

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 16 • Issue 3

JOSEPH'S TECHNICOLOR PAINTING

A beautiful life

Dealing With Dragons

It takes courage!

My Aconcagua

Scaling the mountain





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION ALL WINNERS

I have a confession: I really like to win! Whether it's at sports, a board game, or—unfortunately—a disagreement, my competitiveness comes to the fore and I have to try to come out on top. No game is too simple for me when it comes to trying to develop an edge. I've even devised (mostly point-

less!) strategies for Snakes and Ladders or Go Fish.

I also love to hear or read about people who are “winners” in particular fields or situations—doctors who make important advances in medicine, inventors who think of something no one else has, leaders who find solutions to seemingly intractable problems, sports teams who triumph despite the odds ...

There are countless websites, books, articles, motivational speakers, etc., who promise to help you “unlock your potential” and get on the winner's lane. God's Word also talks about improvement, growth, development, and being a winner: “Overwhelming victory is ours through Christ.”¹

Of course, winning in God's eyes is very different from the kind of winning society at large promotes. God measures wins by a whole different set of rules. In the game of life, we score points by letting Jesus express Himself through our actions and words, by playing with character and commitment, by doing our best with whatever gifts and tasks He has given us, and by loving those He has put in our path.

Most importantly, in the eyes of our loving Father, we are *already* winners, even if we may not see ourselves that way: “You belong to God, my dear children. You have already won a victory.”²

See you on the podium!

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Romans 8:37 NLT
2. 1 John 4:4 NLT

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TO THE FINISH LINE!

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

WE CAN FIND INSPIRATION FROM THE LIFE OF JOHN STEPHEN AKHWARI, as told in Bud Greenspan’s book *100 Greatest Moments in Olympic History*.

When the winner crossed the finish line in the 1968 Mexico City Olympic marathon, the officials and spectators thought that had been the highlight of the race. Then, an hour later, John Stephen Akhwari, a runner from Tanzania, entered the stadium. Bloodied and bandaged from a fall, and with a dislocated knee, he limped painfully.

As Akhwari made his way around the track in the setting sun, the remaining crowd began to cheer loudly. When he crossed the finish line, you would have thought by the

roar of the crowd that Akhwari had been the victor.

Later, when asked why he had not dropped out, Akhwari replied, “I don’t think you understand. My country did not send me 5,000 miles to start the race. They sent me 5,000 miles to finish the race.”

When you’re bruised and bloodied by life, press on; your Creator did not send you here to start the race, but to finish it! “Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”¹

Dr. A. B. Meldrum put it this way: “Bear in mind, if you are going to amount to anything, that your success does not depend on the brilliancy and the impetuosity with which you take hold, but upon the everlasting and sanctified bull-doggedness with which you hang on after you have taken hold.”

Or in other words, “fight the good fight of faith!”² The Scottish minister and hymnist George Matheson was someone else who didn’t quit, despite the onset of blindness. His advice: “We conquer—not in any brilliant fashion—we conquer by continuing.”

Keep going, no matter what the cost. Keep fighting, no matter what bruises you get. Keep running, no matter how many times you stumble and fall. Your cuts and bruises and scrapes and scars are medals of honor in God’s sight, signs that you had the faith, courage, determination, and commitment to keep going even when it was tough! You may have fallen, but you refused to quit.

At the end of the race, you’ll be able to say, like the apostle Paul: “My only aim is to finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me.”³ ■

1. Hebrews 12:1–2
2. 1 Timothy 6:12
3. Acts 20:24 NIV



BY MARIE STORY

Dealing with dragons

THE HOBBIT, a fantasy novel by J. R. R. Tolkien, is the story of Bilbo Baggins, a comfort-loving hobbit who is thrust into an unwanted quest for dragon treasure with a wizard and a group of dwarves. On the way, he faces all manner of hardships, from goblins to hostile elves to giant spiders.

Finally, the adventurers reach their destination: the mountain lair of the dragon Smaug. Bilbo enters through a secret door in the mountainside to face the dragon alone, while the dwarves wait outside. As he makes his way through the dark tunnel, he hears what sounds like a kettle bubbling on the stove. That noise grows into what seems like a giant cat purring. Suddenly Bilbo realizes that he's hearing the sound of the dragon snoring deep in the cave.

