

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 22 • Issue 1

THE NEED FOR LOVE

The way to a
better world

Stepping Into the New

Workout for body
and soul

Making Resolutions Realities

11 tips for 2021



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING AHEAD

In years past, *Activated* has occasionally featured articles describing little ceremonies the contributors participated in around the turn of the New Year. For example, friends might gather to reflect on the old year and to share their hopes and ideas for the coming one.¹

These types of articles have been in my mind over the last few weeks, as we've approached 2021. I suspect that *every* start of a new year feels somewhat momentous to many people, knowing there's so much that could be different this year than the last; but I think that even when we have the benefit of looking back at this time in our lives with hindsight, we'll agree that it was genuinely a time unlike any other.

That being said, the things we experienced last year were unique, and by the same token, our perspectives and hopes for the coming year will be very personal. There's no one-size-fits-all way to go about this, but I believe each of us could benefit from taking some time this month to unburden our hearts to God over the challenges and difficulties of the last year and to thank Him for the blessings we received.

Proverbs 3:6 says: "Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."² As we step into the New Year, let's also commit our hopes and plans into His hands, knowing that He knows what is best for each of us!

May God bless and keep you and yours this month and throughout the year!

For more information on *Activated*, visit our website or write to us.

Website: activated.org
Email: activated@activated.org

Local contacts:

South Africa:
Tel: (082) 491 2583
Email: sales@bigthought.co.za

India:
Email: activatedindia@activated.org

Nigeria:
Cell: +234 (0) 7036963333
Email: activatednigeria@activated.org

Philippines:
Cell: (0922) 8125326
Email: activatedph@gmail.com

EDITOR Ronan Keane
DESIGN Gentian Suçi

© 2020 Activated. All Rights Reserved.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. Other Bible quotations are from the following sources: New Living Translation (NLT). Copyright © 1978, 1996 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission. New International Version (NIV). Copyright © 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society. Used by permission.

1. Some examples of such articles are "Life and Onions," by Anjali Miles and "The Dawn of a New Year," by Andrew Mateyak.

2. NLT



LIFE'S EDITING

BY SCOTT MONTROSE

I HAD STRUGGLED WITH AND OVERCOME THE DEMONS OF SELF-DOUBT AND FEAR OF FAILURE, launched out into the deep, put pen to paper, and written my first short inspirational piece.

I sat back and read it through several times. Pleased with my modest effort, I submitted the piece to a monthly magazine for possible publication.

Some time later the magazine's editor contacted me, saying he would like to print my article. He also enclosed an edited draft for my approval or further revision. *Edited!* As I sat and stared at "my" work, now before me in edited form, a strange mix of feelings swept over me. I had seen myself as an up-and-coming writer, but that image vanished like a mirage in a gathering sandstorm.

After the initial shock subsided, I tried to think about the situation more objectively. The central idea I wanted to convey was still there,

the imagery was intact, and the tone was unchanged, but the superfluous parts had been cut to get to the heart of the piece. The edited version was indeed better.

As I contemplated this, my eye caught a picture of a diamond ring in a magazine lying open on my table. I thought about how someone had mined the chunk of rock that had contained that diamond, and about the skilled hands of the lapidary that had transformed that diamond in the rough into a thing of beauty, highly valued and greatly desired. Like a diamond trapped in a chunk of rock, my rough piece was not the final product. The diamond was there, but it had taken other skilled hands to retrieve, cut, and polish it.

Life is like this too. We are created as rough drafts that must go through the editing process. God sees in each of us that spark of promise, like the editor spots a promising thought as he scans the rough drafts that cross his desk. Then God works to transform us step by step into a finished article that will make worthwhile reading. Our substance is reshaped repeatedly by the choices and decisions we make, the superficial and superfluous bits are purged through life's trials, and we are fine-tuned and polished through our daily interaction with others.

Like my roughly penned story, in the hands of the Great Editor my life has become more than it was to begin with—and He's not done yet.

SCOTT MONTROSE IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN THE MIDDLE EAST. ■

BE ALL YOU CAN BE



EACH PERSON IS DIFFERENT AND HAS DIFFERENT GIFTS AND CALLINGS. God knew what

He was doing when He made you the way you are, and He wants to use the talents He has given you and help you to develop them so that you can go further and make the most of your situation.

