

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 15 • Issue 10



RIDING THE DRAGON

Face your fears

Coming Through

He's always with you

Dealing With Disappointment

Developing resilience



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION LIGHT IN DARK PLACES

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*,¹ the elven “Lady of Light” Galadriel presents Frodo with a crystal phial containing the light of Eärendil’s star. “It will shine brighter when night is about you,” she promises; and sure enough, over the course of their quest, Frodo and Sam use the light on a number of occa-

sions to avoid harm.

The Phial of Galadriel wasn’t only a lamp to light their physical way, but it could also infuse courage and hope into the bearer. Such a gift would come in handy for sure on our own journey through life, but even the light of Eärendil was occasionally subdued in a hostile environment. This issue of *Activated* is about an even more potent light that nothing is able to dim.

Speaking of Himself, Jesus said, “The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it. I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life.”²

God’s light has the power to soften the sting of wounds and heal the loneliness and sickness of our souls. In the furrows of despair, it can plant the seeds of hope and enlighten the deepest valleys of sorrow. It can illuminate the path and lead us through the darkest night into a new dawn.

Even though we encounter difficulties and hardships along our way, even though it sometimes feels like the darkness of fear, worry, or doubt is closing in, we can trust that God’s light and love will always be with us. “God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble.”³ “He won’t let you down, and he won’t abandon you.”⁴

May He be a light to you in dark places, when all other lights go out.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. J.R.R. Tolkien, 1954
2. John 1:5 NLT; John 8:12
3. Psalm 46:1 NLT
4. Deuteronomy 31:6 CEB

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DOWN IN THE SALT MINES

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

Photo: Nightman1965 / Shutterstock.com

WE WENT DOWN 378 SPIRALING STEPS into the Wieliczka Salt Mine in southern Poland, wondering what we would find and thinking about how easy it would be to get lost in the underground maze around us. I marveled at how anyone could spend so much of their life underground and retain their sanity.

As we passed through various chambers, we were shown sculptures in the salt. Hundreds of years ago, some anonymous miner in the depths of the earth saw the candle-light reflected in the salt and realized that it could be a wonderful medium for carving. Perhaps he dreamed of being an artist like Leonardo da Vinci or Michelangelo. Maybe he spent his lunch or after-work hours creating his own masterpiece, one that would never be on display in a sumptuous

museum or sunlit cathedral. It would only serve to inspire other miners like himself. Perhaps he hoped that in the deep he could show them the way to God. Eventually, others began to carve as well.

Four hundred forty-three feet beneath the surface of the earth, the miners created a chapel. On the walls, they depicted the life of Jesus, from the nativity to the resurrection. Maybe they realized that they desperately needed God's protection and care as they entered the forbidding darkness.

Who would have thought that light shining on salt would cause it to gleam like marble? Who could imagine that men who do such manual labor would have time and inspiration to create masterpieces? Our guide invited us to test the acoustics, reputed to be some of the best in the world, and told us how

people still bring their children into the salt mines if they have asthma or allergies to benefit from the healing power of the salty air.

After an elevator ride back to the surface, I continued thinking about the salt mine. I'm not a sculptor, artist, or composer, but it's important to me that I am able to create something through my writing. Whatever you do can become something that will inspire others.

Life is not all sunlight and blue skies. Even in the dark places, a tiny candle can lead us to find our purpose. The sweat and tears won't last, but the beauty we create in the spaces of our lives can live on and enlighten someone else's darkness.

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



COMING THROUGH

BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED

LIGHT IS APPRECIATED AND VALUED, because we've experienced darkness. Hope is truly valued after we've experienced despair. Our blessings bring us the greatest joy, because we've experienced life without them. We value health because we've experienced sickness, and we understand the value of being loved because we know what it's like to feel loneliness.

I don't think there is anyone who enjoys the suffering, the difficulties, the sickness, the pain, and the hardships of life; yet Paul tells us in the Bible that he is "glad to boast about [his] weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through [him]."¹ When we can look to God in whatever life brings, His power gives us the strength to endure and gain all the good that He has promised to bring about.

Here are a few thoughts from some who discovered that when

they turned to God in times of trouble, He walked by their side through it all.

