel, waving in the breeze, adorned with a huge smiley face. What made me crane my neck for a second look as we turned the corner were five letters below the face: S-M-I-L-E.

My heart lifted and I couldn't help breaking out into a big smile. Did the person who had hung that towel there know the inspiration it would bring to a weary passerby? Or did God orchestrate that scene just for me, like a little love note, to reassure me of His presence? I realized that I'd gotten so wrapped up in my immediate circumstances and troubles that

I'd forgotten to notice and appreciate the touches of God's love all around me—the wildflowers blooming by the roadside, a dainty butterfly fluttering past, the welcome breeze that shared the open window with that blazing sun, the sweet smile of the small child in the seat beside me. So many things worth smiling about!

Since that day, I've been learning to enjoy life more and to savor its many pleasures, big and small. I'm noticing God's loving presence more, how He helps me, guides me, and sprinkles my life with His blessings, like little love notes to remind me how much He cares.

Happiness is neither within us only, nor without us; it is the union of ourselves with God.
—Blaise Pascal¹

1. Blaise Pascal (1623–1662) was a French mathematician, physicist, inventor, writer, and philosopher.

ELSA SICHROVSKY IS A HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT AND LIVES WITH HER FAMILY IN TAIWAN. ■

THE ROAD TO HAPPINESS

ADAPTED FROM THE WRITINGS OF VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

REGARDLESS OF WHATEVER ELSE WE MAY BE LOOKING FOR IN LIFE, WE ALL HAVE ONE ASPIRATION IN COMMON: we all want to be happy.

Happiness is different things to different people, of course, but some seem to think that it is as simple as having a good time. As children, we all do that. We think that happiness means doing as we please, having lots of fun and not much work. Eventually, after getting into plenty of mischief and suffering many stomachaches, most of us learn that happiness does not come from grabbing everything we want—that happiness is not the product of idleness and chocolate creams.

Unfortunately, some people never do seem to learn that. They spend their lives looking for happiness in all the wrong places, only to realize too

late that they have been chasing shadows. Meanwhile there are others who do not make the quest for personal happiness their top priority, their holy grail, but they find it just the same.

Ella Wheeler Wilcox wrote a poem about this search:

I've lost the road to happiness,
Does anyone know it, pray?
I was dwelling there
When the morn was fair,
But somehow I wandered away.
I saw rare treasure
And scenes of pleasure
And ran to pursue them when, lo,
I had lost the road to happiness
And knew not whither to go.

Where can true happiness be found? It is found in living in harmony with God. Many people think they are unhappy because of their circumstances, but that is not it—something is wrong in the heart. When the heart is right, all is right, but when the heart is wrong,

all is wrong. They are at war with themselves because they are out of harmony with God.

Jesus told His disciples, “If you know these things”—the keys to right living that He had taught them—“blessed are you if you do them.”¹ The King James Version translates the Greek word *makarios* “happy,” rather than “blessed.” That makes the point even more clearly, and there is a world of truth in it! Joy is a result of right living. When we try our best to do things God’s way, we can stop struggling to find happiness, because happiness comes to us. If our hearts are right with God and our will is in line with His, we find rest of spirit, peace, and joy—chief building blocks of happiness.²

VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG (1886–1968) WAS AN AMERICAN PASTOR AND PIONEER RADIO EVANGELIST THROUGH HER RADIO PROGRAM *MEDITATION MOMENTS*, WHICH AIRED FOR 15 YEARS. ■

1. John 13:17

2. See Matthew 11:28–30;
Isaiah 26:3; John 15:11.



BY GABRIEL GARCÍA V.

ATTITUDE IS A DECISION

DOES OUR ATTITUDE TOWARD LIFE DETERMINE OUR LEVEL OF HAPPINESS? I

became convinced that it does while volunteering with survivors of the earthquake and subsequent tsunami that devastated parts of Chile in February 2010. Our team met many courageous and remarkably optimistic people who were finding ways to make the best of their horrible situations.

On our first trip to the area, we met a woman who had owned a hair salon. The tidal waves had swept through her shop, leaving total devastation in their wake. When she had dug through the mud where her business had been, she found only one pair of scissors, one buzzer, and one cape. Miraculously, the wave had also spared her large mirror. Thankful that she still had one of each of the items she needed, she

cleaned them and reopened for business.

