

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 13 • Issue 9

REACH FOR THE PRIZE

How to succeed at almost anything

Three Treasures

What good is faith?

The Payoff of Perseverance

Why good things are worth the wait





PERSONALLY SPEAKING

I wish you could meet three people who each made a big impression on me. If you could, you'd understand immediately what this issue of *Activated* is about.

The first was a busboy who cleared my table from his wheelchair with such outgoing charm that I wasn't a bit surprised when the manager told me on my way out that he considered that busboy his most valuable employee. "More people come back for him than for the food," the manager confided.

The second was a blind beggar whose smile and heartfelt blessing has me looking for him whenever I'm in the area. Jesus said that it's more blessed to give than to receive; my blind friend makes believers.

The third was a middle-aged cashier whose "Have a nice day," after who knows how many hours on her feet, was so genuine that she completely turned my day around. Never mind that she said the same thing to every customer before and after me, I was the one drowning in troubles that day and she was my lifesaver.

What is it about people like these three that leaves us envious, not of their circumstances perhaps, but of their cheerful dispositions? Like angels in disguise, these unlikely champions of goodwill seem to say to us, "Join the team!"

In search of their secret, I looked for a common denominator—how they manage not only to rise above adversity, but to take so many others with them—and I think I found it. They all seem so genuinely thankful for what they have that they don't waste time complaining about their lacks and limitations. Such buoyancy comes only from knowing and feeling secure in God's love. If you don't feel that way at this moment, I hope you will by the time you finish reading this issue of *Activated*. Join the team!

Keith Phillips
For *Activated*

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NEVER GIVE UP!



BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

BEN IS A WHITE-HAIRED MAN WHOSE HOUSE I PASS ON MY ERRANDS ROUTE. He always calls out a friendly greeting, and over time we've become good friends. His cheerful demeanor and lively personality make him a joy for me to be around, despite our age difference.

Last spring, Ben slipped on a wet bathroom floor, fell backwards, and hit his head hard. The impact brought on a stroke that resulted in recurring dizzy spells and headaches, blurred vision, permanent damage to his left eye, and loss of stamina.

After his granddaughter phoned with the news, I went to visit Ben in the hospital. I had pictured a sad, sullen Ben greeting me from his wheelchair, but to my surprise I was met by a smile. Ben waved me over to his chair with his usual enthusiasm. His speech was slow and halting and he was evidently in some pain, but Ben's glowing smile never faded. We enjoyed a wonderful time together, sprinkled with Ben's laughter and fresh sense of humor. How could he still be so upbeat after such a debilitating accident?

As if he knew what I was thinking, Ben touched my arm and said, "You

know, Elsa, my dad is already 100 years old, but he's stronger than I am. Recently he fell down a flight of stairs. Most people his age would have died instantly or at least suffered permanent injury. Not Dad! Instead, he immediately got up, turned around, and walked back up the stairs." My mouth dropped open. "I may not have my dad's physical strength," Ben continued, "but I can share his strength of spirit! I'm getting back up again!"

I had a lot to think about on my way home. How many times, when stepping out to try something new or make a lifestyle change or pursue a goal, have I lost my footing and taken a fall? And how many times have I lain there questioning whether I had the strength or will to get up and try again? But each time that I refused to give up, I found deep within me enough strength to get back up.

Failure, disappointments, and setbacks are all part of life, but I can refuse to allow them to get the best of me. As Ben said that day, "As long as I live, I have the choice to not give up!"

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

THREE TREASURES

BY MARIA FONTAINE

I ASKED MYSELF RECENTLY WHAT KEEPS ME STEADY IN TIMES OF CRISIS. What keeps me from giving up and saying, “I don’t want to keep trying,” “I don’t want to give so much,” “I don’t want to care anymore,” “I don’t want my heart broken anymore,” “This burden is too heavy for me to keep carrying.”

What keeps me from doubting God’s promises when all of my faults and failures hang over me like a black

cloud and my feelings threaten to overwhelm me? When I don’t know if I can cope, what keeps me from giving in to that feeling?