Bilbo is petrified. He wants nothing more than to turn back, and he nearly does, but instead he decides to press on. Tolkien writes, "Going on from there was the bravest thing he ever did. The tremendous things that happened afterward were as nothing compared to it. He fought the real battle in the tunnel alone, before he ever saw the vast danger that lay in wait."

We all face challenges where we want to run away before we've even had a chance to see what's ahead. Dealing with dragons (or other scary

1. NLT
2. www.just1thing.com

obstacles) takes a whole lot of courage, and not always in the way we'd imagine. Bilbo's testing point came in the tunnel. He had to face his fear and self-doubt even before he had to face the dragon.

These "dragons" in our lives don't always seem like a big deal to anyone but us, and as a result, we often have to find the key to victory within ourselves. C. S. Lewis wrote, "Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at its testing point." Sometimes we have to simply not give ourselves room to wiggle out of doing what's right.

If you're anything like me, then you're probably feeling that having this kind of courage is nearly impossible. As strong as we are, or try to be, we often lack the mettle that we'd need to overcome. So where can we find the courage to face life's challenges?

Joshua 1:9 tells us, "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go."¹ We can have courage because God is with us. He doesn't send us out to face our dragons alone. He's right there with us, backing us up, not only ready to give us strength and courage, but also promising to meet us there and carry us through.

Once you've asked God for courage, you have to choose to use it,

even if you don't feel courageous. It will be there for you as you step out. If you don't have a ton of courage right now, that's okay. Often, courage is simply putting one foot in front of the other, taking small, sometimes even tiny, steps forward. Every time you make a brave choice, you're strengthening your courage and preparing for the bigger challenges ahead. Courage begins as a decision and grows as you consistently use it.

Bilbo had been building up his courage little by little throughout his journey. He fought fearsome enemies and won. He tackled difficult problems and found solutions. Each time he faced a challenge bravely, it was an investment in courage; and those investments paid off when it came time to face the dragon.

The King's Guard of ancient Greece had a motto: "All men have fears, but the brave put down their fears and go forward, sometimes to death, but always to victory." So face your dragons boldly.

MARIE STORY IS A FREELANCE ILLUSTRATOR AND DESIGNER, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE U.S. THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST 1 THING,² A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■

Courage is the common currency of all those who choose to do the right thing.

—*Florence Nightingale (1820–1910), English social reformer and the founder of modern nursing*



The great danger facing all of us ... is not that we shall make an absolute failure of life, nor that we shall fall into outright viciousness, nor that we shall be terribly unhappy, nor that we shall feel [that] life has no meaning at all—not these things. The danger is that we may fail to perceive life's greatest meaning, fall short of its highest good, miss its deepest and most abiding happiness, be unable to tender the most needed service, be unconscious of life ablaze with the light of the Presence of God—and be content to have it so—that is the danger: that some day we may wake up and find that always we have been busy with husks and trappings of life and have really missed life itself.

—*Phillips Brooks (1835–1893), American clergyman and author* ■



The Rise of the Problem-Solver

BY SUNIL KUMAR

SOME FRIENDS AND I WERE HELPING TO PREPARE A BEAUTY SALON FOR OPENING, and my part involved setting up the in-house entertainment system. The salon's setup included individual TV sets for each of the stations, complete with sound, etc. I was excited to work on this project, but soon realized there were some aspects to it that were outside my realm of expertise.

For a while, I tried unsuccessfully to solve the rather complex problem of wiring the individual sets to the main set, making the individualized sound work, etc. I hashed and rehashed the problem in my mind, eventually throwing my hands up in frustration and admitting that I needed help.

I made an appointment to meet up with someone who specializes in this kind of engineering to see if I could get some advice. The result was that I not only got help with my project, but I learned something valuable at the same time.

This young man was vibrant and full of life. He relished the challenge and refused to take no for an answer. Every time I threw out what I thought was an obstacle, he found a solution. Sometimes that meant going back and changing something we had originally thought would work, but eventually, we found solutions to each problem. It wasn't long before the updated blueprints we'd worked on were before me, making perfect sense. I was able to implement all the solutions we'd come up with, and the salon now has working individual entertainment centers.

I got to wondering how I too could make life easier for others in the areas I'm proficient in. If everyone made the effort to discover, analyze, and solve issues, how much easier and more positive our journey through life would be.