Thankfulness is the secret of joy.
—*Author unknown*

We human beings instinctively regard the seen world as the "real" world and the unseen world as the "unreal" world, but the Bible calls for almost the opposite.
—*Philip Yancey (b. 1949)*

Every truth about suffering can be twisted into a weapon for or against God. Most often, suffering speeds us in the direction we are already heading—whether toward or away from God.—*David McKenna*

Don't shake your head when you see a mom or dad with a Down syndrome child and say, No way could I face that. Most likely you couldn't. Which is precisely why

God hasn't asked you to. Instead, take time to seriously consider how you will remain joyful within your own particular, unique, individual situation. Accept your circumstances as a gift from His hand. Dare to thank Him for them.—*Joni Eareckson Tada (b. 1949)*

Think of your worst moments, your sorrows, your losses, your sadness, and then remember that here you are, able to remember them. You got through the worst day of your life. You got through the trauma, you got through the trial, you endured the temptation, you survived the bad relationship, you're making your way out of the dark. Remember the bad things ... then look to see where you are. When we remember how difficult life used to be and how far we have come, we set up an explicit contrast in our mind, and this contrast is fertile ground for gratefulness.—*Reverend Peter Gomes (1942–2011)*

1. 2 Corinthians 12:9 NLT



In suffering—pray that the trial increases your capacity for faith.

—*Bob O'Bannon*

Don't pray for a lighter burden. Pray for a stronger back.—*Author unknown*

Whenever you feel yourselves weak, do not say, "I am weak," but seek the remedy—for it is God's Word.

—*John Calvin (1509–1564)*

In times of trouble say, first: He brought me here; it is by His will I am in this strait place, in that I will rest. Next: He will keep me here in His love, and give me grace in this trial to behave as His child. Then: He will make the trial a blessing, teaching me the lessons He intends me to learn, and working in me the grace He means to bestow. Last: In His good time He can bring me out again—how and when He knows. Say: I am here (1) by God's

appointment, (2) in His keeping, (3) under His training, (4) for His time.—*Andrew Murray (1828–1917)*

God is not concerned about our plans; He doesn't ask, "Do you want to go through the loss of a loved one, this difficulty or this defeat?" No, He allows these things for His own purpose. The things we are going through are either making us sweeter, better, and nobler men and women, or they are making us more critical and fault-finding and more insistent on our own way. The things that happen either make us evil or they make us more saintly, depending entirely on our relationship with God and its level of intimacy.

—*Oswald Chambers (1874–1917)*

No test or temptation that comes your way is beyond the course of what others have had to face. All you need to remember is that God will never let you down; he'll never

let you be pushed past your limit; he'll always be there to help you come through it.—*1 Corinthians 10:13 MSG*

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

I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times, I've been trusted to take the game-winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.—*Michael Jordan (b. 1963), former professional basketball player, considered by the NBA to be "the greatest basketball player of all time"*



MOMENT BY MOMENT

BY KOOS STENGER

WHEN OUR SON PETE WAS THREE, he was diagnosed with leukemia, and from one moment to the next, our lives changed drastically. There are no instruction manuals that can prepare you for how to cope when your child is facing a life-threatening disease. Even though we found shelter in the loving arms of Jesus, our tender Shepherd, we still had to find a way to face the scary events of the following weeks and months.

Finally, there was light at the end of the tunnel: The doctors pronounced Pete healed. But in reality the challenge was not over; years later, the ugly monster raised its foul head again, not once but twice.

When the cancer returned the first time, we were in South Africa, an unfamiliar country with a different

language, culture, and medical system from what we were used to. But the fears and pain were the same, along with the interminable waiting for the tiniest signs of improvement. The improvement did come, and again it seemed he was cured ... until three years later, we were stunned to discover that our son's cancer had returned yet again.

Still only ten years old, Pete was facing his third bout with the illness.

We cried and agonized. We didn't understand God's reasons, but we felt His presence ever by our side. I was pretty sure I could relate to how the apostle Paul must have felt when he wrote, "We are pressed on every side by troubles, but we are not crushed. We are perplexed, but not driven to despair. We are ... never abandoned by God. We get knocked down, but we are not destroyed."¹

And so once more we held on desperately.

Back at the hospital, the doctor was explaining that the best possibility for permanent healing was a bone marrow transplant, but everyone in our family had already been tested. None of us were a match.

"Let's test again," he advised.