He wants you to be all that He created you to be. He wants you to strive for your personal best no matter what your calling in life or situation or context—that is, He wants you to take your particular gifts, talents and life experience, and do your personal best with them; not

1. See Ecclesiastes 9:10.

2. The story of Soichiro Honda can be found here: <https://astrumpeople.com/soichiro-honda-biography-a-great-history-of-japanese-car-manufacturer>.

being content with halfway or almost, but wanting to do the most and the best with whatever task you face.¹

Why not give whatever you do your best effort? Awesome accomplishments often come as a result of hundreds, even thousands of small sacrifices and right decisions, along with a lot of plain hard work. Anything worthwhile in life costs, and that cost often comes to you through lots and lots of plodding along, day by day, come rain or shine, no matter how you feel.

Every great man or woman who has accomplished outstanding things did so through years of hard work, sacrifice, vision, determination, and faithfulness. If we're willing to learn that, then we will have hit on the secret to giving our best effort in any situation that we find ourselves in, because we will have learned what

it means to make the most of our circumstances, to rise to the occasion, to be faithful on the particular plot of land where God has planted us, and to reach our personal best, by God's grace.

John C. Maxwell put it aptly in his book, *Developing the Leaders around You*:

No one, the experts said, would ever be able to run the mile in less than four minutes. Then, in 1954, a young medical student named Roger Bannister did the impossible by breaking that barrier. Today, every world-class runner can run the mile in less than four minutes. Why? Because one man decided to keep improving. One man decided to pay the price of personal growth. He was willing to lead. As a result, he created a climate for those achievers who followed him.



Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart—*Colossians 3:23 NIV*

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Maybe you're discouraged or things aren't working out for you. Here's another story of someone who took the major obstacles and difficulties that life threw at him and used them as stepping stones to success.

In 1938 when Mr. Honda was at school, he took everything that he owned and began working on a special piston ring that he could sell to Toyota.

He labored day and night to create this—often sleeping in his workshop. He even pawned off his wife's jewelry so that he could stay in business.

When he finally developed the piston ring, he presented it to Toyota and was told that it did not reach their standards. He went back to school for two years to improve the design. After this, Toyota gave him a contract.

Then, the Second World War began and he couldn't get the concrete to build a factory and mass-produce his new design. He and his team created a new type of concrete to build the factory.

Honda's factory was bombed twice, and he had to rebuild it. When bombs dropped, he and his team picked up the empty shells and called them "gifts from President Truman" because they provided him with the raw materials for his manufacturing process.

Finally, an earthquake leveled his factory and he had to sell his piston operation to Toyota.

After the war, a gasoline shortage hit Japan, and Honda couldn't drive his car to get food for his family. So he attached a small motor to his bicycle to help him get around.

Many people asked him to make one for them so they could also have a "motorized bicycle." So many asked him that he wanted to open up a factory and make them—but he didn't have the capital. So he wrote a personal letter to all 18,000 bicycle shops in Japan and told them of his new invention. He convinced 5,000 of them to give him the capital he needed to build his factory.

Mr. Honda once said: "Many people dream of success. I believe that success can be achieved only through repeated failure and self-analysis. Success is only one percent of your work, and the rest is bold overcoming of obstacles."²

THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM THE ROADMAP SERIES OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP ARTICLES. ■

STRENGTH FOR A NEW YEAR

BY J. R. MILLER¹

WE OUGHT TO MAKE SOMETHING OF EVERY YEAR. Each new year should be like a new step on the stairs, lifting our feet a little higher. We ought not to live any two years on the same plane.

Many Christians grow faint and weary in their tasks and duties. Routine is intensely wearisome. Tasks are large and exacting, life is dreary in its monotony, work seems oftentimes in vain. We sow and do not reap. We find disappointment and discouragement at many points. Hopes bright today lie like withered flowers tomorrow.