SUNIL KUMAR IS A COUNSELOR AND LIFE COACH IN INDIA. ■

Tomorrow, God isn't going to ask, "What did you dream? What did you think? What did you plan? What did you preach?" He's going to ask, "What did you *do*?"
—*Michel Quoist (1918–1997)*

The "how" thinker gets problems solved effectively because he wastes no time with futile "ifs" but goes right to work on the creative "how."
—*Norman Vincent Peale (1898–1993)*

Everyone who achieves success in a great venture solves each problem as they come to it. ... They keep going regardless of the obstacles they meet.—*W. Clement Stone (1902–2002)*

Behold the turtle. He makes progress only when he sticks his neck out.—*James Bryant Conant (1893–1978)*



BY ROSANE PEREIRA

WHEN I WAS A CHILD, my father joined a mountain-climbing club where people from all around Rio would meet on Sundays to climb together. Once he had learned the main tracks, he began taking his kids and other teens from the neighborhood up to the many peaks in the area. As I grew up, I realized that life is like a range of mountains, and each one needs to be conquered in a different way.

My youngest son, Mat, suffers from attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). He is hyperactive and has difficulty concentrating. He struggles to learn appropriate behavior and to understand rules. On the other hand, he is very caring and gets along unusually well with animals and small children.

I always thought that if I had a child with disabilities or learning

difficulties, I would feel discouraged or upset at God, but my first feeling at receiving the diagnosis was deep love and compassion. I held Mat tight and thought, *This is our next mountain and we will climb it together.* I was also blessed to have lots of support from friends who helped me research the condition.

Over the years, I have had moments of doubt and questioning “why us?” but all along, God found ways to reassure me of His special love for Mat. He’s often found himself on the receiving end of special treats, like when we were traveling to visit my older daughter and her family in Chile, and Mat made friends with the cabin crew and pilots. As boarding was delayed, he got to talk with them for a long time in his broken Spanish and was thrilled when the pilot later mentioned him

by name in his announcements and invited him to visit the cockpit.

Early in the morning, the plane passed by Mount Aconcagua (6,961 meters; 22,837 ft). That was the first time I had seen a mountain so high that even planes had to circle it. It is a majestic peak, with hundreds of smaller mountains around it. They were all covered with snow that shone with the first golden rays of the sun.

Life can be as beautiful as the Andes at dawn, even though it is full of tall mountains. My son Mat has been my Aconcagua so far. Even though it hasn’t been easy, I have been thrilled with every moment of our climb!

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



ONWARDS TO EXCELLENCE

BY MARIA DOEHLER

MY FRIEND'S DAUGHTER, Jenni, is 12 years old and enrolled in a high-commitment gymnastics program. Four times a week, she practices after school for four hours. She does her homework in the car on the way there and eats dinner in the car on the way home.

This has always been Jenni's choice. She loves gymnastics and wants to take it as far as she can. She'd already won medals and was considered the best gymnast at her level in the area when she enrolled in this intense training program with the goal of earning a gymnastics scholarship for college.

A few months into the program, she's admitting that it's tough. Sometimes she gets frustrated at the combined load of keeping good grades in school as well as progressing in gymnastics, or the lack of time to hang out with her friends. Her coaches have high expectations and they expect her not to complain but to persevere.

So why does she do it? She's following a dream. She's taking her talent and developing it into a skill.

A lot of us haven't got it in us to push ourselves toward excellence. The thought of the commitment, discipline, and hard work it would

1. See Matthew 25:14–30 and Luke 19:12–28.
2. See "Weights and Measures," The Jewish Encyclopedia Online.
3. Matthew 25:21 NLT
4. Matthew 25:25 NLT
5. Matthew 25:26–29 NLT
6. www.just1thing.com

take is enough to dissuade us. Yet we all have the opportunity to develop excellence in our lives, to be the very best we can be, to do the outstanding. Sadly, the ingredient most often missing is the commitment to see it through.

In the parable of the talents,¹ Jesus told of a rich man who was leaving on a trip. He called three of his servants and explained that he wanted them to care for his estate in his absence. He entrusted each of them with some talents according to what he must have already known about their characters and abilities.