If the answer is faith, how does it work? What can I do to have more faith? And then, what does that faith do for me?

As I pondered these questions, some answers came to me—answers that are like jewels in a treasure chest that I can dip into when my faith needs a boost. Here are three of them:

REMINING MYSELF OF GOD’S PROMISES PUTS ME BACK ON SOLID FOOTING. If faith is believing God, what am I believing Him for? Generally, it’s that things are going to turn out all right eventually. Specifically, I usually believe something He has said, some specific promise He has made that fits my particular situation at the time. Here are three examples, which I committed to

memory many years ago and which have always stood firm:

“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”¹

“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able.”²

“Cast your burden on the Lord, and He shall sustain you; He shall never permit the righteous to be moved.”³

My faith in God’s promises has strengthened me and brought me through many difficulties. I feel like I have every reason to keep trusting Him through trying times, because He hasn’t failed me in the past. In His time, He has always pulled me through, answered my questions, given me peace of heart and mind, healed my body, or directed me.

I know He’s not going to go back on His Word; He said so. It doesn’t

1. Psalm 34:19
2. 1 Corinthians 10:13
3. Psalm 55:22
4. 1 Kings 8:56
5. Numbers 23:19
6. 2 Corinthians 1:4
7. James 1:2–4
8. See “Troubled, Yet Not Distressed” on the back cover.
9. Romans 8:18
10. Colossians 1:23 KJV
11. Susan L. Taylor (b. 1946) is an American journalist.



SEEDS OF FAITH ARE ALWAYS WITHIN US; SOMETIMES IT TAKES A CRISIS TO NOURISH AND ENCOURAGE THEIR GROWTH.
—SUSAN L. TAYLOR¹¹

matter what my circumstances are; I choose to put my trust in Him, to keep believing that He has the power to change things.

“There has not failed one word of all His good promise.”⁴

“Has He said, and will He not do? Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?”⁵

KNOWING THAT TOUGH EXPERIENCES PUT ME IN A POSITION TO BETTER HELP OTHERS ENCOURAGES ME TO KEEP GOING. God doesn’t spare us from all trials and tribulations or deliver us from them immediately. Rather, He comforts us as we pass through them—and He does so “that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”⁶

Even if that were the only reward for endurance, it would be worth it. I can’t think of anything that is more satisfying and fulfilling than helping

to bring about wonderful, lasting change in the lives of others by passing on that treasure, that assurance that God is with them in their trouble and will see them through as surely as He has me.

REMEMBERING THAT PATIENCE PAYS OFF HELPS ME HAVE MORE OF IT. Thomas à Kempis wrote, “There is no means of escaping from tribulation and sorrow except to bear them patiently.” That may be true, but on its own it isn’t a very happy thought. When we’re in the middle of a crisis, we need to know that the struggle will be worth it. God gives us that assurance. “Count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience,” James the apostle wrote. “But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.”⁷

And consider what Paul the apostle, who suffered more than most

of us,⁸ was able to say: “I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.” Besides pointing us to the gloriously happy ending, Paul reminds us that our sufferings are for “this present time.” They aren’t going to last forever.

So that’s another thing that helps me “continue in the faith, grounded and settled.”¹⁰ I know from experience that the feelings of turbulence, disappointment, or sadness will pass. In the end, I will come out stronger and better for the experience.

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER AMSTERDAM, ARE DIRECTORS OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL, A CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY OF FAITH. “THREE TREASURES” IS ADAPTED FROM HER *TREASURE CHEST* SERIES. ■



THE FOURTH

BY JOE JOHNSTON

I COLLECT FOUR-LEAF CLOVERS. It's a sort of hobby, like knitting or shooting hoops.

According to the noble creed of clover collectors, each leaf represents something: the first leaf, hope; the second, faith; the third, love; and the fourth, not surprisingly, good fortune. To most of those who are fortunate enough to have found a four-leaf clover, that fourth leaf means a lucky day, health, a kiss from God, or maybe just a sour little snack. To me, that fourth leaf means another precious addition to my collection.