1. Published in 1913, adapted. Source: https://gracegems.org/Miller/strength_for_a_new_year.htm.

2. John 14:1

3. Isaiah 41:10

4. Psalm 55:22

5. John 14:27

6. 2 Corinthians 12:9

7. Isaiah 40:31

Some days we are discouraged, overwrought, vexed by cares, fretted by life's myriad distractions, weary and faint from much burden-bearing. We sit down with our Bible and God speaks to us in its words of cheer:

"Let not your heart be troubled."²

"Fear not, for I am with you."³

"Cast your burden upon the Lord."⁴

"Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you."⁵

"My grace is sufficient for you."⁶

And as we ponder the words, the weariness is gone; we feel that we are growing strong; hope revives, courage returns. One who reads the Bible as God's own Word and hears God's voice in its promises, assurances, commands, and counsels is continually strengthened by it.

But there is something better than even this. God Himself comes into our lives with all His own love and grace. The prophet tells us this: "He

gives power to the faint; to him who has no might He increases strength." This means nothing less than that there is a direct *importation of divine strength* for God's fainting and weary ones on the earth. This is a wonderful revelation. It tells us that the very power of Christ is given to us in our weakness, passed from *His fullness* into *our emptiness*.

One may stand by us in our trouble and may make us a little stronger by his sympathy and love, by his encouragement and cheer, but he cannot put any portion of *his* strength or joy into *our* heart. Christ, however, gives us strength, and imparts to us His own life. What the vine is to its branch, Christ is to us. If the *branch* is hurt in any way, bruised, broken, its life wasted, the vine pours of its life into the wounded part, to supply its loss and to heal it. That is what Christ does. He gives power to the faint. His



strength is made perfect in our weakness. The greater our need, the more of Christ's grace will come to us. Therefore, there are blessings which we shall never get until we come into experiences of trial. We shall never know God's comfort until we have sorrow. And as we learn what grief is, we shall learn also how God gives strength and consolation in grief.

How can we make sure of receiving this promised strength? The answer is: "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength."⁷ What is it to *wait* upon the Lord? It means to trust God patiently, to believe in God's love, to accept God's guidance, to keep near God's heart, to live in unbroken fellowship with God, leaning upon His arm, drawing help from Him.

We are to go on with our work, with our struggle, with our doing and serving, being sure that, waiting upon God, we shall ever renew our

strength. We are in living communication with Him who made the stars and calls them by their names, and holds all the universe in being, who faints not nor is weary. He is behind us all the while—all His fullness of life, all His important strength—and every emptying of life from us is instantly replenished, for He gives power to the faint.

Over all the unopened year, God casts His light. There can be no experience through the year for which there will not be strength. God never gives a *duty*, but He gives also the needed *strength* to do it. He never lays on us a *burden*, but He will *sustain* us under it. He never sends a *sorrow*, but He sends the *comfort* to meet it. He never calls to any *service*, but He provides for its *performance*. We need only to be sure that we wait upon God, and then all the strength we shall need will be given, as we go on, day by day.

God's message to the world during times like this always is, "You're not really in charge. You may think you are going to get ready for the next one, but you never will. The world isn't under your control; it's under My control. You need to turn to Me. You are not sufficient to run your own life. You need My wisdom and you need My help."

In every disaster, whether it's 9/11 or COVID-19, God is saying to people, "Eventually, I'm going to put an end to all of this. But for the time being, this world is broken, and every time you think you don't need Me and that you can get on top of it, something like this will come along to remind you that, no, you do need Me."

—Tim Keller ■



BY GABRIEL GARCÍA V.

THE NEED FOR LOVE

“IN THE WORLD OF PAIN THERE IS A NEED FOR LOVE, a real, real need for love... Love your brother... a need of love, a need of heart.” These words, translated from the famous song by the Colombian singer Juanes, paint a picture of humanity’s universal need for love.¹ “Everybody needs love” rang out

1. *La tierra*, by Juanes with band Ekhymsis
2. *Love Makes the World Go Round*, by Deon Jackson
3. See Philippians 2:2–4.
4. *Es tiempo de cambiar*, by Juanes

another song from the sixties.² And with the countless social conflicts, outbreaks of violence, cries of outrage, the scourge of the pandemic, along with the “viruses” of selfishness, self-centeredness, and self-service and other diseases of our times, what we need most is love.