Later, when distributing food boxes, we met her again in her rough one-room temporary housing. She greeted us with a warm smile and hug, and proudly showed us how she had replaced the wooden shutter with a glass window so she could look out on the woods that surrounded the makeshift camp where she and other earthquake survivors were living. She had turned her misfortune into an adventure, and found cause to celebrate in spite of the catastrophe.

There were many others like her. A fisherman said to me as we stood together and took in the desolation along the waterfront, “Do you see that tree standing alone in the middle of nothing? That is the center of what used to be our garden, and our house stood to the right of there. I’ve lost everything else, but I thank

God that I still have my family—my wife and all of our kids. How can I complain?” We prayed together for him to find a good job, as the local economy had come to a virtual standstill after the earthquake.

His faith, optimism, and gratitude paid off. When I met him again two months later, he told me that shortly after our previous visit he had found a job where he now earns twice as much as he had before.

When faced with difficult circumstances, many people become embittered and blame God for their plight. Not so with these and other brave survivors who chose instead to focus on the positive and keep their heads up in spite of adversity.

GABRIEL GARCÍA V. IS THE EDITOR OF THE SPANISH EDITION OF *ACTIVATED* AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■

Good Lord!

BY PHILLIP LYNCH

SOMETIMES I'M AMAZED AT HOW DENSE I CAN BE! I've been reading the Bible regularly for the past 40 years, but it was only yesterday that something so elementary struck me that I wondered where my head had been the past four decades.

I've been bothered recently by what a raw deal God usually gets. In many of the books I've read and the television shows and movies I've watched, it seems that whenever God comes up, He is portrayed as hard and unyielding, even mean. I was getting tired of this portrayal because it simply doesn't match up with the God I know. At the same time, I admit that I have myself also occasionally

wondered about God's goodness—not so much *whether* He was good, but rather if I was the only one somehow missing out on it. But even when battling with my own questions about God's justness, I knew that these other portrayals were grossly unfair.

I was thinking about this and how God must get fed up with humanity's grumblings and accusations, when the words came to me, "Love endures long and is patient and kind."¹ I recognized them immediately as part of Apostle Paul's famous discourse on love. Then I was reminded of how John the Beloved captured the essence of God's nature in three simple words: "God is love."² It struck me that the passage in 1 Corinthians was also describing God.

What a God! He puts up with us because it is in His nature to. His justice and righteousness are

tempered with infinite patience, kindness, forbearance, and a readiness to always believe the best about each of us. He is a God who endures all that we unjustly throw at Him; He isn't conceited, arrogant, rude, unbecoming, self-seeking, touchy, fretful, resentful, or vengeful. He is a God who will freely and graciously give us all things.³

What struck me the hardest was that while I was pointing to specks of dust in the eyes of these authors and scriptwriters who I thought were giving God such a raw deal, I was excusing the log in my own eye when I complained to God about His "neglecting" me. As I said, I can be dense.

PHILLIP LYNCH IS A NOVELIST AND COMMENTATOR ON SPIRITUAL AND ESCHATOLOGICAL ISSUES, LIVING IN ATLANTIC CANADA. ■

1. 1 Corinthians 13:4 AMP

2. 1 John 4:8

3. See Romans 8:32.

4. Psalm 150:6

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye but do not notice or consider the beam [of timber] that is in your own eye? ... First take the beam out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye.

—Jesus, Luke 6:41–42 AMP.

The Nature of God

LOVE ENDURES LONG AND IS PATIENT AND KIND; love never is envious nor boils over with jealousy, is not boastful or vainglorious, does not display itself haughtily.

It is not conceited (arrogant and inflated with pride); it is not rude (unmannerly) and does not act unbecomingly. Love (God's love in us) does not insist on its own rights or its own way, for it is not self-seeking; it is not touchy or fretful or resentful; it takes no account of the evil done to it [it pays no attention to a suffered wrong].

It does not rejoice at injustice and unrighteousness, but rejoices when right and truth prevail.

Love bears up under anything and everything that comes, is ever ready to believe the best of every person, its hopes are fadeless under all circumstances, and it endures everything [without weakening].

Love never fails [never fades out or becomes obsolete or comes to an end]. As for prophecy ([a]the gift of interpreting the divine will and purpose), it will be fulfilled and pass away; as for tongues, they will be destroyed and cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away [it will lose its value and be superseded by truth].