I found my first four-leaf clover five years ago. I was sitting in a gloomy gas station, staring at the two miserable shoes on my feet, when it jumped out at me from a patch of lawn in a corner. It was smiling—the only thing in that gas station with a smile on that cloudy day. I almost

left it where it was, to smile at others, and I did for a while. Even though a hungry bug had eaten a circle out of one leaf, there it sat, beaming at me. After a while, I was beaming back.

I ended up taking it with me. I couldn't help it. That day the fourth leaf represented cheer—and I needed as much of that as I could get. Nothing astonishingly lucky happened though, so I pressed it between the pages of my Bible and all but forgot about it.

It happened to mention it to some friends one day, and ended up passing around the Bible with the bug-eaten fourth leaf still grinning from between its pages. Many of them had never seen a real four-leaf clover, and they all offered to keep their eyes open for contributions to my "collection."

The contributions began to pour in. Just the next week, Jessica

presented me with four she had found and pressed, which I laid carefully in my Bible beside the bug-eaten smiling patriarch. Over the next few weeks, a few other friends brought more. Before long there was a whole little community in my Bible.

I had still only managed to find one.

I did occasionally search for the elusive four-leaves, fingering through whichever velvet patches of green I chanced not to step on. I found many three-leaves, even a few twos, but no fours. I couldn't help but be a little frustrated when Jessica, week after week, brought me two or three little four-leaves for "my" collection.

It has been estimated that there are approximately ten thousand three-leaf clovers for every four-leaf. Who could compete with those odds?

LEAF



STUBBORNLY PERSIST, AND YOU WILL FIND THAT THE LIMITS OF YOUR STUBBORNNESS GO WELL BEYOND THE STUBBORNNESS OF YOUR LIMITS.

—ROBERT BRAULT¹



Well, Jessica, apparently. The next week she brought over seven petite four-leaves, smiling tiny smiles from between her fingers—the fourth leaf, as usual, a little smaller than the rest. (It wasn't fair, I muttered to myself as I stored them away in my Bible. Who had the time to sort through tens of thousands of almos^ts? She babysat kids and often looked for four-leaf clovers while they were playing quietly beside her in the park.)

I turned back to Jessica, intending to lavish upon her my heartfelt appreciation, but before I could say a word she whipped out her crowning contribution with a wicked smirk—a beautiful clover with *six* luscious emerald leaves. Angels sang as I fell to my knees.

1. Robert Brault, American freelance writer; www.robertbrault.com

I couldn't stand it one second longer. When the choir died down and the single beam of piercing light shining down upon on the holy grail of clovers had faded, I gathered that six-leaf clover into my arms and begged Jessica for her secret.

I will never forget her words. "I don't have a secret," she insisted.

Then, suddenly, she stumbled upon an enlightening truth which will hold just as true one thousand years from now as it did then. With pursed lips and sparkling eyes, she whispered, "I don't stop looking till I find one."

How true.

I have since even found a few four-leaf clovers for myself, and my collection now spans the pages of my Bible, both New and Old Testaments. And it all comes back

to that simple principle: Don't stop looking till you find one.

Do ten thousand-to-one odds scare you?—Edison had two thousand failures before he invented the light bulb. But it only took one success to start lighting up the whole world. Who has the time to sort through tens of thousands of almos^ts? That depends on how much you want the prize.

Whether it's clovers or success or love you're looking for, determine that you won't stop until your fingers have closed around your goal. Maybe the very next one will be it.

Maybe that fourth leaf on the clover doesn't represent health, happiness, or good fortune.

Maybe it represents perseverance.

JOE JOHNSTON IS AN AUTHOR AND GHOSTWRITER, LIVING IN MEXICO. ■



THE PAYOFF OF PERSEVERANCE

BY PETER AMSTERDAM

OVER THE YEARS I HAVE SEEN SOME DEAR FRIENDS BE MARVELOUSLY BLESSED BY GOD. Some of these same people had previously gone through what seemed to be a series of incredibly trying times. They had faced a lot of difficulty, had been deeply disappointed, and hadn't seen the fulfillment of their dreams and desires. From time to time, I would

1. Psalm 23:4

comment to my wife, Maria, "It will be so great to see them truly happy!" And the wonderful thing is, today nearly all of them are.