Love that becomes real by actions, love that gives a hand, that is friendly and kind, that walks in another’s shoes and finds a way to help whenever it can. “A real, real need for love” to be shown by acts of kindness toward those who cross our path in the course of the day, or in

the virtual communications that have become our new normal in the age of COVID-19.

I sincerely believe that if we all made even a little effort to be courteous, to give words of encouragement, to show social graces, to make contributions, the world’s “climate” would improve, and we would all breathe a little easier. If we would try not to be critical of people, but to see their worth regardless of social condition, appearance, or any other prejudice we may be tempted with—there would be fewer violent reactions and more dialogue, more forgiveness.

Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around.—*Leo Buscaglia (1924–1998)*

If you have kindness in your heart, you offer acts of kindness to touch the hearts of others wherever you go—whether they are random or planned. Kindness becomes a way of life.—*Roy T. Bennett*

Kindness means building bridges instead of walls.—*RAKtivist*

It's not our job to play judge and jury, to determine who is worthy of our kindness and who is not. We just need to be kind, unconditionally and without ulterior motive, even—or rather, especially—when we'd prefer not to be.—*Josh Radnor (b. 1974)*

The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.—*Galatians 5:22–23 NIV*

Be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.—*1 Peter 3:8 NIV*

My friend Margaret was telling me about the serious, cranky man who works where she has a rented parking spot. One morning she was trying to operate her remote control to gain access to the parking lot, but she just couldn't get it to open the gate. When Margaret asked the parking attendant for help, she received the curt reply: "Lady, you aren't using the control right."

In the end, Margaret learned how to use the remote control, but she kept thinking about the attitude of the parking attendant. Why did he act the way he did? Did he feel humiliated in front of the people who rented in the building? Had he received unkind treatment? What could it be?

Then she remembered the saying "A little bit of love goes a long way." She decided to take positive action: learn the attendant's name and always greet him kindly.

"Good morning, Mr. Liborio. How are you?"

If she saw something positive that she could comment on, she would mention it. "Oh, you got a new haircut; it looks really good on you."

Through little gestures, she let him know that she was considerate of him as a person. Months passed, and Mr. Liborio began to change. Now he is softer and kinder, greets her warmly when she arrives, and even likes to crack jokes with her.

"When a person can joke with you, it is a sign of confidence," Margaret says.

I propose a Love Campaign to the tune of the song by Juanes and the many other musical artists who motivate us with the message in their music and lyrics. Let's be kinder, gentler, and more humble with those around us. To think we are better than others is just plain arrogance, as the apostle Paul put

it—we should esteem others more than ourselves.³

Along with Margaret, I genuinely believe that each dose of kindness, courtesy, and respect we share with others will go a long, long way toward recouping the love that has been lost among us. Everywhere, wherever we go, let's bring to life these lyrics of Juanes, "It's time to change in the thoughts of all, hate for love. It's time to change."⁴

By showing people love, we show them Jesus, who can then work in their lives and motivate them to join us in our love campaign. Together we can help to change this cold, insensitive world into a warmer, more loving place, a little more like heaven.

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



BY MARIA FONTAINE

NOW AND FOREVER

AS THE NEW YEAR BEGINS, many people are looking ahead with a measure of trepidation to what lies ahead for them and their families and friends, as well as for the world in general. It's comforting to know that whatever the future holds and whatever problems or hardships you may face, Jesus wants to help you through them. If you have received Him as your Savior, you can count on His extra special care.

I've found that some of the most moving passages in the Gospels are in John chapters 14 through 17. Jesus was spending time with His closest followers, talking with them, teaching them, praying for them, and encouraging them—preparing them for the fact that He would soon be leaving this physical realm, and explaining that His Spirit would continue to always be with them.

He reminded them that He was their passage to heaven,¹ and that He would prepare a place for them there.² He promised to answer their prayers.³ He told them about the Holy Spirit.⁴ He promised them supernatural peace.⁵

He taught them the importance of remaining close to Him in spirit in order to have the kind of life He wanted for them.⁶ He called them His friends.⁷ He challenged them to share His love and truth with others, and promised to reward them for doing so by answering their prayers and working through them.⁸ He promised grace and peace through tribulation, and confidently proclaimed that He had overcome the world⁹—“the world” meaning the godlessness that prevails in this temporal world.