—Apostle Paul, 1 Corinthians 13:4–8 AMP ■

Praise in a Cage

BY ROSANE PEREIRA

WHEN MY NEPHEW MOVED TO ANOTHER CITY, I reluctantly agreed to care for his songbird until he could get resettled. I had never had a bird in my house, much less a Green-winged Saltador, more commonly called *trinca-ferro* (iron-cruncher) because of its high-pitched song.

My children and I were in the habit of starting each day with a short devotional reading, and we usually began by singing a song or two. From the first day the bird was with us, he would join in the singing with his vibrant “djew, tjew, tjew, tjew.” This went on for weeks. He would sing a little in the afternoon, but he saved his best melodies for our morning times, his song blending beautifully with our voices.

Even from his cage, our feathered friend knew how to raise the roof with songs of praises to his Creator. “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”⁴

ROSANE PEREIRA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND WRITER IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

WHAT IF?

BY JOE JOHNSTON



KIKA WAS SIX YEARS OLD, with beautiful blue eyes and a smile that could melt the iciest heart. Kika liked stuffed kittens and ice cream and blowing bubbles. She was learning her alphabet and how to count backwards from ten. But Kika had never taken a step in her life.

She was paralyzed from the waist down, having been born with a condition called spina bifida. She had a tiny wheelchair in which she raced around the house, and there was a larger one parked under the staircase for her to grow into.

Kika never complained about her condition. That was simply life to her—how it had always been—and she enjoyed every minute of it. Some said that at night, when everyone was asleep, Kika would pull out her halo, don a tiny pair of gossamer cherub wings, and glide around the house to check on people—her family and the dozen or so other Christian volunteers, myself included, with whom she was living. Kika shone. Kika was our angel.

She yawned that morning as her father carried her down the stairs and set her on the sofa. Daddy was leading our daily devotional reading, and he must not be late. The rest of us had already gathered and were waiting for him to begin. Daddy was smiling broadly.

“Today we’re going to start with a little exercise called ‘What If?’ We’ll go clockwise, beginning with Ben.”

We knew how this one went. The first person would give a short scenario in which something terrible had happened, and the next person in the circle would imagine himself in that dire circumstance and find some positive aspect about it or possible positive outcome, and thank God for that.

There was a brief pause and mischievous smirks played around the corners of various mouths as scenarios were being prepared.

Ben cleared his throat. “Okay, Joy, what if your glasses got scratched so badly that you couldn’t use them?”

Joy smiled. “I would be thankful that now there was nothing to stop me from getting the contact lenses that I’ve been deliberating over.”

“What If?” got people thinking in a positive direction—a smashing way to begin the day. It was also good preparation for when bad things happen, which they do.

“What if you were bitten by a black widow spider?” the next person asked. This was an all too likely possibility on the ranch in Mexico where we lived. We had killed a number of black widows already, some with bodies nearly the size of a man’s thumbnail.

“I would thank God that two of our nearest neighbors are doctors.” Good thing! The venom of a black widow acts quickly.

“What if you sprained your wrist?” The room erupted in laughter. Patrick, who was next in the circle, shot arrows from his eyes. He really *had* sprained his wrist and was still recovering.

“If I ever sprained my wrist—*God forbid!*—I would be thankful that I would be excused from my turn washing dishes for a *looong* time.” Excellent answer.

“Okay, I have one. Say you really liked strawberries, but it wasn’t strawberry season. You had looked all around town without finding any, but finally, in the very last store, there was one small box of strawberries—the most beautiful, sweetest-smelling strawberries ever. You buy them and leave the store, but as you step from the curb, a taxi zooms past and knocks them from your hand. The box is flattened and the strawberries are mush. What would you be thankful for?”

“Strawberry jam!” The room applauded. Nice escape from a tight spot.

“What if you got home from a long, sweaty, dusty day, working outdoors, and when you went to

take a shower, there was no water?” Another all-too-familiar scenario on the ranch.

“I would thank God that it suddenly started pouring rain, and that I could put on my bathing suit, step outside, and rinse off in the rain!”

“That’s not fair! What if it *didn’t* start raining?”

“Of course it would! Thankfulness sets miracles in motion!”

That brought things around to the last person in the circle, Kika’s daddy. Stifling a smile, he said, “Okay, what if…” He paused for effect. “What if your daughter was born with spina bifida? And what if her one wish was to have a Geiger machine—a revolutionary piece of technology that stimulates the nervous system of spina bifida patients and might eventually make it possible for your little girl to walk on her own?”