To the first, he gave five talents, to the second, two, and to the last, one. These talents weren't something that could be held in a wallet or coin purse. A talent was equal to about 43.6 kilos (approximately 96 pounds) of silver;² and would be worth nearly US\$ 30,000 in today's value. So receiving five talents was a huge opportunity, but receiving even one talent wasn't shabby either.

The master went away for a time, and upon his return, he wanted to know what the servants had done with his wealth. The first servant said,

"Lord, you left me with five talents. I invested them, and now they are doubled." The lord was very pleased and said, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together!"³

The second servant had also doubled the talents he had been given and got the same response from his lord. The third servant, however, had a different story: "I was afraid I would lose your money, so I hid it in the earth. Look, here is your money back."⁴

The master's response was also different: "You wicked and lazy servant! ... Why didn't you deposit my money in the bank? At least I could have gotten some interest on it. ... Take the money from this servant, and give it to the one with the ten ... To those who use well what they are given, even more will be given, and they will have an abundance. But from those who do nothing, even what little they have will be taken away."⁵ The third servant had hidden the talent to keep it safe and sound. But the master wanted to see him *do something* with it.

Some scholars credit this parable with being the origin of the current use of the word "talent" in the sense of "gift, ability, or skill." When we look at the story in that context, it becomes obvious that God expects us to do something with the gifts, talents, and abilities He's entrusted to us. "Doing something" involves some work and some risk.

I admire Jenni for what she's doing with her talent. I know that what she's learning through the discipline, sacrifice, and commitment involved will be of great value to her for the rest of her life. If you have a talent or skill that God has given you, invest in it. Grow it for God. You may not know now what He'll do with it, but one thing you can know is that at the end of life's journey, like the faithful servant, you'll hear Him say, "Well done."

MARIA DOEHLER CURRENTLY LIVES IN TEXAS WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN, AND RUNS A SMALL FAMILY BUSINESS. THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST1THING.⁶ ■



NEW ROADS

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

IT SURE WAS A LONG TIME COMING! For months, we had suffered from detours and delays. Traffic was often backed up so badly along the construction site that I began avoiding the area altogether when possible. Sometimes the congestion was so bad that I wished they had never attempted to “improve” the roads in the area. Then after having endured lane closures, work zones, and long, long delays for what felt like forever, I found myself this morning coasting along on a beautiful new stretch of smooth tarmac. I was so excited.

Isn't life like that? We get used to our regular routes and ruts. Even though they're a little problematic, they're also comfortably familiar. We swerve around the potholes and think nothing of it. Then we get annoyed with somebody who isn't familiar with our well-worn route and doesn't know how to navigate it. Finally, we see the big machines and yellow cones and realize it's time for a change, and that improvement—perhaps long overdue—is about to happen.

Just like the Department of Transportation's road improvements, God's work in our lives doesn't just happen overnight. Whether it's time for a widening, a little resurfacing, or an entirely new stretch, it takes a lot

of courage to allow Him to lead us someplace new.

Often, the preparation seems like it will last forever. Then the day finally comes and you're really on your way. A few twists and turns and you just seem to sail along to the place God has prepared for you. Gone are the ruts, the bumps and holes, the delays! It may take a little time to get used to the new road, but it is so worthwhile.

As we approach the start of any new project—or even if we're not there yet, but we're still at the stage of considering our options—it is good to think about new roads. Is God doing something new? Do those delays that test our patience so much mean something really smooth is just about ready to roll out?

Let's face the future with excitement and anticipation. Rather than lament the old roads, or bemoan the hassle the changes are bringing, let's fix our focus on what's ahead. Life has ups and downs, stops and starts, but eventually we'll find ourselves once again happily sailing along on the open road of God's plan for our lives.

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



A WORK IN PROGRESS

BY ALEX PETERSON



IN A WAY, we are all unfinished business, as far as God's concerned. He's started a lot of "projects" that are well begun, even perfect in their own right, but aren't complete.

Luckily for us, the Master never stops work on His creation—the molding, the shaping, the chiseling, the polishing are all to help us make progress and bring us closer to Him.

Here are five steps you can take to grow in your relationship with your heavenly Father.