Then He prayed for His disciples. “Father, I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one [the devil]. They are not of the world, just as I am not of the world. Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.”¹⁰

It's not easy to live in the world and not be tossed about by the “waves” of this world's woes, but it is not impossible. The secret is to keep your eyes on Jesus, “the author and finisher of our faith,”¹¹ and to trust Him to keep you afloat.¹²

He has promised to be with you now and forever, through thick and thin,¹³ and nothing can separate you from His loving care.¹⁴

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

1. See John 14:6.

2. See John 14:2-3.

3. See John 14:13-14.

4. See John 14:16,26.

5. See John 14:27.

6. See John 15:1,3-5.

7. See John 15:15.

8. See John 15:8,16.

9. See John 16:33.

10. John 17:15-18

11. Hebrews 12:2

12. See Matthew 14:25-31.

13. See Hebrews 13:5.

14. See Romans 8:37-39.



BY JOYCE SUTTIN

QUARANTINING MY SOUL

I DIDN'T REALIZE HOW BUSY I WAS UNTIL I STOPPED. I didn't really think about how important it was for me to go places and be around people until I couldn't. I never really thought I was stressing myself with activities until, due to the COVID-19 restrictions, there *were* no more activities, and I *had* to stay home.

Then I decided to dig deep and learn what was infectious and what wasn't. I vigorously washed my hands, remembering what I had touched and which hand I had used to handle anything that might have germs on it. I scrupulously disinfected door handles and light switches, mopped the floor, sewed masks, and developed a strict routine for the times I had to leave the house. I did all this to protect myself and the loved ones in my home.

But then I also spent much more time watching television news. I

1. See Matthew 19:24.

dug online to learn about what was going on and what the future might look like. Apart from all my pains and efforts, I probably also spent too much time looking for things to entertain myself and keep my mind busy, because it was so hard to be still. It took a while to settle into the new routines of a quieter, simpler life, to learn to be selective about what I watched and listened to, and to limit my time thinking about the pandemic.

So I spent more time in my garden. I tended tiny sprouts and watched them bud before my eyes. In the new quieter world, there was less traffic and airplanes, and I could hear birdsongs and church bells. I learned the power of sanctuary, having a place where I could go, without people around me, without media, where I could protect myself from the contagion of fear and anxiety sweeping across the world.

As my world became smaller, my internal life became a bit grander.

As I shut out other thoughts, I could commune with God in my heart and find that place of peace in the midst of storm. I felt like I was going through the needle's eye Jesus spoke about¹ and entering into the kingdom of heaven, shedding some of the weights and worries that had bogged me down and seeing life a little more clearly.

So while I pray desperately for those suffering, dying, and dealing with the loss of loved ones or income and security, and while I continue to pray for my own protection, I have been blessed to find a place to quarantine and protect my soul from the viral attacks of fear and anxiety. In the most difficult times of darkness, God's light shines brighter to guide us and keep us through it all.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A RETIRED TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. CHECK OUT HER BLOG AT [HTTPS://JOY4DAILYDEVOTIONALS.BLOGSPOT.COM/](https://joy4dailydevotionals.blogspot.com/). ■



BY MILUTIN BUNČIĆ

STEPPING INTO THE NEW

HAVE YOU EVER THOUGHT OF TAKING UP A NEW SPORT, learning to play a musical instrument or just stepping out of your comfort zone to do something new and different? Perhaps the desire was always there but there was always something that was stopping you from actually doing it? Well, let me tell you a short, true story.

Sometime ago I was faced with a very challenging situation. The pressure at my workplace was enormous and eventually affected my personal life. I felt that I needed something that would challenge me in a physical way to the point that I would simply be too tired to think about my work and would be able to relax.

I decided to enroll in a local sports club. I was 49 at the time, and some would consider me too old to be just starting a fitness regime. Sure enough, the trainings were grueling

and I was so out of shape that I could barely do three pushups to begin with. I remember literally inching my way home after the first training.