The next week the doctor met us with a smile. "Your youngest son is a close enough match," he said.

It was no instant victory. Again it took days, weeks, and months before Pete was out of danger. But he pulled through and has been cancer-free for the past ten years.

How do you survive a crisis? You hold the hand of the Shepherd, moment by moment, hour by hour, day by day.

KOOS STENGER IS A FREELANCE WRITER IN THE NETHERLANDS. ■

1. 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 NLT

FACE THE STORM

BY ANNE SPRING

QUITE A FEW YEARS AGO, our small family was traveling on a freighter from Europe to our new field of service in South America. Due to long delays in the loading of the ship's cargo, we found ourselves setting sail in the dead of the Mediterranean winter, the same time of year as the apostle Paul was shipwrecked off the coast of Malta.¹ We joked about that and casually prayed that our fate would not be the same as his.

As it happened, only two days out of port, we were caught in a storm with hurricane-force gales. Though our ship was fully loaded and lying deep in the water, it reeled violently. The children were young and thought it was great fun, but

the rest of us struggled to keep our composure intact and our stomachs where they belonged. Even the seasoned crew members were seasick.

We heard radio reports of other ships in difficulty. There was nothing I could do practically to change the situation, but I could pray, which I did, like I had never prayed before!

Go to the bridge! I immediately recognized that voice in my mind as Jesus. *The captain is also praying. Pray with him and encourage his faith.*

When I stood up and took my first stumbling steps, I didn't know how I'd make it to the bridge, but I managed somehow. The captain was there alone, and yes, he was praying. We held vigil together until we passed below Sicily, which shielded

us from the worst of the wind. The ship and its contents had sustained some damage, but no one had been hurt.

The lessons from this experience came to mind again recently during some difficulties: *Get up there on the bridge, they seemed to instruct, and take firm hold of the Captain's hand. Jesus is our Pilot, and together we will soon be in safer waters.*

It's human nature to evade difficulty, to hide from it and hope it goes away, but that's not the way of winners. Don't take the storms lying down. The battles of life sometimes seem overwhelming, but the victory is worth fighting for.

ANNE SPRING IS AN AUTHOR AND CHRISTIAN HUMANITARIAN AID WORKER IN THE BALKANS. ■

1. See Acts 27–28.

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

riding the dragon



STRAPPING ON MY HARNESS AND CHECKING MY GEAR TO MAKE SURE IT WAS SECURE, I held the reins tightly in my hands. The winged creature lurched, squirmed, wriggled, and writhed to free itself from its restraints and heave me into the abyss. My keepers, one at either side, were able to contain its fury, but it took all of their skill and stamina to keep it from sweeping me off my feet and carrying me up into its lair.

The voice on the radio startled me back into reality. “Hands back, palms facing up, lean forward, look straight ahead ... launch position!” It was Avi, our master instructor; the mentor determined to give us the skill to defy gravity and soar, and most of all, to land safely afterwards. “Launching is optional, landing is not,” he was fond of saying. I reassured myself that all was well, remembering our instructors’ unblemished safety record.

It was the end of our paragliding course. All the theory of lift, drag, and attack we had learned about would be pointless unless I now took the leap off this hill. *Just keep calm and follow instructions!* I repeated as a mantra.

As I stood poised for launch, an eagle soared effortlessly overhead whirling in circles. He barely flapped his wings as he caught a rising thermal. I thought of a verse, “They will soar high on wings like eagles.”¹

My radio crackled again. “Are you ready?”

I nodded and took a few deep breaths, trying not to panic. What had Avi told us? “Panic is one step before accidents. When you panic, your subconscious takes over and causes you to make mistakes.”

