

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 16 • Issue 7

CRUMPLED AND DIRTY

—Yet immeasurably valuable

The Boy Sitting Next To Me

Befriending the bully

The Prisoner

Always look on the bright side





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION BUILDING AND STRENGTHENING

The Roman author Tertullian (c.160–c. 225), when speaking of the early church, reported that the pagans would exclaim, “See how they love one another!” Clearly the Christians’ concern and care was visible in their actions, attitudes, and words.

One of the early Christians named Joses seems to have had a special talent for understanding and encouraging others, so much so that the believers named him Barnabas.¹ He demonstrated his trust and good judgment by being one of the first believers to trust Paul after the latter’s dramatic conversion.²

Jesus Himself was a great example of someone who encouraged others and inspired them to grow. He spoke highly of Nathanael in his presence. (Read more about this in “The VIPs,” on p.15 of this issue.) He gave Simon a new identity as the “Rock,” and despite his impetuosity, weakness, and failures, entrusted him with the mission of taking care of His followers.³

As followers of Jesus, we’re called to try to do as He did, to bring out the good in others, to build them up, to believe in them. Anybody can dispense encouragement. You don’t need money or unusual intellect or special talents—in fact, it’s a gift in its own right.⁴ You just need a caring and understanding heart.

One biblical metaphor for the Christian life pictures it as a race we’re taking part in.⁵ No one said running a race—or living a godly life—is easy, but it certainly seems much easier when the fellow runners we pass by are calling out encouragement to us. What a boost that gives! And that shows us what a boost we can be to others when we return the favor!

I hope you’ll find the collection of inspirational articles, quotes, and Bible verses in this *Activated* issue encouraging and uplifting, and that you’ll be inspired to share a little of the same with those around you.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. The name “Barnabas” is derived from the Greek word also used to describe the Holy Spirit as the Comforter in John 14:26.
2. See Acts 9:26–27.

3. See John 21:15–17.
4. See Romans 12:6–8.
5. See Hebrews 12:1.

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A Lesson from Orchids

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER



TODAY WOULD HAVE BEEN MY DAUGHTER REJOICE'S BIRTHDAY. It's our custom to celebrate this day every year since she passed away by remembering some of the special moments she shared with us.

This year, mine is the orchid story. At the time, Rejoice was living in Osaka, Japan, with her husband and five children. One winter day as she was outside tending to her garden, she saw her neighbor take out a pot that held the straggly remains of a plant.

"It was once a beautiful orchid," her neighbor said with a sigh, "—a birthday gift from my children, but now it's all shriveled up."

"Do you mind if I have a go at it?" Rejoice asked.


Her neighbor was happy to get rid of it, so Rejoice took the pot and tended it for three years,


regularly watering and fertilizing the unresponsive plant. She researched what light, temperature, and water conditions suited orchids best, but nothing seemed to get any results. Over those three years, everyone who saw the plant advised her to give up and toss it out. It was clearly dead and just taking up space.

Instead, Rejoice persevered, and one morning during the fourth year, a beautiful blossom suddenly appeared. My wife and I happened to be visiting at the time, and I took a photo.

Her patience and tender care in this simple matter spoke volumes to me about having a long-term vision and not giving up when I don't see immediate results for my efforts. Persevering takes faith and an eye to see the possibilities that others can't.

How many people have been given up on by others as hopeless cases? Yet if they receive the love


Cultivate an optimistic mind, use your imagination, always consider alternatives, and dare to believe that you can make possible what others think is impossible.—*Rodolfo Costa*


The glory of gardening: hands in the dirt, head in the sun, heart with nature. To nurture a garden is to feed not just the body, but the soul.
—*Alfred Austin (1835–1913)*

and care they need, what a beautiful blossom their life can become. I hope to grow in having the patience, vision, and faith to see the potential in others, then to help nurture and develop it, so they too can blossom one day.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST¹ IN MUMBAI, INDIA, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

1. <http://elixirmime.com/>

THE BOY SITTING NEXT TO ME



BY EDMOND SICHROVSKY

THIS SHOULD BE EASY, I thought as I prepared to enter high school. I didn't expect to have any problems making friends or interacting with my classmates. Unfortunately, my confidence was shattered on the very first day of school, when I met the boy seated next to me in class.