INVOLVE GOD IN YOUR DECISION-MAKING. From the time we are small children, we learn through parental instruction. In the same way, we grow spiritually by learning

1. See James 1:5.
2. See James 1:3.
3. Proverbs 11:24–25 CEV
4. Romans 3:23
5. See James 4:10.

to follow our Father's instruction, turning to Him in prayer, and applying the spiritual principles in His Word to our decisions.¹

EXERCISE FAITH. Just as we learn through experience—suffering the consequences of wrong decisions and reaping the rewards of right decisions—we grow spiritually when our faith is tested and we see that it is the solution to life's problems.²

GIVE OF YOURSELF. As we forget ourselves and focus on meeting the needs of others and making them happy, we become conduits of God's love to those people. And as we pour out, God pours into us. "Sometimes you can become rich by being generous or poor by being greedy. Generosity will be rewarded."³

RECOGNIZE AND WORK ON WEAK AREAS. We all have room for

improvement. "All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."⁴ It's not too hard to accept in a general way that we are imperfect. It gets harder when we get specific about our mistakes or weaknesses. It's humbling to acknowledge where we fall short, even if only to ourselves and God. But doing so helps put us on the fast track to spiritual progress.⁵

TAKE ON NEW CHALLENGES. It's human nature, particularly as we grow older, to say, "This is the kind of person I am" or "I can do this, but not that," but that attitude stunts our growth. When we close ourselves off to new information, ideas, or challenges, we stop growing intellectually and spiritually. When we close ourselves off from other people, we stop growing emotionally. We can only make progress by moving forward, and the way we move forward is by rising to new challenges. ■

JOSEPH'S

By JANET KLUCK

WE ALL HAVE THEM—plans that didn't turn out the way we'd hoped, prayers that seem like they didn't make it past the ceiling, dreams that break and are shattered as we wonder what went wrong. We keep going, but often these apparent failures remain etched in our mind along with a question mark. *Why didn't things turn out the way I had planned or hoped or prayed?*

In the animated film, *Joseph, King of Dreams*,¹ there is one scene where Joseph, after having been sold by his brothers as a slave and taken to Egypt, has been bought by Potiphar and is seen scrubbing a floor. He visualizes his brothers laughing and mocking him. His tasks are made even more miserable by the resentment and anger he's holding on to.

Of course, if anyone had a right to be angry and sorrowful, it would have been Joseph. He had been betrayed by the very ones who should have protected him and stood up for him—his own family. Whatever Joseph's

1. DreamWorks Animation, 2000
2. www.just1thing.com

TECHNICOLOR PAINTING

plans might have been, they were broken to pieces and scattered among the sands on his long trek to Egypt. His future outlook was certainly bleak!

But as we know, and as Joseph found out, the story didn't end there. Despite going through many more hardships and difficulties, Joseph ended up in a position to save the future of a nation and his family at the same time. And through all that God did for him, he learned just how vast and perfect God's plan is. God can take the most terrible occurrences and transform them into hope and a future. Joseph's dreams did come true, just not in the way he had expected, planned, or even dreamed.

Imagine there is a gorgeous painting hanging on the wall of an apartment. It was painted by a great artist and contains contrasts of images, colors, shapes, and elements if you could see it in its entirety. But you're not inside the apartment, and the only chance you have of seeing it at all is through the keyhole, where you can catch only a small glimpse of the darkest, most shadowed section. You might think, *What a dark and depressing painting! Why didn't the artist use brighter colors or grace the canvas with more light?*