A couple of years ago, I attended a marriage celebration for one of these friends, who had gotten married a few months earlier in another country. After returning home, she and her husband wanted to celebrate with those of us who hadn't been able to attend the ceremony. I knew she had wanted a family for a long time, but things had never worked out. It had been a test for her, but

she had continued to trust that God had a good plan for her life. After years of waiting, God had finally brought the right man into her life, and her into his. She now has a wonderful husband and a beautiful daughter. As hard as I know it was for her to wait, it was worth it.

Seeing her so happy, as well as thinking about other friends who have come through prolonged tests, helps me trust God when times are hard. Each of these friends passed through their own personal "valley of the shadow of death"¹ that was full of difficulties, discouragement, and circumstances beyond their control. In

DELIGHT YOURSELF ALSO IN THE LORD, AND HE SHALL GIVE YOU THE DESIRES OF YOUR HEART. COMMIT YOUR WAY TO THE LORD, TRUST ALSO IN HIM, AND HE SHALL BRING IT TO PASS.

—PSALM 37:4–5

some cases there was no way out but to wait and to trust that in time things would change for the better. The best they could do was to just get through those times, and that meant trusting God while journeying through that valley. Sometimes they would ask me for advice and I would pray for them and try to give them some encouragement or comfort, but often there wasn't really anything that could be done to help in a practical sense.

However, each persevered through their difficulties. They held on to the Lord; they didn't give up; they passed through the valley and came out on the other side. Those difficulties eventually became things of the past. Today, their situations are very different and their lives much happier. Their trust and faith paid off.

Besides the happiness I feel for these friends, I also have great admiration for them. Their particular valleys took a long time to travel

through—years, in some cases. But each held on, each didn't give up, and each is better and happier for it.

Just today, I was reminded of a low time in my own life, when I was faced with the most trying circumstances I had encountered up to that point. There was nothing I could do to remedy the situation except pray and trust God for the outcome—that He would either change the situation or give me the grace to make it through. Thankfully, He did both, and I'm still grateful for it.

During those traumatic weeks, a dear friend gave me a notebook with a number of Bible verses pasted into it. Some nights, all I could do was curl up on my bed and read those verses. Nothing else provided relief. That booklet of verses was my lifesaver.

In time, I passed through that valley. Some years ago, I loaned that same notebook to another friend who was experiencing turbulent times. When she returned it recently, we discussed her journey over the

past years, how she has grown and changed and has much more peace and joy in her life.

These events in others' lives and my own have highlighted for me the importance of trusting God in difficult times. Most trials and tribulations don't pass immediately; sometimes they last a very long time. In the midst of them you may feel as if you're being ripped apart, and sometimes all you can do is cry out to Jesus, hold on desperately to the promises in His Word, fight to survive ... and trust.

Seeing my newly married friend, having another one return my "survival notebook" of Bible verses, and thinking of others who at one time or another felt that they would never be happy again, but now are, reminded me that there is new life after passing through that valley of the shadow of death. It's worth holding on for, worth waiting for, worth fighting for.

PETER AMSTERDAM AND HIS WIFE, MARIA FONTAINE, ARE DIRECTORS OF TFI. ■

11 STEPS TO STRONGER FAITH

1. Spend quality time in God's Word.¹ Read it, listen to it, memorize it, meditate on it. "Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation."²

2. Read accounts of divine intervention. Accounts of answered prayer, both in the Bible and in modern-day settings, put "skin" on God's promised help. What He has done for others, He can do for you.

3. Put God's promises to the test. As you study the Word, make a list of verses that contain promises from God concerning certain circumstances; hold God to those promises when you pray.