Sean was about my height but twice my weight. He was careless in his studies, never studied for exams, and yelled and cursed at teachers and students alike. He bragged endlessly about the violent computer games he played, and their influence was evident in his angry, destructive behavior. I quickly started wishing I didn't have to sit next to him.

Weeks passed, and Sean seemed to go from bad to worse. He failed nearly every exam, got into fights daily with other classmates, and made no friends. I did my best to be polite but kept my distance.

One day at lunch hour, the seat beside Sean was the last vacant one in the cafeteria. I reluctantly sat down, and we got to talking. During the short conversation that followed,

I found out that Sean's father had died when he was very young, and that his mother worked long hours on a night shift. Consequently, he was home alone most evenings and only got to spend time with her on weekends.

I was ashamed of my harsh judgmental attitudes and determined to reach out to Sean, even though that went against my natural inclinations.

At first, my attempts were only met with mocking refusals and deriding curses. I learned that Sean had been the brunt of ruthless bullying in the past, so it seemed that in order to protect himself, he had developed a very hard and unfeeling exterior. It was a struggle to include him whenever we picked teams, and it was tough trying to befriend him when my efforts were only rewarded with snide remarks. I was often tempted to get angry and wondered if he was worth my trouble.

As the months went by, however, Sean gradually grew friendlier. Then one morning, over four months after that initial conversation in the cafeteria, Sean insisted on pairing up with me for a class activity. I was shocked. "You're always saying you never want to see me again," I told him.

1. Matthew 22:39



“That’s not true!” he replied, smiling broadly. “You’re my only friend—the one person who cares about me. I want us to always be friends.”

That day, I not only gained a friendship that is ongoing, but I also discovered a precious truth: Regardless of how a person acts, looks, or behaves, everyone wants and needs love and acceptance. Beneath the rocky surface of a person’s hard exterior is often a bud waiting to blossom. Kind words and loving deeds are to human hearts what sunshine is to flowers. It can take days, weeks, or sometimes even months or years for the results of our efforts to be rewarded, but one day that person will blossom.

When Jesus said to “love your neighbor,”¹ He wasn’t just talking about the person living next door. He wants us to share His love with anyone who needs our attention and care, whether it’s the postman, the cleaning lady, the clerk at the counter, or the school bully sitting next to us.

EDMOND SICHROVSKY IS A STUDENT AND VOLUNTEER IN TAIWAN. ■

WITHOUT PRICE

More people fail for lack of encouragement than for any other reason.

—*Author unknown*

The finest gift you can give anyone is encouragement. Yet, almost no one gets the encouragement they need to grow to their full potential. If everyone received the encouragement they need to grow, the genius in most everyone would blossom and the world would produce abundance beyond our wildest dreams.

—*Sidney Madwed (b. 1948)*

We should readily and liberally give the gift of showing faith in others. As many of us can testify from personal experience, it’s been God’s and others’ faith in us, and their seeing the good in us, that has helped us to reach success after moments of despair and times when we’ve questioned our self-worth.

Your spouse, your coworker, your child, your brother or sister, are capable of becoming anything God wants them to be, because God *in* them is capable of everything! Show faith in others at every opportunity, and you will help them to achieve the great things that God has in store for them!

—*Maria Fontaine*

A true friend knows your weaknesses but shows you your strengths; feels your fears but fortifies your faith; sees your anxieties but frees your spirit; recognizes your disabilities but emphasizes your possibilities.

—*William Ward (1921–1994)*

Trustworthy friends are a strong shelter; whoever finds one has found a treasure.

Trustworthy friends have no price, and no one can estimate their worth.

Trustworthy friends are life’s medicine, and those who fear the Lord will find them.

—*Sirach 6:14–16 CEB*

A true friend unbosoms freely, advises justly, assists readily, adventures boldly, takes all patiently, defends courageously, and continues a friend unchangeably.