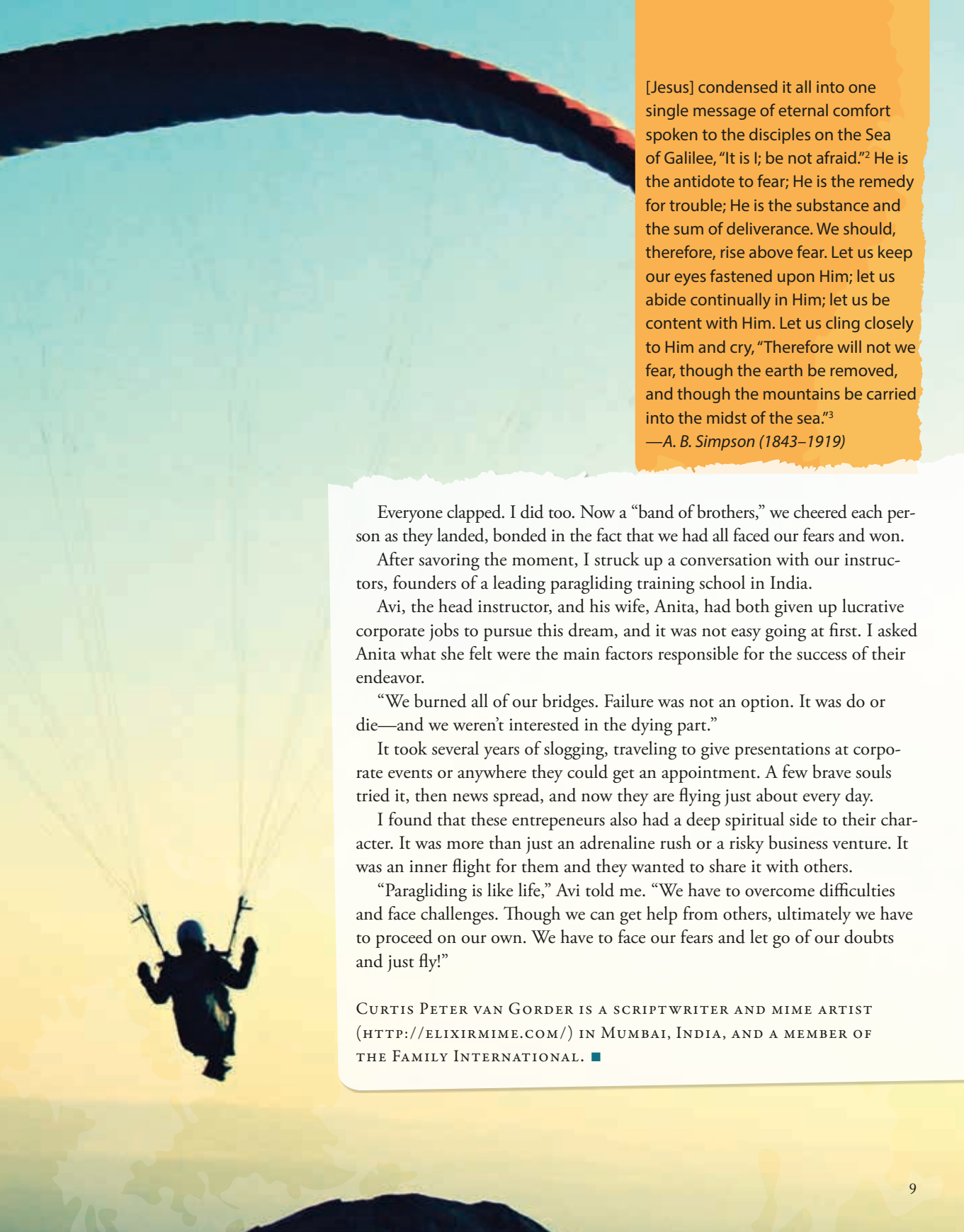
Hands back, my chute caught the wind, inflated, and pulled me back. I bent forward and looked up. Now, I was committed, there was no turning back. I knew the next step was to run. Like life, if we lack energy to move toward our goal, circumstances will begin working against us. If I lost speed, the glider would begin its own journey sideways. I had to tell it what I wanted it to do. *Fly! Land me safely!*

“Run!”

Two steps and I was up. That was easier than I’d thought, more like riding a ski lift than a plane. I was flying high, enjoying the majestic view of blue mountains over a clear lake. I pulled gently on the brake to turn right. It obeyed, then left and right again, then in for the landing and touchdown—not as gently as I’d hoped, but not too rough either, for a first time.

I started critiquing my landing and telling Avi how I would do better next time. “Don’t be so hard on yourself,” he chided. “All safe landings are successful landings.”