4. Stay positive. Look at difficulties, obstacles, and challenges as opportunities to stretch your faith.

1. See Romans 10:17.

2. 1 Peter 2:2 NIV

3. Jeremiah 33:3

5. Take your problems and questions to God in prayer. God says, "Call to Me, and I will answer you, and show you great and mighty things, which you do not know."³ As you learn to work more closely with God to find solutions and answers, you will become more aware of His ever-present love and help.

6. Embrace change. Major changes of circumstance can be unsettling and uncomfortable, but they also create a great environment for faith to blossom in because they force a decision: Will you trust God for the outcome? Each time you do and He comes through, it becomes easier to trust Him to get you through the next difficulty.

7. Pray as though you expect, not merely hope for, the best. When you thank God for answering your prayers even before you see those answers, it takes the focus off of the need at hand and puts it on God's ability to fill that need.

8. Keep a prayer log detailing what you prayed for and when, and then check off the items as they are answered. From time to time, go back and review the results.

9. Keep a log of promises claimed and fulfilled. Record which of God's promises you claimed in each specific situation, and review the list when you need a boost of faith to get you over your next hurdle.

10. Make Word-based decisions. The more you learn to operate according to the principles and promises of God's Word, the more of God's power you will experience, which will in turn increase your faith as you take other needs to Him in prayer.

11. Testify of God's power to others. Telling others about how God has helped you will strengthen your faith and theirs. ■



REACH FOR THE PRIZE

BY ARIANA ANDREASSEN

I DON'T KNOW HOW AN ELEPHANT SURVIVES 22 MONTHS OF PREGNANCY. I have been pregnant twice, and nine months is more than enough for me. For weeks I couldn't wait for the baby to be born, but then when I was in the throes of labor it seemed there would be no end to my suffering.

About 30 minutes before Lisa, my second child, was born, I was ready to give up. But I held out just a little longer, and there she was—my reward!

I have a friend who is so slim and fit you would never guess that she has given birth 13 times (you read correctly) whereas after only two I have struggled to lose weight. I asked her for her secret, and she said that the only way she was able

to regain her figure each time was to keep focused on her goal of losing all of that extra weight she had put on during her pregnancy. Everyone around her could be eating pizza or icecream, but she would tell herself that the tuna or carrots she was eating instead were inching her closer to her goal.

In Philippians 3:14, Paul talks about pressing forward to the prize of the high calling of God. In my case, Anthony and Lisa were my prizes. I had to endure a combined 18 months of pregnancy and more than 30 hours of labor in order to get them (and I am still running on the treadmill to lose the extra weight I gained), but my darling children are more than worth it!

You might be shooting for success at work or marriage, a good score on the next exam, or fitting into those

slim jeans, but whatever it is, you will only succeed if you stick with it. Cutting corners at work or with your spouse will not help you in your job or in your marriage; going to the movies instead of studying won't help you at exam time; and eating doughnuts will make those jeans even tighter.

The Roman poet Persius wrote, "He conquers who endures." If you want to reach your goals, you cannot give up. The end result will be worthwhile.

"Let us lay aside every weight, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith."¹

ARIANA ANDREASSEN IS A TEACHER AND MOTHER OF TWO (PICTURED ABOVE) IN THAILAND. ■

1. Hebrews 12:1-2

How to Get God's Answers to Your Prayers

FEEDING READING

BE RIGHT WITH GOD.

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy.

—*Proverbs 28:13*

If our heart does not condemn us, we have confidence toward God.

—*1 John 3:21*

MEMORIZE PROMISES; FIND AUTHORITY IN GOD'S WORD AND FAITH WILL FOLLOW.

Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

—*Romans 10:17*

Not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord spoke.

—*Joshua 23:14*

Keep my commands and live, and my law as the apple of your eye. Bind them on your fingers; write them on the tablet of your heart.

—*Proverbs 7:2-3*

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away.—*Matthew 24:35*

By which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature.

—*2 Peter 1:4*

BE DEFINITE ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT GOD TO DO.

Let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a wave of the sea driven and tossed by the wind.—*James 1:6*

EXPECT FROM GOD.