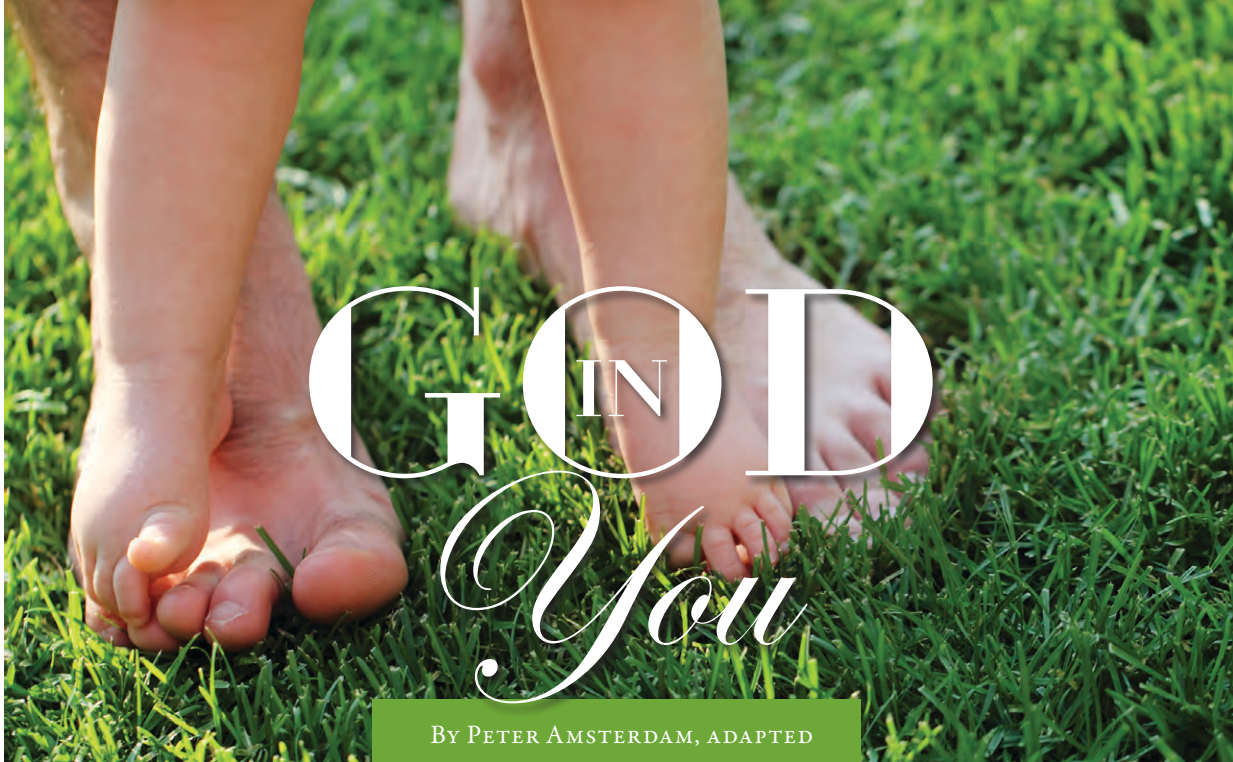
This is so often our perspective of our own lives. We focus on the dark spots, the losses and perceived failures. But all the while, our life is a beautiful, colorful, joyful, and bright painting; the problem is that we are viewing it through a tiny keyhole. If we could just see our lives from a bigger, more complete perspective, so many other elements and colors and highlights would come into view, and that tiny image would be transformed into the marvelous masterpiece that it truly can be in God's eyes.

Maybe those dark spots in our lives represent a broken friendship, a painful breakup, a new opportunity falling through, or a feeling that our goals and dreams are slowly being swept away by life just being the way it is—complicated, busy, and not always in our favor. All of that can change, though! God can mend a broken heart if you give Him all the pieces.

I read recently that we cannot disappoint God, because He already knows that we can't be perfect. He is fully aware of our failures, setbacks—and even sins—and He still loves us with more intensity, care, and compassion than we can begin to comprehend. If we try to figure God out or fully understand His plan, forcing things to fit into our very limited perspective, we'll only be disappointed in ourselves and even in Him when things don't turn out the way we've dreamed and hoped.

He has His own dream for our lives—one filled with splashes of light and blends of color, depth, and texture—and He's waiting by the canvas with a brush, ready to paint it into reality. All we have to do is give Him room to work and make something beautiful.

JANET KLUCK IS A BLOGGER AND MOTHER OF 10, WHO RESIDES IN THE U.S. THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST 1 THING.² ■



BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED

WE ALL NEED TO HAVE FAITH IN OURSELVES—or rather faith that God is in us and that He can use us. Since God uses individuals to do His work, we have to believe that we're capable. We need faith in His ability to perform and work through us. We must dare to try, which means allowing God to try through us.