—*William Penn (1644–1718)* ■



BY LUCAS HERNÁNDEZ

Treat a man as he appears to be, and you make him worse. But treat a man as if he already were what he potentially could be, and you make him what he should be.—*Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832)*

Love and kindness are never wasted. They always make a difference.—*Barbara De Angelis (b. 1951)*

Kindness is a language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see.—*Mark Twain (1835–1910)*

No act of kindness, no matter how small, is ever wasted.—*Aesop (c. 620–564 BC)*

FOR SOME TIME, we've been putting on benefit shows in our beautiful city of Granada, Spain. On a particular occasion, we performed at a residence for senior citizens. After the usual dances, songs, and puppet show, I decided to end with an illustration about value. This is how it went:

"Supposing that I offered to give this away," I asked the audience, showing them a €20 banknote, "who would want it?"

Everyone raised their hand.

"And if I did this?" I crumpled the bill and repeated the question. Everyone's hands stayed up.

Then I threw the bill on the ground and stepped on it. I picked it up and asked, "And now?"

A few fussy souls abstained, but the majority continued to raise their hands.

"Let's remember that we are like this bill. Sometimes life will rough us up and get us dirty, but in God's eyes, we never lose our value as individuals." I was moved by the applause, but the best was yet to come.

At the end of the show, as we were packing up the equipment, a woman approached me and asked if we could talk in private. We moved to an adjoining room and with tears in her eyes she tightly squeezed my hands, thanking me over and over, and saying, "My children brought

me here and forgot about me. Now they never visit. But today you came and reminded me of something very important—I am this euro bill."

This reminded me of a Bible passage: "Even if my sons and daughters abandon me, the Lord will hold me close."¹

If in the course of life, we stumble and fall, or things work out in a way that we end up feeling like that battered €20 banknote, let's not forget the moral of the story: No matter how crumpled or dirty we are, in God's eyes we still hold inestimable value.

LUCAS HERNÁNDEZ LIVES IN GRANADA, SPAIN, AND HAS VOLUNTEERED WITH VARIOUS NGOs FOR OVER 40 YEARS. ■

1. Psalm 27:10, adapted

10 PRINCIPLES OF PEOPLE-BUILDING

Be a people-builder by supporting others. These tips can help.



Build up excellence: Think of at least one thing that you find outstanding in someone, and then let them know how excellent they are in that specific way.



Give responsibility: Try to help others feel trusted, needed, and appreciated for their obvious strengths. If you're in a position of authority, you can try to give others responsibility. If you're leading a team or managing a project, you can encourage the quieter members by asking their opinions. Share decision-making authority as much as possible.



Appreciate people for who they are: Being appreciated for what we do is important, but being appreciated for who we *are* is even more vital.

1. See 2 Corinthians 1:11.



Slow down: It takes time to see people in a true light. It takes slowing down hasty, superficial assumptions. Go slower in your interactions with people and allow God to show you how He sees them.



Pause to consider: Think of the positive ways someone has helped you. Think about the good a person has done. Appreciate them.



Let go of the past: Be willing to see who the person is today, or the potential of what they can be tomorrow, and don't let your positive expectations of them today be marred by your past experiences.



Extend mercy: Everyone makes mistakes, forgets things, messes up sometimes. How do you want to be treated when you fail? That's how you should treat others.



Drop the labels: Think of how you dislike being labeled. Labels and

classifications put people in boxes that can limit their progress. Try to support and encourage others to go further than they've gone before.



Be there: Sometimes all that someone needs is a listening ear. Whether a coworker or colleague, friend, or family member, be ready to hear them out.



Support them in prayer: A little effort behind the scenes can have a great impact; we can help others through our prayers.¹

One of the greatest gifts you can give someone is your faith in them. Everyone needs someone to believe in them!—*Peter Amsterdam*

Cultivate the qualities you desire in a friend, because someone is looking for you as their friend.—*Unknown*

Beginning today, treat everyone you meet as if they were going to be dead by midnight. Extend to them all the care, kindness, and understanding you can muster, and do it with no thought of any reward. Your life will never be the same again.—*Og Mandino (1923–1996)* ■

the Prisoner

BY PHILLIP LYNCH

THE PRISONER DICTATED A LETTER TO SOME OF HIS DEAREST FRIENDS hundreds of miles away in another country. He told them that he was in chains—most likely chained to his jailer, as that was the custom of the time. Ironically, he had previously also been jailed in the city in which his friends lived.¹ On that occasion he had been beaten and imprisoned—illegally, it turned out—in the city’s most secure cell. He was considered an atheist² and a rabble-rouser, and was well known to authorities throughout the empire, who were glad to get him off the streets whenever they could.