1. Isaiah 40:31 NLT
2. Matthew 14:27 KJV
3. Psalm 46:2 KJV



[Jesus] condensed it all into one single message of eternal comfort spoken to the disciples on the Sea of Galilee, "It is I; be not afraid."² He is the antidote to fear; He is the remedy for trouble; He is the substance and the sum of deliverance. We should, therefore, rise above fear. Let us keep our eyes fastened upon Him; let us abide continually in Him; let us be content with Him. Let us cling closely to Him and cry, "Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea."³

—A. B. Simpson (1843–1919)

Everyone clapped. I did too. Now a "band of brothers," we cheered each person as they landed, bonded in the fact that we had all faced our fears and won.

After savoring the moment, I struck up a conversation with our instructors, founders of a leading paragliding training school in India.

Avi, the head instructor, and his wife, Anita, had both given up lucrative corporate jobs to pursue this dream, and it was not easy going at first. I asked Anita what she felt were the main factors responsible for the success of their endeavor.

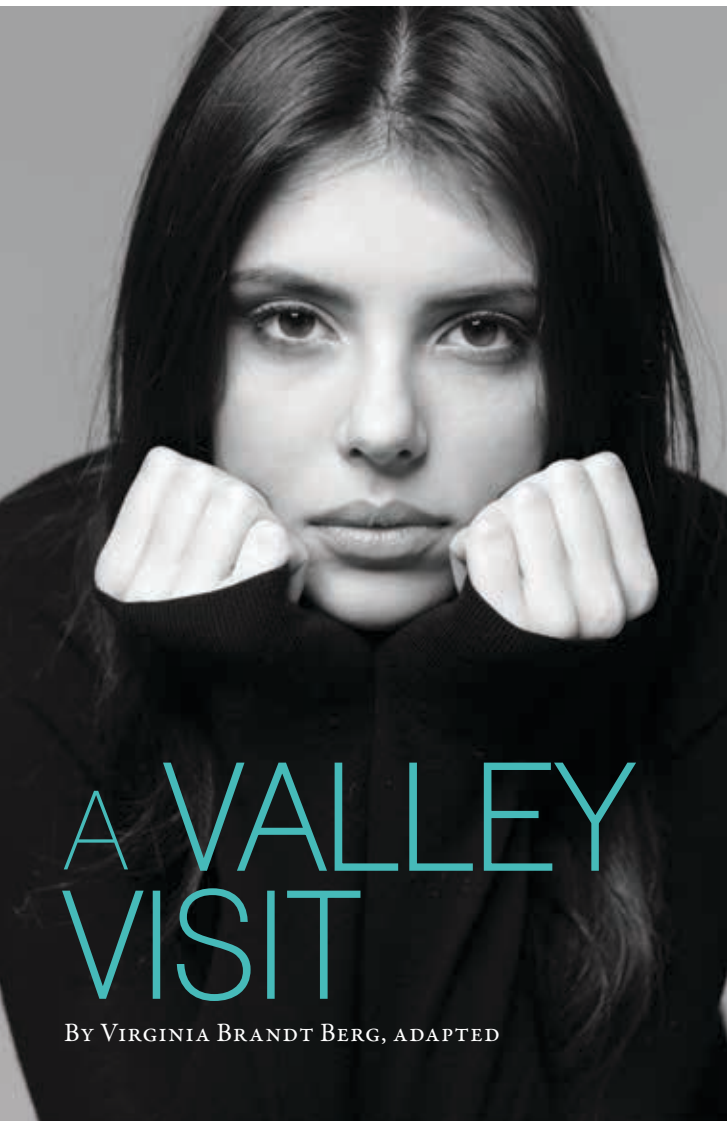
"We burned all of our bridges. Failure was not an option. It was do or die—and we weren't interested in the dying part."

It took several years of slogging, traveling to give presentations at corporate events or anywhere they could get an appointment. A few brave souls tried it, then news spread, and now they are flying just about every day.

I found that these entrepreneurs also had a deep spiritual side to their character. It was more than just an adrenaline rush or a risky business venture. It was an inner flight for them and they wanted to share it with others.

"Paragliding is like life," Avi told me. "We have to overcome difficulties and face challenges. Though we can get help from others, ultimately we have to proceed on our own. We have to face our fears and let go of our doubts and just fly!"

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST ([HTTP://ELIXIRMIME.COM/](http://elixirmime.com/)) IN MUMBAI, INDIA, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■



A VALLEY VISIT

BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG, ADAPTED

THE HEBREW WORD *BAKAH* MEANS “WEEPING,” and in Bible times there was a valley in Israel called by that name. Figuratively, the Valley of Baca is a place where all of us have been at some time or other. It’s a place of suffering, sorrow, hardship; a dry, dusty, desert place.