We are weak and faulty, but our God is invincible. We are earthen vessels, yet as we commit our lives and hearts to Him, He becomes one with us and can work through us. "The people who know their God shall be strong and do great things."¹

God wants us to be humble and dependent on Him, and He also wants us to be confident in

His power and His ability to use us for His glory, even when we feel incapable. Give God the glory, and believe that you can do what is His will, because He can do it through you. "God is the one who enables you both to want and to actually live out his good purposes."²

Here are a few more thoughts on this subject:

- Having faith in yourself is a combination of confidence in God and His infallibility, and faith to act on that confidence.
- It requires humility to acknowledge your inability, and at the same time to acknowledge God's ability to do anything through you. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."³
- That kind of faith is allowing God's strength to be made perfect in your weakness.⁴
- It's faith that doesn't set

boundaries. It's letting God determine what you can do.

Of course, no matter how much faith we have, not everything in life is going to be problem-free and work out smoothly and easily. God will come through for us, but we're nonetheless going to have to fight through time and again. But no matter how hard we have to fight, or how many things need to change, we know that we will win. Jesus told us, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes."⁵

Let's work to cultivate an atmosphere of faith in our lives—a faith that believes, hopes for, and expects the best, and knows that God will never fail to care for us; He will keep the promises in His Word.

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

1. Daniel 11:32 TLB
2. Philippians 2:13 CEB
3. Philippians 4:13
4. See 2 Corinthians 12:9.
5. Mark 9:23



QUIET MOMENTS
BY ABI MAY

THAT WINNING FEELING

HE CONSIDERS HIMSELF A WINNER, but some might wonder how he's come to that conclusion. His body is bruised and scarred from numerous beatings. His life on the road has left its mark too. On top of it all, he's lost his freedom, and the likelihood of execution is looming over him.¹

He had a promising start, born with the top grade of citizenship that could have opened so many doors.² Yet since embracing the new faith, he was falsely imprisoned on numerous

occasions,³ violently interrogated,⁴ shipwrecked three times,⁵ and even stoned once!⁶ He narrowly escaped several conspiracies,⁷ but he certainly didn't escape all violence.

Nor was it just the ferocious opposition and rejection—he also faced poverty and want. He wrote, “To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. . . . We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of the world.”⁸ All in all, he had a lot of troubles, to the point that sometimes his life seemed unendurable.⁹

Under these circumstances, it seems almost beyond belief that he can boldly declare: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me—the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on the day of his return.”¹⁰

Paul considered himself a winner because any outward appearance of

failure was dispelled by the inner satisfaction of knowing that he had done what God expected of him. He had secured the ultimate win—and we can too, if we use our gifts and time for God's glory. (Hopefully, our own unique life path will include a lot less battering than the valiant apostle Paul's!)

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EVER BRIGHTER

The path of the righteous is like the morning sun, shining ever brighter till the full light of day.—*Proverbs 4:18 NIV*

Dear Jesus, please come into my life and accompany me on my path, whatever it may hold.

1. See 2 Timothy 2:9.
2. See Acts 22:28.
3. See Acts 16:19–25; 21:27–33.
4. See Acts 22:22–24.
5. See 2 Corinthians 11:25.
6. Ibid.
7. See Acts 9:23–25; 23:12–15.
8. 1 Corinthians 4:11,13 NIV
9. See 2 Corinthians 1:8.
10. 2 Timothy 4:7–8 NLT

A young man and woman with curly hair are hugging and smiling. The man is on the left, wearing a blue sweater, and the woman is on the right, also wearing a blue sweater. They are both looking towards the camera with bright, joyful expressions. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

YOU'RE MY WINNER

In My heavenly kingdom, in the realm of the Spirit, all are happy and fulfilled, because they better understand My love. They do not question My love for them, for they have experienced the height and breadth and depth of it. They have great peace and great joy. There is no feeling that one is greater than another or that one is more loved than another, because they have found contentment in the knowledge that I love each of them for who they are. They understand that I died for each one, that I have redeemed each one, and therefore each one is very special to Me.

And so it is with you. You are special to Me! My love for you is personal. Don't ever think that you're just one in the crowd to Me. Don't ever think that because there are so many others, I don't see you or that My love will run out before it reaches you.

I know your innermost longings and your innermost fears and insecurities. I know your faults, too, and I love you just the same. I am loving, merciful, and sympathetic. When you struggle, when you are tempted, weary, or weak, I feel for you. When you are victorious, I rejoice with you.

I love you and care about you, and I am never far away. Let Me shower you with the freshness of My love. Let Me surround you with the warmth of My love. Let Me clothe you with the security of My love. Let Me show you how special you are to Me.