It hadn’t always been that way. There had been a time when he was

1. See Acts 16:12–40.

2. One of the crimes attributed to the early Christians was atheism, because they denied the existence of gods other than the one God.

3. See Acts 9:1–2.

4. See Philippians 1:13–14.

5. See Philippians 1:22.

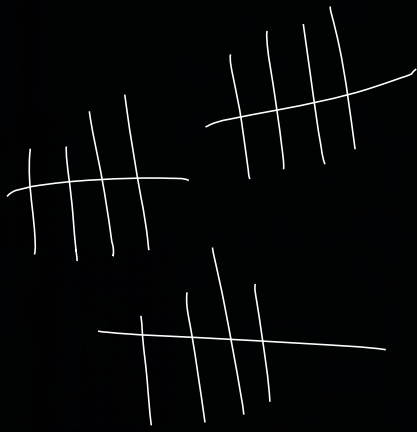
6. Philippians 4:4–9 NLT

dedicated to enforcing the law. He had even been an officially sanctioned vigilante who went about brutally clearing his area of miscreants—men, women, and children alike.³ That had been a task he relished. But that had been long ago. Now he was on the

other side of the fence, and his former colleagues were complicit in his censure and imprisonment.

The apostle Paul knew his life was in the balance. It was either death or freedom for him—it seemed no other options were even being considered. He had been held under a sort of house arrest for a while, but no longer; and his new jailers, drawn from the ranks of the Praetorian Guard,⁴ were particularly tough. In any case, the wheels of Roman justice were turning exceedingly slowly. His dear friends in Philippi were worried about him and had sent money toward his upkeep. Some were old legionaries who knew how the Roman system worked, how tough and often unfair it was. So Paul was writing to reassure them that God had everything under control.

The Philippians were some of his favorite people, it seems. He wrote tenderly to them, encouragingly, telling them to look on the bright side. If this was his time to die, he would go to be with the Lord; and if he was freed, that was good too, because then he could come and see them again. He said he



couldn't make up his mind which was better.⁵ He had committed all into God's hands and had received peace in return. His words are immortal and they resonate with all believers:

Always be full of joy in the Lord. I say it again—rejoice! Let everyone see that you are considerate in all you do. . . .

Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.

And now, dear brothers and sisters, one final thing. Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise. Keep putting into practice all you learned and received from me—everything you heard from me and saw me doing. Then the God of peace will be with you.⁶

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

PASS IT ON

BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED

I BELIEVE THAT GOD WANTS TO ENCOURAGE PEOPLE, but often He needs us to do it. And, believe it or not, we do have what others need. We have God's Holy Spirit and His words of love! Our life can be influential because of the power of our words. Our words don't need to be profound or eloquent—just simple words that meet a person's need for love, hope, significance, or comfort.

If you feel like you have no time, no energy, no expertise, or little to give, don't worry; that's common to many of us. But we can all give through our words of encouragement, through which our lives can have influence, and we can spread God's love wherever we go. In just five minutes or less, we can make a difference at a bus stop, on the metro, at the shop, at work, at school, online, going for a walk, and the list goes on.

Here are some questions we can ask ourselves: *What can I say to this person that will help them in some way, lift their spirits, brighten their day, make them feel appreciated, valued, and worthwhile? How can I leave this person feeling good about themselves, that what they're doing counts?* Then let's ask God to give us the faith to say whatever He lays on our hearts.

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



BY KOOS STENGER

“I HAD SEEN THAT MAN BEFORE and now he was sitting in the snow outside the stadium [in Madrid]. I asked him what he was doing there. He said he’d been there for five hours, hoping for a chance to see the game, but his money had run out. That’s when I knew I had to help.” This is how José Mourinho, then coach for Real Madrid football (soccer) team, described his meeting with Abel Rodríguez, a Mexican-American who waxes floors in Los Angeles.

Rodríguez had first met Mourinho in the U.S. several years earlier when Real was on a training campaign and needed a volunteer to carry water for the players. It wasn’t a paid task, but Rodríguez was happy to help,

and that’s when he decided he had to see a real game. He saved money for the plane fare, flew out, and hoped for the best.—And it was “hope,” because he neither had a ticket for the match nor anywhere to stay.