“Then, what if this morning you received a letter from a friend who wrote, ‘I hope you received the check for \$2,000 that I sent you to put toward a Geiger machine for Kika?’”

The Geiger machine would cost \$10,000, but \$2,000 was a wonderful start. The miracle had been set in motion.

JOE JOHNSTON IS A WRITER.
HE LIVES IN MEXICO. ■

Thanksgiving Thoughts

BY MARIA FONTAINE

THANKSGIVING IS PRIMARILY A NORTH AMERICAN HOLIDAY, celebrated in the U.S. in November and Canada in October, but it would be nice if the whole world would designate a day to reflect on and thank God for His goodness. Our Creator has bestowed so many gifts on humankind. He gave us the gift of life and a marvel-filled world to spend it in, replete with an endless variety of beauty and beautiful experiences. As the Bible says, God has made everything beautiful for its own time and purpose.¹

He has given us the love of family and friends, and every joy that we experience. Not only has He given us the gift of life as we know it, but He has promised that our souls will outlive this earthly existence. He offers us a future in eternity through His Son, Jesus Christ.

1. See Ecclesiastes 3:11.

2. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, emphasis added.

3. See Psalm 100:4.

The Bible says, “In *everything* give thanks; for this is the will of God,”² and we are invited to enter into God’s presence with praise and thanksgiving.³ When you stop to think about all that God has given you, doesn’t it make you want to express your gratitude?

But you may wonder *how* you should thank Him. You may not know how to put your thanks into words, or maybe you feel your words aren’t eloquent enough. Take heart. God isn’t looking for carefully

crafted or perfectly articulated expressions of gratitude. He delights in hearing heartfelt thanks, with words that may be many or few, lofty or simple, flowing or halting. God sees the praise in your heart and translates it into poetry set to beautiful melodies.

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

A PRAISE FOR THE DAY

Lord, I lift my heart, mind, and spirit to You in prayer, praise, and thanksgiving. You are the giver of all good things, and You are all good things to me.

You are my Creator, my Father, the source of life and strength. You cause the sun to rise, the light to shine, the night to come. You hold me in Your arms. You console me in my sadness. You warm me with Your love. You shield me and protect me and provide for me.

All peace, contentment, and blessings come from Your hand. I praise and honor and thank You. Amen. ■



I AM THANKSGIVING

BY JESSIE RICHARDS

A RATHER ODD THOUGHT POPPED INTO MY HEAD LAST THANKSGIVING EVE, out of the blue: “I *am* Thanksgiving.” I think the Thanksgiving holiday is great! What’s not to love about a day centered on a bright spot in history, gratefulness, family, and good food? Then again, I also love Christmas, for mostly the same reasons, but I would never say “I *am* Christmas.”

I went for a run on Thanksgiving morning and, amid the gold and red autumn leaves that adorned the trees along my way, reviewed the year to that point. It would come to a close soon, and although it hadn’t been all smooth sailing, I had thoroughly enjoyed it, even the challenging bits. Most of the things I had been concerned about had either already

been resolved or solutions were in the works. The answer to one rather substantial personal dilemma that I had been struggling with for some time had come to me in a flash just a couple of days earlier. I was surprised I hadn’t seen it sooner. It was so simple and beautiful! I was happy and grateful and already telling my family and friends about it.

I then started musing on that thought from the previous day and had an epiphany. “I *am* thanksgiving” perfectly embodies the kind of person I want to be, the way I want to live my life, what I want to be known for. It’s a different way of saying, “I give thanks to God,” but I want to do more than that; I want to *live* in that state of being grateful and I want to voice it. All the time.

“I *am* thanksgiving” goes a step further than simply being thankful or being grateful, which can be done rather passively.

So I now proudly affirm that thanksgiving is not just something in which I participate on occasion, or in the back of my mind, or once a year while gathered around a table with family and friends and football games and heaping plates of food! May gratefulness and thanksgiving always be a part of who I am and permeate everything I say and do.

I *am* thanksgiving, and I’m always going to smile about something!

JESSIE RICHARDS IS AN *ACTIVATED* STAFF WRITER. SHE LIVES IN THE WASHINGTON DC AREA. ■



ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Acting upbeat when feeling down

Q: I've been happier than ever since finding Jesus, but I still have problems and sometimes get quite down. My friends try to cheer me up and tell me to "put on my happy face," but how can I smile and look happy when I really don't feel that way? Wouldn't that be hypocritical?