I was worried I'd feel foolish training with much younger and more athletic people, but in fact, the people I got to know while working out were friendly, chilled, and extremely supportive. Their motto was "Never give up," and it seemed to me that God had sent me there to strengthen both my body and my spirit.

I started with two training sessions a week, and after three months, I started going three times a week. Six months later, I was going five times a week. My health improved by leaps and bounds.

As I'd hoped, the exercise was so intense that I couldn't think about my problems while I was training. Not only did I feel stronger

physically, but my spiritual well-being was improving, and I was in better shape to face my problems.

Of course, reading God's Word is the best way to strengthen our spirit but He sometimes uses other things to help us too, in this case physical exercise. God is always on our side, because He loves us. He has our best interests at heart and wants to help us accomplish our goals. But He can't do our part for us, whether that's going to the gym, picking up that guitar you haven't touched in years, starting that project you've been putting off, or whatever the situation is.

The point is, if I was able to do it, you can too. Just get up and start.

MILUTIN BUNČIĆ IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER, PROFESSIONAL TRANSLATOR, AND INTERPRETER IN HUNGARY. ■

A CHANGE FROM WITHIN

BY KEITH PHILLIPS



TO ONE DEGREE OR ANOTHER, just about all of us are unsatisfied with ourselves—but that’s not necessarily a bad thing. A certain amount of dissatisfaction is necessary if we’re going to keep making progress. It’s healthy to aspire to be more than we are. The problem is that too many of us stop there. Why do you suppose that is?

I suspect that more often than not it’s because we don’t think we have what it takes to grow and be more than we are. And we’re usually right about that. We can make some changes by sheer willpower or working harder, like reaching a new sales quota or dropping a clothing size. But what about the bigger changes, the changes *inside* that we know would make us happier and better people? It’s that kind of change that is often most elusive.

1. Mark 10:27

We tell ourselves we’re not good enough. We have too many flaws and make too many mistakes. We’ve tried and failed too many times. What’s the use? It’s just not in us!

Jesus summed it up simply when He said, “With men it is impossible, but not with God; for with God all things are possible.”¹ The secret lies in putting ourselves in God’s hands and letting Him do the impossible for us and through us and sometimes in spite of us. We may be small and weak and incapable, but there is a very big, strong, capable God just waiting to give us a hand. With His help, it’s easier than you imagined to make those “impossible” changes in yourself.

KEITH PHILLIPS WAS *ACTIVATED’S* EDITOR-IN-CHIEF FOR 14 YEARS FROM 1999 TO 2013. HE AND HIS WIFE CARYN NOW WORK WITH THE HOMELESS IN THE USA. ■

One can choose to go back toward safety or forward toward growth. Growth must be chosen again and again; fear must be overcome again and again.

—Abraham Maslow (1908–1970)

Though no one can go back and make a brand new start, anyone can start from now and make a brand new ending.

—James R. Sherman

[Christ] said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” ... For when I am weak, then I am strong. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

—2 Corinthians 12:9–10;
Philippians 4:13



MAKING RESOLUTIONS REALITIES

BY RONAN KEANE

HERE ARE SOME TIPS TO TURNING YOUR NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS INTO LASTING CHANGES IN YOUR LIFE:

- 1.** Make a list of your goals and select the top three to five that are the most important to you. Pray for God's guidance in the process. He knows best.
- 2.** Be realistic. Reaching for a goal should stretch you, but it must be doable. Decide on a reasonable time frame for reaching each goal.
- 3.** Don't try to do everything at once. It may help to focus on your top goal for a set period of time. Then move to goal number two, while maintaining the progress made toward reaching the first one, and so on.
- 4.** Pray. Prayer brings into play the spiritual help you need to reach your goals.

5. Work with God. Change involves overcoming past thought and behavioral patterns. This is never easy, but change for the better is possible if you ask God to help and you follow His lead.

6. Chart your progress. Keep track of how far you've come, using a journal or chart. Keeping records and reviewing them periodically can also help you to identify weak areas.

7. Get help from others. Share your plan with a friend and ask for his or her help. Being accountable to someone will give you added incentive to stick to your resolutions even when it's tough.