Psalms 84 brings out the beautiful thought that whenever we pass through such a place, we have an opportunity to turn that difficulty or disappointment, that sorrow or hardship, whatever it may be, into a blessing. “As they pass through the Valley of

1. Psalm 84:6–7
2. Romans 8:37
3. See Psalm 61:2.

Baca, they make it a spring. The rain also covers it with pools. They go from strength to strength.”¹

I’m reminded of a friend who has done just that. Some time ago, he became gravely ill. Although it looked like the end of his active, productive life, he turned his Valley of Baca into a great blessing. He “dug a well there,” and as a result, he has become an even greater encouragement to others. He let his “Baca” bring out the best in him; he transformed his “desert” into a beautiful place, by digging down into his heart and deep into God’s Word.

When you can stand on the promises of God and trust in His goodness, even in time of sorrow and distress, others will see your faith, and it will be to you and them as a well in a hard, dry, dusty place. That’s when your faith shines brightest: when it causes you to rise above difficulty.

We can find the strength to thrive despite our circumstances, because we have a loving, all-powerful God and all of His wonderful promises to sustain us. “In all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us.”² We are not to stay in that dry, desolate valley, nor are we to merely endure troubles. By drawing close to God and standing upon His Word, we find many divinely given living waters springing up.

It’s something to remember the next time you find yourself in the Valley of Baca.

VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG (1886–1968) WAS AN AMERICAN EVANGELIST AND PASTOR. ■

When the difficulties and sorrows are overwhelming, you can find comfort and reassurance in Jesus.³

Jesus, I want You to be my comfort in time of sorrow, my protection in time of trouble, and my friend at all times. . Please come into my life and stay by my side always.



BY ELENA SICHROVSKY

THE PAYOFF OF PERSEVERANCE

“YOU ARE BRAVER THAN YOU BELIEVE, stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think.”—*Christopher Robin (A. A. Milne)*

The first time I read this quote, I thought of a story I had just read about a young man with extraordinary athletic skill and ability. At just nineteen years old, Rafael Nadal already knew that he wanted to be a world champion tennis player. It was 2005, and having won his first Grand Slam title that year and charged up to No. 2 in the ATP rankings, he seemed poised to scale the heights of greater success. However, after several weeks of discomfort in his left foot, the doctors discovered he had been born with a rare foot disease that caused one of the bones in his foot to swell and inflict frequent intense

pain, with the potential to halt his entire career overnight.

This twist of fate tore through Rafa’s youthful aspirations. Unable to walk, much less play tennis, he slipped into a dark spiral of depression. He spent hours lying on the sofa staring into space or sitting in the bathroom weeping. “I didn’t laugh, I didn’t smile, I didn’t want to talk. I lost all appetite for life,” he said later.

At that point, Rafa had to make a pivotal decision: He could give up or go on. He could choose the easier path, but forfeit the potential rewards on the rugged way. He chose to press ahead, to focus on victory, even if he only saw and felt defeat. It was not an easy choice; he continued to suffer injuries and difficulties with his foot problem, but his determination paid

off when, three years later, he stood as the world’s number one tennis player.

There are times when life deals us a harsh and bitter hand. Our dreams are broken, our hope is gone, and we are lost in despair. But even if all circumstances point to defeat, we can choose to live in victory. We can choose to hold on day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment. We can choose to try again, even if we are afraid of failing. We can choose to love again, even if we have been hurt. We can choose to give, even if we have suffered loss. And one day, we too will emerge from our dark nights into a brilliant sunrise.

ELENA SICHROVSKY IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND MISSIONARY VOLUNTEER IN TAIWAN. ■

dealing with disappointment

BY GLORIA CRUZ

WHO HASN'T EXPERIENCED DISAPPOINTMENT ON OCCASION? Maybe a friend failed you; maybe anticipated recognition at work did not materialize; perhaps what you thought would be a lifetime of love in your marriage ended prematurely in divorce; maybe you had big dreams for your children and they took a different path.