A: It is not being hypocritical to put on a happy face even when you don't feel happy. It's a sign of inner strength and maturity. It shows you realize that whatever is dragging you down at the moment is relatively small in the grand scope of things, and that it will pass.

It's loving and considerate to be cheerful around others, smiling even when you don't really feel like it. It's

considerate to try not to allow your facial expression to drag other people down with you or send a wrong signal, as though you're down because you don't like being around them.

Acting more positive than you feel also does *you* good and will often help bring you out of your funk.

Of course, the best thing would be to get over whatever it is that's getting you down, and the best first step in that direction is usually to talk it over with Jesus and ask Him to help you fix the problem. If there is someone else who might be able to help you sort things out, it may also be good to talk with them. There's a time to look pleasant and smile—which is most of the time when you're with others—but there's also a time to turn to the Lord and others for help.¹ ■

SIMPLE JOYS

For most of life, nothing wonderful happens. If you don't enjoy getting up and working and finishing your work and sitting down to a meal with family or friends, then the chances are that you're not going to be very happy. If someone bases his happiness or unhappiness on major events like a great new job, huge amounts of money, a flawlessly happy marriage or a trip to Paris, that person isn't going to be happy much of the time. If, on the other hand, happiness depends on a good breakfast, flowers in the yard, a drink or a nap, then we are more likely to live with quite a bit of happiness.

—*Andy Rooney (1919–2011), American radio and television writer* ■

1. See James 5:16; Galatians 6:2.

POINTS TO PONDER

HAPPINESS, RELAXATION, and ENJOYING LIFE

COMPILED BY DAVID BOLICK

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.—*Jesus, Matthew 11:28–30*

God can't give us happiness and peace apart from Himself because there is no such thing.—*C.S. Lewis (1898–1963), English novelist, poet, academic, critic, essayist, and apologist*

A person is fully human when joy is the fundamental thing in him, and grief the superficial. Melancholy should be an innocent interlude, a tender and fugitive frame of mind; praise should be the permanent pulsation of the soul. Pessimism is at best an emotional half-holiday; joy is the uproarious labor by which all things live.—*G. K. Chesterton (1874–1936), English philosopher, author, and apologist*



No mockery in this world ever sounds to me so hollow as that of being told to cultivate happiness. Happiness is not a potato, to be planted in a mould and tilled with manure. Happiness is a glory shining far down upon us from heaven. She is a divine dew, which the soul feels dropping upon it from the amaranth bloom and golden fruitage of paradise.—*Charlotte Brontë (1816–1855), English novelist and poet*

I find my joy of living in the fierce and ruthless battles of life, and my pleasure comes from learning something, from being taught something.—*August Strindberg (1849–1912), Swedish playwright, novelist, poet, essayist, and painter*

It is true also that joy is in its nature more divine than sorrow; for, although man must sorrow, and God share in his sorrow, yet in himself God is not sorrowful, and the “glad creator” never made man for sorrow: it is but a stormy strait through which he must pass to his ocean of peace.—*George MacDonald (1824–1905), Scottish author, poet, and Christian minister*

It is not the level of prosperity that makes for happiness but the kinship of heart to heart and the way we look at the world. Both attitudes are within our power. . . . A man is happy so long as he chooses to be happy, and no one can stop him.—*Alexander Solzhenitsyn (1918–2008), Russian and Soviet novelist, dramatist, and historian* ■

BY IRIS RICHARD

5 WAYS TO RELAX

EVERY MORNING I WAKE UP AND BOARD AN EXPRESS TRAIN LEAVING FROM FAST TRACK STATION. As I speed along life's rails, I stare out the window and think. Where has the time gone? How did my children manage to grow up so quickly? Now it's happening with my grandchildren. I catch my reflection in the window and wonder where all that gray hair came from. It seems like only yesterday...

In today's ever-changing and expanding world, it's hard to take the focus off of what is happening to us externally, the pressures of life on the fast track. But it's through meeting our inner needs that we are renewed. It can start simply, as the following ideas suggest:

01 INVEST IN RELATIONSHIPS

Don't take friends and family for granted; these relationships need nurturing. Let people know that you appreciate them and are glad they're part of your life. Try to surround yourself with happy people. Being around people who are upbeat buoys your own mood. And when you are cheerful and optimistic, you give something to those around you.