It paid off. After their encounter, Mourinho put up Rodríguez in the same hotel as the players, all expenses paid. He proceeded to give him a paid job as kit man for an upcoming Champions League match against Manchester United, which meant Rodríguez flew with the team to England as a staff member.

“We must help each other to live our dreams,” said Mourinho.¹

When I first heard about this incident, I was impressed. Mourinho has a reputation as a tough character. He never seems to miss an opportunity to ridicule his opponents, and he comes across as proud and harsh. Yet, when faced with this man’s dreams,

his heart was touched. It shows that deep down we may be quite different from the image we project.

Then there is the faith of the cleaner. How could he have flown across the world with hardly any money, expecting to manage to see a game in one of the world’s biggest soccer stadiums? That seems rather ridiculous. Irresponsible, actually. Dreamers do crazy things that average people might never attempt. But in following his dream, Rodríguez ended up with a unique and inspiring story to tell.

If people can dream big dreams for things in this life that have little eternal value, how much more should we, as God’s children, dream big and do as much good as we can in a world that is desperate for love and recognition.

KOOS STENGER IS A FREELANCE WRITER IN THE NETHERLANDS. ■

1. See <http://www.si.com/soccer/2013/04/10/real-madrid-fan-jose-mourinho>.



POINTS
TO PONDER

THE HOUSE BY THE SIDE OF THE ROAD

THERE ARE HERMIT SOULS
THAT LIVE WITHDRAWN
In the peace of their self-content;
There are souls, like stars, that dwell
apart,
In a fellowless firmament;
There are pioneer souls that blaze
their paths
Where highways never ran—
But let me live by the side of the road
And be a friend to man.

I see from my house by the side of
the road,
By the side of the highway of life,
The men who press with the ardor
of hope,
The men who are faint with the
strife.
But I turn not away from their smiles
nor their tears—
Both parts of an infinite plan—
Let me live in my house by the side
of the road
And be a friend to man.

1. John 14:3

Let me live in my house by the side
of the road
Where the race of men go by—
They are good, they are bad, they are
weak, they are strong,
Wise, foolish—so am I.
Then why should I sit in the scorner's
seat
Or hurl the cynic's ban?
Let me live in my house by the side
of the road
And be a friend to man.
—*Sam Walter Foss (1858–1911)*

To the world you are just one person,
but to one person you could mean
the world.—*Unknown*

Good friends are like stars;
you don't always see them,
but you know they're always
there.—*Unknown*

A friend is one who strengthens
you with prayers, blesses you with
love, and encourages you with
hope.—*Unknown*

It is not so much our friends' help
that helps us as the confident knowl-
edge that they will help us.
—*Epicurus (341–270 BC)*

My best friend is the one who brings
out the best in me.—The one to
whom I can say, "I like me best when
I'm with you."—*Unknown*

Friendship that flows from the heart
cannot be frozen by adversity, as
the water that flows from the spring
cannot congeal in winter.—*James
Fenimore Cooper (1789–1851)*

Dear Lord, You teach me how to be
a friend to others by always being
there for me. You care about how
things are going in my life, looking
past my failings and assuring me of
Your love in countless ways. May I
also be a good friend to You, always
reserving a place for You in my heart.
I look forward to being with You for
eternity, as You promised, "Where I
am, there you [will] be also."¹ ■

Being There

BY MARA HODLER



THE RIGHT FRIENDS ARE A HUGE ASSET. Charles Spurgeon once said, “Friendship is one of the sweetest joys in life. Many might have fallen beneath the bitterness of their trial, had they not found a friend.”

You might think that being that kind of friend requires you to do or say something amazing on a regular basis. But I’ve found that the simple act of showing up when needed is often what really counts.

Sam Rayburn was Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives for 17 years. One night, the teenage daughter of a close friend passed away suddenly and unexpectedly. First thing the next morning, the girl’s father heard a knock at the door. There was Sam Rayburn.

“I came to see what I could do to help,” he said.

“We’ve already made all the arrangements. There really isn’t anything left to do.”

Mr. Rayburn put a hand on his friend’s shoulder and asked, “I bet you haven’t eaten anything yet this morning?” He went on to fix breakfast for his friend’s family.

“Weren’t you supposed to have breakfast at the White House?” someone asked.