The Bible contains a number of stories of parents who had to cope with disappointing offspring. Absalom wanted his father David's throne and actually raised up an army in open rebellion against his rule.¹

Moses is another Bible character who faced disappointment. God had chosen him to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and they eventually made it to the wilderness of Sin; but while Moses was on the mountain receiving the Ten Commandments from God, the people turned from God and worshipped a golden calf. Moses was so disappointed and angry that he smashed the tablets of stone containing God's words. He then had to return to the mountain to receive them again.²

When we are disappointed because our expectations about something or someone are unfulfilled, we may become discouraged, lose trust, and even close ourselves off to others. We can become unhappy, resentful, bitter, and angry; and in the long run, this can negatively affect our health. While these are natural reactions, there is a better way. In fact, disappointment needn't destroy us; it can teach us.

Here are four tips for dealing with disappointment:

1

Accept that people are not perfect, nor are they the same as you. They don't think exactly the same as you do, don't see things the way you do, and often don't react to circumstances the same way you do. Recognize and understand that others' priorities aren't necessarily the same as yours.

2

Accept that there are all kinds of situations in life, some of which you'll like and some you won't. Life doesn't have to be perfect, entirely happy, or entirely successful to be worthwhile.

3

Learn to be flexible when facing a situation that isn't turning out as you'd hoped. A dry branch breaks when you put pressure on it, but a green branch full of life bends instead.

4

Look for the positive side of each situation and ask yourself, *What can I learn from this? How can I use it as something positive?* If we seek God in each situation we face, what could have been negative can turn into something positive.

1. See 2 Samuel 15.

2. See Exodus 32:15–35.

GLORIA CRUZ IS A CHRISTIAN LIFE COACH FOR WOMEN IN SPAIN. ■



WINTER IS COMING

BY PHILLIP LYNCH

I DISLIKE COLD, icy, snowy winters. That is a big reason I was happy living in Mexico for many years. But now my wife and I are in Canada, and yesterday it snowed. It is early in the year for snow, and they were wispy flakes that didn't stick, but they were a harbinger of what is sure to follow. It has been below zero most nights and not much above it in the daytime. Did I already say I dislike winter?

To be forewarned is to be forearmed, but I wonder if in this case it is just making me suffer in my mind today what I might have to endure tomorrow. And that is just the opposite of what the Bible says to do. "Do not worry or be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will have worries and anxieties of its own," Jesus said to His disciples. "Sufficient for each day is its own trouble."¹ Now that doesn't mean not to prepare for the future, but it does mean we aren't supposed to let worries about bad things that might happen tomorrow ruin our today.

The apostle James said to not count on tomorrow at all. "Come now, you who say, 'Today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a city and spend a year there and carry on our business and make money.' Yet you do not know [the least thing] about what may happen tomorrow. What is the nature of your life? You are [really] but a wisp of vapor (a puff of smoke, a mist) that is visible for a little while and then disappears [into thin air]."²

I might not even be around tomorrow, let alone for the winter. I could be like Mark Twain who wrote, "I am an old man and have known a great many troubles, most of which never happened."

And really, when it comes down to it, endurance isn't that hard. If I can just take things day by day, every day that passes is one fewer to worry about. If I can make it through one day, making it through the next probably won't seem quite as hard. So when the snow here is up to the window tops in a few months, it will simply mean that winter is peaking and soon it will be over.

I'll survive. I might even learn to ski.

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

1. Matthew 6:34 AMP
2. James 4:13-14 AMP



HARD KNOCKS

BY MARIE BOISJOLY

HAVE YOU EVER WONDERED WHY IT IS THAT FROM TIME TO TIME YOU FIND YOURSELF GOING THROUGH THE SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS? Just when you're thriving on some "ups" in your life, something happens that brings you down a few notches on the happiness scale. "Why me?" "Why this?" "Why now?" Instead of helping to turn things around, those questions only make matters worse. Finally you remind yourself that even if you don't understand and can't see anything good coming from your present struggles, God can. He's always got a plan. So you decide to trust Him and hold on, and He works things out in the end.

Not long ago, I was somewhere between the questioning and trusting phases of that cycle when my

husband, Ivo, returned from his daily jog and told me about something he had just seen. We live in a hilltop neighborhood with lots of flowering trees and lovely gardens. That's perfect for Ivo, since he is both an avid exerciser and a skilled gardener.