8. Don't be discouraged by your mistakes. You will have some setbacks and "off" days. Take these lows as a reminder that you can't do it on your own. Draw closer to

God and depend more on His help. Tomorrow is a fresh chance to do better!

9. Be in it for the long haul. If you are truly serious about making a change, you will be willing to see it through, no matter how long it takes.

10. Visualize victory. Periodically visualize what your life will be like once your goal is reached. Picture the advantages you will gain and how much happier, healthier, or more productive you will be.

11. Reward yourself for each goal you reach. The greatest reward will be the feeling of accomplishment and the benefits you'll experience from the change you've made, but having a physical reward attached to a specific goal can make it even more enjoyable. ■



BY MARIE ALVERO

CHANGING

I READ SOMETHING THE OTHER DAY THAT'S BEEN RUNNING THROUGH MY MIND EVER SINCE: "The system you have in place today is set up to get exactly the results you are getting today." Since then, I've tried to challenge myself to have different reactions than I would typically have.

For example, my husband and I seem to mainly argue about the same few things, and pretty much in the same way each time. Sometimes, I feel like our arguments might as well be replays of the last one. One Saturday night, I felt all my familiar frustrations and emotions rising. I knew exactly how things would play out, the frustration, the fuming, and eventually, the apologies.

Suddenly, I thought *What if I just skip to the apology?* I changed my expression, sincerely apologized, and owned my contribution to our situation. It took a second for him to believe me, but he was quick to let his anger go as well, and just like that, we had our evening back. I was grateful that I'd tried something new.

Another example has to do with endless heated discussions on social media. Again, the idea to try something radically different came to mind. I signed out of all social media and deleted the apps on my phone. I made a reading list of articles and books covering both sides of a few issues and started reading them to be able to come to more informed conclusions.

I thought, *If I am really looking for the truth that God promises to guide me into,¹ the only way is to educate myself, learn to listen, and see where He leads me.* I still don't have a comprehensive understanding of some issues, and

You can start on this transformation journey by inviting Jesus to come into your heart with a simple prayer:

Dear Jesus, I believe that You are the Son of God and that You died for me, so that I could be forgiven for the wrong things I've done and live eternally with You in heaven. Please come into my life and help me learn to depend on You. Amen.

I'm sure this will be an ongoing process, but I feel like I'm growing in understanding rather than continuing to feel stuck and helpless.

God's Word promises us His power to change: "Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person."² "Walk in newness of life."³ "Put on your new nature."⁴

These verses refer to the transformation we undergo when we become a follower of Jesus, but "old" doesn't just mean who we were before we knew Jesus; it's also whoever we are now without His guidance. My natural reactions, weaknesses, and habits aren't what define me; what matters is who I am after Jesus transforms me.

MARIE ALVERO IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO AFRICA AND MEXICO. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES A HAPPY, BUSY LIFE WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN IN CENTRAL TEXAS, USA. ■

1. See John 16:13, 2 Timothy 2:15, James 1:5.

2. 2 Corinthians 5:17 NLT

3. Romans 6:4

4. Ephesians 4:24 NLT



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

THE DIFFERENCE

Picture a forest—lush, deep, inviting. You enter and look around, expecting that rush of wonder that you’ve experienced before in nature, but this time the birds are not singing, there is no breeze to rustle the leaves, and the stream is not flowing. Everything is still, frozen in time, lifeless. You are in the forest, but it might as well be a picture hanging on the wall.

Now imagine the same scene, except this time everything you expect is there—the cheerful singing of birds, the babbling of the brook, the rustling of the leaves, the breeze in your hair, the scent of a forest after rain, the cool, lingering mist, the mossy path beneath your feet.

The contrast between these two forests is like the difference between knowing *of* Me and actually *knowing* Me; it’s the difference between merely having heard or read about Me and having a direct, personal relationship with Me. One is static; the other is vibrant and brimming with excitement, life and love. One is empty; the other fills your senses. One may help you be a better person; the other makes you complete.

My love is just waiting for you. Won’t you step in and experience all that I have in store for you? I’m only a prayer away. Just open your heart, and I’ll be there.