Whatever things you ask when you pray, believe that you receive them, and you will have them.

—*Mark 11:24*

Let us ... come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain

mercy and find grace to help in time of need.—*Hebrews 4:16*

ACCEPT FROM GOD. THERE COMES A TIME TO CEASE PRAYING BECAUSE YOU KNOW GOD HAS HEARD AND THE ANSWER IS ON ITS WAY.

This is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we *have* the petitions that we have asked of Him.

—*1 John 5:14-15, emphasis added*

STAND YOUR GROUND IN FAITH AND TRUST, EVEN IF YOU DON'T SEE THE ANSWER IMMEDIATELY.

Not being weak in faith, [Abraham] did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did

not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.—*Romans 4:19–21*

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful.

—*Hebrews 10:23*

Do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise.

—*Hebrews 10:35–36*

PUT YOUR FAITH INTO ACTION.

Naaman, commander of the army of the king of Syria, was a

1. Philip Yancey, *Prayer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 33

great and honorable man, but a leper. And Elisha sent a messenger to him, saying, “Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and your flesh shall be restored to you, and you shall be clean.” So he went down and dipped seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

—*2 Kings 5:1, 10, 14*

And Peter said, “Lord, if it is You, command me to come to You on the water.” So He said, “Come.” And when Peter had come down out of the boat, he walked on the water to go to Jesus.—*Matthew 14:28–29*

[Jesus] said to [the lepers], “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.—*Luke 17:14*

When he heard that Jesus had come out of Judea into Galilee, he went to Him and implored Him to come

NORWEGIAN THEOLOGIAN OLE HALLESBY SETTLED ON THE SINGLE WORD *HELPLESS* AS THE BEST SUMMARY OF THE HEART ATTITUDE THAT GOD ACCEPTS AS PRAYER. “WHETHER IT TAKES THE FORM OF WORDS OR NOT, DOES NOT MEAN ANYTHING TO GOD, ONLY TO OURSELVES,” HE ADDS. “ONLY HE WHO IS HELPLESS CAN TRULY PRAY.”¹

down and heal his son, for he was at the point of death. Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your son lives.” So the man believed the word that Jesus spoke to him, and he went his way. And as he was now going down, his servants met him and told him, saying, “Your son lives!”—*John 4:47, 50–51*

As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.—*James 2:26*

THANK HIM FOR HEARING AND ANSWERING YOUR PRAYER, EVEN BEFORE YOU SEE THE ANSWER.

Blessed be the Lord, because He has heard the voice of my supplications!—*Psalms 28:6*

You have turned for me my mourning into dancing; You have ... clothed me with gladness. O Lord my God, I will give thanks to You forever.—*Psalms 30:11–12* ■



POINTS TO PONDER

Optimism

COMPILED BY SAMUEL KEATING

FOR THE SORROWING EVERY DAY IS EVIL, FOR THE JOYOUS HEART IT IS FESTIVAL ALWAYS.
—*Proverbs 15:15 TJB*

If you will call your troubles experiences, and remember that every experience develops some latent force within you, you will grow vigorous and happy, however adverse your circumstances may seem to be.
—*John Heywood (1497–1580), English playwright and poet*

What seems to us as bitter trials are often blessings in disguise.
—*Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), Irish poet, novelist, dramatist, and critic*

A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty.
—*Winston Churchill (1874–1965), British orator, author, and prime minister during World War II*

Optimist: Person who travels on nothing from nowhere to happiness.—*Mark Twain (1835–1910), American humorist, writer, and lecturer*

I'm not afraid of storms, for I'm learning how to sail my ship.
—*Louisa May Alcott (1832–1888), American author known for her children's books, especially the classic Little Women*

A pessimist only sees the dark side of the clouds, and mopes; a philosopher sees both sides and shrugs; an optimist doesn't see the clouds at all—he's walking on them.
—*Leonard L. Levinson (1904–1974), American producer, writer, and director*

Deep, solemn optimism, it seems to me, should spring from this firm belief in the presence of God in the individual; not a remote, unapproachable governor of the universe, but a God who is very near every one of us, who is present not only in earth, sea and sky, but also in every pure and noble impulse of our hearts.—*Helen Keller (1880–1968), American author and educator who was blind and deaf*

Keep your thoughts positive, because your thoughts become your words.