Each morning he passes a certain *glorieta*—a square with a fountain, some flowers, and lush grass—and that day he had noticed a patch of grass that was turning brown due to lack of water. The rest of the lawn was receiving plenty of water from the sprinkler system, but one failing sprinkler was causing this section to dry out and die.

Just as Ivo stopped to investigate, the neighborhood gardener passed by and also saw the problem. The gardener walked over to the defective sprinkler, pulled a hammer from his

bag of tools, and gave a few short, sharp knocks to the sprinkler head. Apparently some dirt had made its way into the sprinkler system and clogged the head, but those few knocks shook it loose. Right away the water started flowing through the sprinkler again, and with enough pressure to cover the neglected area. In time, that patch of grass would be green and beautiful again, like the rest of the lawn.

God, like that gardener, sometimes allows life to give us a few hard knocks to cleanse us, so we can do better at beautifying our part of His garden.

MARIE BOISJOLY IS A LAUGHTER THERAPIST AND DIRECTOR OF COLOREANDO EL MUNDO, AN INTERACTIVE CLOWN AND PUPPET SHOW IN MEXICO. ■

QUIET MOMENTS
BY ABI MAY

THE MYSTERY OF THE FIG TREE

FIGS ARE FRUITS MENTIONED IN THE BIBLE THAT ARE STILL FAMILIAR TODAY, whether they are soft, juicy, fresh figs or the sweet, chewy, dried variety. Fig trees are a common sight on the biblical landscape and often symbolized safety and prosperity.¹

And then there's the time that Jesus was leaving the small town of Bethany and noticed a fig tree. He was hungry and rummaged through the leaves, looking for fruit. There was none, so He cursed the tree: "Let no fruit grow on you ever again."² Immediately, the tree withered.

It seems a rather tough judgment on the tree, and quite unlike the parable He told about another fig tree that was given a total of four years to prove itself.³ We don't know all of

the reasons why Jesus issued such a sudden and irrevocable judgment, just as Jesus' contemporaries didn't know why 18 men were killed by a falling tower in what seemed a random disaster.⁴

It's tough when disaster strikes in our own life. We lose a loved one, our health, our job, a relationship, and we try to figure it out. Perhaps someone gives us a book giving "Reasons for Sickness" or advertising "11 Steps to Healing." But "figuring it out" doesn't always seem to be part of God's plan. He doesn't always let us in on what He's thinking; sometimes He expects us to "trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding."⁵

God may not always give us explanations, but He promises to always give us Himself. "Fear not, for I am with you," He tells us.⁶ "Do not be afraid or discouraged, for the Lord will personally go ahead of you. He will be with you; he will neither fail you nor abandon you."⁷

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WHAT I WANT

Once it was the blessing,
Now it is the Lord;
Once it was the feeling,
Now it is His Word.
Once His gifts I wanted,
Now the Giver own;
Once I sought for healing,
Now Himself alone.

Once 'twas painful trying,
Now 'tis perfect trust;
Once a half salvation,
Now the uttermost.
Once 'twas ceaseless holding,
Now He holds me fast;
Once 'twas constant drifting,
Now my anchor's cast.

—A. B. Simpson (1843–1919)

1. See Deuteronomy 8:8–9; 1 Kings 4:25.
2. Matthew 21:18–20
3. See Luke 13:6–9.
4. See Luke 13:4.
5. Proverbs 3:5
6. Isaiah 43:5
7. Deuteronomy 31:8 NLT



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

LOVE TO THE CORE

Life can be rough, and it's not always easy to understand why things happen the way they do. When everything seems to be going wrong, it's natural to question My love, but it's during those very times that I want to be closer than ever to you. My love will always be there for you and will help you through the tough times.

Unconditional love in its purest form comes from Me. Even when you blame Me for the troubles that have befallen you, I love you and don't condemn you. Even when you question My love, I still love you and I'm not going to give up on you. I'm still going to be right there beside you when you need counsel, when you need some company, when you are desperate for a listening ear, or when you need a friend. I want to ease your mind with the knowledge that there is always someone who sees endless possibilities in you, someone who loves you as you are—and that someone is Me.

No matter what, I will always love you unconditionally. That love will be a light in dark places, a compass when you are lost, an anchor to hold you fast in the storm, and a warm blanket to comfort you when you are alone and cold.