“Yes, I was,” said Mr. Rayburn, “but I called the president and told him that a friend needed me, so I couldn’t make it.”

When I was 16, there was a quiet guy in my class called Marcus. Other than working on a few school projects together, we hardly spoke. Then one of Marcus’ little brothers got very sick. No one knew if he was going to get better or if he would die. It was scary for them and for everyone who knew his family. I didn’t really know how to be a friend to him, but finally

I muscled up my courage and went to his house after school. I found him tinkering around in the garage, said hi, and then proceeded to sit and watch him fiddle with an old clock for what felt like a long time.

We didn’t say much, and I had no idea if I was being helpful. Later, I felt a bit awkward about the whole situation, and I was glad that we went right into a school break. On the first day back at school, though, Marcus approached me and struck up a conversation. We chatted for a long time that day and have been friends ever since. Simply showing up was enough to begin forming a bond of trust and friendship.

MARA HODLER IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO THE FAR EAST AND EAST AFRICA. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES IN TEXAS WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN, AND RUNS A SMALL FAMILY BUSINESS. ■

DURIAN PEOPLE



BY ALEX PETERSON

WHAT MAKES PEOPLE CRAVE A FRUIT LIKE DURIAN? Why do they light up when they see clumps of those prickly, greenish-brown husks hanging liberally from vendor stalls? How do they get past the pungent, even revolting, odor? What makes them fight their way through the thick, prickly outer husk in order to reach the inside?

The reason is that they've fallen in love with what's inside. They know that inside the prickly outer shell, past the foul smell, there is an exquisite center.

Loving people and seeing the good and possibilities in others can sometimes be similar to getting to the heart of a durian. People can be prickly. They can have thick, crusty outer shells. Their presence can repel rather than attract. People can be stinky—when they do and say stinky things, or when they sin, as everyone does at times. But those

barriers merely add to the challenge of reaching that sweet center of the inner person.

Durian is the king of fruits to some. Likewise, human beings are God's crowning creations on earth—each one possessing a heart and soul that is more valuable and precious than all this world has to offer. Anyone who has truly looked inside another's heart has seen great potential. Therein lies good. Therein lies possibility that just needs to be believed in and highlighted.

Everyone needs friends and family who love them, who know that there is good and possibility deep inside of them, and who are willing to work at it to reach that beautiful center.

Charles Schwab, the successful businessman, said, "I have yet to find the man, however exalted his station, who did not do better work and put forth greater effort under a

spirit of approval than under a spirit of criticism."

Everyone wants and needs to be affirmed for his accomplishments. A little boy playing darts with his father said, "Let's play darts. I'll throw and you say 'Wonderful!'" That's what the [encouraging] person does for others.

We tend to become what the most important person in our life thinks we will become. Think the best, believe the best, and express the best in others. Your affirmation will not only make you more attractive to them, but you will help play an important part in their personal development.

As Christians, we cannot afford not to affirm others. If I fail to affirm a brother, we both lose.—*John Maxwell (b. 1947), American author, speaker, and pastor who has written more than 60 books, primarily focusing on leadership.* ■



Bundles of Love

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

OUR NEIGHBOR, Mr. Chen, enthusiastically returned my “Good morning,” adding a heartfelt, “Isn’t the weather great today!” As I watched him walk on with a spring in his step and a beaming smile that eclipsed his graying hair and wrinkles, I couldn’t help but marvel. Until recently, Mr. Chen had barely acknowledged my greetings, and he rarely smiled or talked to anyone. Chronic health struggles had left their mark in the depressed frown, slumped shoulders, and slow gait that seemed to characterize him. What could have brought about this wonderful change?

When I told my sister about this, she replied that his daughter had recently become a mother. “He’s rejoicing over his new grandson!” she said. I shook my head in awe at how much fulfillment, joy, and purpose a helpless, screaming infant had brought to Mr. Chen.

Mr. Chen’s transformation

reminded me of what a bundle of joy and inspiration my cousin Katie has been to my grandmother. A year ago, a massive stroke took a severe toll on Grandma’s memory capacity, communication skills, and mobility. Chronic headaches and discomforts, and the resultant discouragement and frustration, left her silent, sullen, and sedentary. She began spending her waking hours dozing in a chair or watching television, and any efforts to talk to her were met with disinterest.