Keep your words positive, because your words become your behavior.

Keep your behavior positive, because your behavior becomes your habits.

Keep your habits positive, because your habits become your values.

Keep your values positive, because your values become your destiny.
—*Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948), the preeminent political and ideological leader of India during the Indian independence movement*

There are always flowers for those who want to see them.
—*Henri Matisse (1869–1954), French artist and sculptor*

Happiness is what we make it. Some people are unbelievably cheerful in the midst of difficulty or obstacles; others bemoan the slightest inconvenience. Those who look for the upside of any trouble are the ones who come out ahead in quality of life, and the radiance of their positive attitude sheds light on the paths of others.—*Chloe West (b. 1947), American writer* ■

REGAINING FOCUS

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

BY ABI F. MAY

LIFE IS FULL OF BUSY MOMENTS, tasks, and responsibilities that are each connected to jobs, studies, family, friends, or home life. The moments turn into hours, which turn into days and weeks and years. It seems there is a never-ending stream of things to take care of. Then one morning, you wake up and feel at a loss. Where are you headed? It's hard to keep a sense of direction when your vision is blurred.

This spiritual exercise can help you regain your focus. Sit down in a quiet place and follow the story of the blind man at Bethsaida:¹

Then [Jesus] came to Bethsaida; and they brought a blind man to Him, and begged Him to touch him. So He took the blind man by the hand and led him out of the town.

Picture yourself as this man. Tell Jesus you need His help. Describe your problems. Then let Him take your hand in His. You can't see where you're going, but He is leading you "out of town" in spirit, to a place of peace, where you don't need to be busy and active.

And when He [Jesus] had ... put His hands on him, He asked him if he saw anything. And he looked up and said, "I see men like trees, walking." Then He put His hands on his eyes again and made him look up. And he was restored and saw everyone clearly.

It was during the time that the blind man was aside with Jesus that the miracle of healing took place. It wasn't something to be hurried; it took a while, not only for his sight to be restored, but also for him to regain full focus.

Like a blind man, close your eyes and let the reassurance of the


Lord's presence bring calm to your spirit. You can't rush it. If you open your eyes too soon, things will still be fuzzy. Take time to share your requests with the Lord, to tell Him what's burdening you, and also the things you hope for.

Now open your eyes. While you rested in prayer and meditation, the Lord was working. Even if things still aren't as clear as you would like them to be, have patience—the more time you take with the Lord, the more your vision will be restored, just as surely as the blind man eventually saw clearly.

The next time your vision is hazy, remember that you can call on Jesus, let Him hold your hand, step aside with Him, and let Him work. He will restore your sight.

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1. Mark 8:22–25



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

Troubled, yet not distressed

If you think you have troubles, consider My apostle Paul: He was whipped on five occasions and beaten with rods on another. He was stoned and left for dead. He was shipwrecked three times, and spent a night and a day in the deep. He went through perils at sea, perils in the wilderness, and perils in cities. He suffered at the hands of robbers, his own countrymen, strangers, and even those who wrongly thought they were acting for Me. He was imprisoned and deprived of basic needs many times.¹

Yet through all that, Paul kept trusting Me and pointing others to Me with such declarations of faith as: “We are troubled on every

side, yet not distressed,” and “In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”²

Paul had great faith, yes, but don't forget that he was as human as you. He had a wonderful personal link with Me that millions since have revered, but what most people fail to realize is that this was born of the troubles that befell him. He learned to turn to Me and My Word in his time of need—and you can too.

Will you allow yourself to be distressed by present or future troubles? Or will you hold on to Me for dear life, as Paul did? I will always be there for you, as I was always there for him.

1. 2 Corinthians 11:24–28; Acts 16:23

2. 2 Corinthians 4:8 KJV; Romans 8:37