02 TAKE A BRISK WALK

Physical activity releases endorphins, the feel-good hormones in your body, which increases your sense of well-being and makes it easier to approach challenges positively. Exercise also improves your overall health. While you're exercising, concentrate on deep, abdominal breathing. This will increase the amount of oxygen delivered to every cell of your body and flush toxins from your circulatory system.

03 MEDITATE

Focus on an object—a flower, a tree, a cloud—and take in its wonder. Or concentrate on a positive thought or a Bible verse. Let feelings of gratitude fill your mind and flood your spirit. Picture your troubles, confusion, and fears taking flight as you breathe slowly and deeply.

04 PRAY

Prayer is like an extension of meditation. It has the same immediate benefits for body, mind, and spirit, but goes far beyond that; it is your link with your Creator and releases His power to work on your behalf.

05 TAKE TIME OFF

Most stress is work related. Make times to totally disengage from work and do something that will have a positive impact. And instead of picking up the nearest electronic device as your default diversion, try sketching or painting, creative writing, or reading a good book—something that will stimulate you in a new way and get your creative juices flowing.

IRIS RICHARD IS A COUNSELOR IN KENYA, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN A COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER FOR THE PAST 17 YEARS, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

Wonder and Appreciation

A Spiritual Exercise

BY ABI MAY

IMAGINE A SMALL CHILD WITH A BIRTHDAY OR CHRISTMAS PRESENT. Excitedly, the child tears off the wrapping paper to discover what's inside. Eyes widen and a shriek of joy is heard as the new toy is revealed. Perhaps she hugs her new golden-haired doll, or he starts pushing his toy truck across the room.

That's a simple picture of the sense of wonder and appreciation we read in the Psalms:

We give thanks to You, O God, we give thanks! For Your wondrous works declare that Your name is near.¹

You are great, and do wondrous things.²

[I will] tell of all Your wondrous works.³

1. Psalm 75:1
2. Psalm 86:10
3. Psalm 26:7



For this exercise, imagine yourself as that child, excited to receive so many gifts from God: health, family, friends, a roof overhead, livelihood, a beautiful world—the list is endless. Get excited as you unwrap each one in your mind's eye and experience anew the wonder of each particular blessing. Tell God “Thank you!”



God's goodness has been great to thee.—Let never day nor night unhallowed pass but still remember what the Lord hath done.
—*William Shakespeare (1564–1616), English poet and playwright*

If one should give me a dish of sand, and tell me there were particles of iron in it, I might look for them with my eyes, and search for them with my clumsy fingers, and be unable to detect them; but let me take a magnet and sweep through it,

and now would it draw to itself the almost invisible particles by the mere power of attraction.

The unthankful heart, like my finger in the sand, discovers no mercies; but let the thankful heart sweep through the day, and as the magnet finds the iron, so it will find, in every hour, some heavenly blessings, only the iron in God's sand is gold!
—*Henry Ward Beecher (1813–1887), American clergyman, social reformer, abolitionist, and speaker*

Think excitement, talk excitement, act out excitement, and you are bound to become an excited person. Life will take on a new zest, deeper interest and greater meaning. You can think, talk and act yourself into dullness or into monotony or into unhappiness. By the same process you can build up inspiration, excitement and surging depth of joy.
—*Norman Vincent Peale (1898–1993), American minister and author* ■



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Happiness as constant as the sun

Happiness of the spirit is far above happiness of the flesh, for happiness of the spirit is something that will always be there for you, even through the loneliest nights and the darkest times.

Happiness of the flesh is fleeting; it comes and goes with your circumstances and surroundings, with the things you see and feel and experience physically. But happiness of the spirit comes from knowing that I am your Savior and that I love and watch over you; those truths never change.

The happiness that I give is as constant as the sun. When the sun disappears beneath the horizon at night, do you worry that it's gone forever? No, you realize that it is still there and only out of sight for a time. Night comes and you cannot see the sun, but you never doubt its existence or that it will rise the next morning. So it is with the happiness of the spirit; it is always and forever, like the sun.

When darkness settles on your spirit and you lose sight of happiness, that is the time to trust until morning, until you see and feel the sunshine of My love again. Never doubt. The dawn will come.