Then Katie was born. Even when Katie was only a few days old, Grandma spent hours leaning over her crib, rocking her, listening to her coo, and playing with her tiny fingers. When she was a year old, Katie would sit on Grandma’s lap and share her toys with her. Now at two years old, she loves to clasp Grandma’s wrinkled hand in her tiny pudgy one and pull her outside for a walk.

Grandma’s physical condition hasn’t improved, but Katie still makes

her smile, talk, and even laugh. There is truly something magical about children’s love and innocence and their ability to melt and cheer hearts in ways that grown-ups can’t, just as Mr. Chen’s grandson touched him and Katie touched Grandma.

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BABY BLESSINGS

Children’s children are the crown of old men, and the glory of children is their father.—*Proverbs 17:6*

Behold, children are a heritage from the Lord, the fruit of the womb is a reward.—*Psalms 127:3*

The soul is healed by being with children.—*English proverb*



THE VIPS

QUIET MOMENTS
BY ABI MAY

THERE ARE TIMES IN LIFE WHEN WE EACH FEEL LIKE AN ANONYMOUS UNKNOWN. It's a discouraging realization. You're a statistic—a woman or a man, over forty or under forty, single or married, able-bodied or disabled. Every so often, you put your vote in the ballot box and wonder if it makes a difference. If you didn't show up to work today, you wonder if anyone (apart from the payroll department) would even notice. Not many achieve the type of fame that would make us stand out in the mass of humanity. And even if we do, fame is lean comfort

1. John 1:47–48 NLT
2. See Psalm 139:2–3; Jeremiah 1:5; Ephesians 1:4.
3. Job 31:4 CEV
4. 1 Corinthians 4:5 CEB
5. Isaiah 62:5 CEB
6. See John 10:3.
7. See Luke 12:7.

in difficult times, and usually transitory.

The reality is that few of us feel like Very Important Persons (VIPs), much less are viewed that way by the world at large.

Perhaps this was how Nathanael felt, living in first-century Palestine under the shadow of a brutal military occupation. We're not told why he was sitting alone under a fig tree—maybe he was reflecting on his powerlessness to change anything; maybe he was in prayer. At any rate, his friend Philip finds him and shares some good news—they have found the Messiah. Nathanael agrees to come and meet Jesus. The conversation bears repeating:

As they approached, Jesus said, "Now here is a genuine son of Israel—a man of complete integrity."

"How do you know about me?" Nathanael asked.

Jesus replied, "I could see you under the fig tree before Philip found you."¹

Nathanael is astonished to find out that God has been watching him. It is the realization that God knows him that inspires him to proclaim that Jesus is the Son of God and become an enthusiastic follower.

Even when nobody else seems to be thinking about us, God certainly is! He's been watching over us our entire lives, even before we were born, and will continue all the way through.² Job reflected on this while in the midst of his troubles: "He keeps a close watch on everything I do."³

God not only thinks about us, He admires us: "There will be recognition for each person from God,"⁴ and "God will rejoice because of you."⁵

We are not unknown to God. He knows you and me by name.⁶ Not mere statistics, but valued.⁷ You and me—God's VIPs.

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A person in a hoodie is captured in mid-air, performing a skateboard trick. The scene is set in a city square during sunset, with a large building and palm trees in the background. The entire image has a warm, orange-red color cast. The person's shadow is cast on the ground in the bottom left corner.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

BELIEVE

Have you ever let Me down? Have you ever fallen short? Have you ever failed? Yes. But have you also grown through the failures, learned to stand back up after falling, and come to love Me more through the times that you have disappointed Me and let Me down? If so, you are a success to Me, and there is much more success ahead.

Lift others up in the way that I have lifted you up; forgive others as I have always forgiven you; challenge others to press on as I have challenged you; encourage others in the way that I have encouraged you; inspire others with the inspiration I have given you; comfort others with the comfort that you have received from Me; believe in others as I have believed in you; love one another as I have loved you.

Remind your loved ones that they can be strong by faith, even when they don't feel strong. They can make it with My help, even when they feel exhausted. They can overcome, even when they think they have already lost. They can try again, even when they have failed. They can love, even when their hearts are broken. They can smile and even laugh through their tears. They can make it, even when the odds are against them. Let them know that you believe in them, just as I believe in you.