

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 23 • Issue 7

A WHOLE LOT OF SOMETHING

Substance over
style

Wings from Weights

How to rise
above problems

Positive Programming

Train your mind
for success



EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

TWO BOATS AND A HELICOPTER

In a well-known parable, a storm hits a small town, which is quickly flooded. As the waters rise, the local preacher kneels in prayer on the church porch, surrounded by water. Soon, one of his parishioners paddles up in a canoe.

“Get in, pastor. The waters are rising fast.”

“No worries,” says the pastor. “God will save me.”

The waters continue to rise, and the pastor has taken refuge on the balcony by the time a motorboat approaches.

“Climb aboard, pastor. There’s been an evacuation order.”

Once again, the pastor is unmoved. “God will see me through.”

The town’s levee breaks, and the flood rushes over the church until only the steeple remains above water. That’s where the pastor is, hanging onto the belfry, when a helicopter descends out of the clouds.

“Grab the ladder, pastor!” the pilot calls.

Once again, the preacher refuses, insisting that he’s putting his faith in God. The helicopter leaves, and he drowns.

At the gates of heaven, the pastor meets God. “I don’t understand. Why didn’t You deliver me from that flood?”

“What do you mean?” God asks. “I sent you two boats and a helicopter!”

Sometimes we can be like this pastor. When we are going through difficult times, and problems and questions are mounting around us, it can seem that God has turned a deaf ear to our prayers for help, whereas perhaps we’re just focused on *how we think* God should help us.

Let’s remember that the help, answers, and solutions that we want and ask for may not always come in the way we expect them to. As Martin Luther said, “All who call on God in true faith, earnestly from the heart, will certainly be heard, and will receive what they have asked and desired, although not in the hour or in the measure, or the very thing which they ask; yet they will obtain something greater and more glorious than they had dared to ask.”

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BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

THE ABALONE AND ME



AN ABALONE IS A SHELLFISH THAT STICKS TO ROCKS IN COASTAL WATERS. It's a gastropod, which means that its stomach is its foot—it walks on its stomach. And apart from its shell, an abalone is practically all stomach. It sticks to a rock and then lifts its shell about half an inch. As water sweeps past the portion of the stomach that is exposed between the shell and the rock, the abalone catches and consumes microscopic particles of vegetation that are in the water.

The abalone's shell isn't only its house, but also its armor. When threatened, the abalone can instantly clamp itself to the rock it's on as tight as a vise. That big stomach can create tremendous suction. In a flash, that great big shell can adhere to the rock so tightly that it takes a crowbar to pry it off. So when people “stick like abalones,” they *really* stick.

Perhaps sticking like that is learned with time. The first waves of trouble usually throw me off for a moment as I see everything become topsy-turvy around me, things swirling in the surf, and my world turned upside down. But then I find my rock and cling to it, like everything depends on it. Such turbulent times used to

be frightening, but I eventually learned that that's just the way life is, and when I accepted that it's the natural order of things, it became easier to navigate.

As the waves come and go, I better understand and know what to do. I know the waves and the rock, I know that I have a suction device that helps me stick, and I've learned that it gets easier the more I do it. Sticking has made my suction stronger. I've also learned to relax when the ocean is calm, but remain ready at a moment's notice to hold on tight to the rock. I never want to repeat that awful feeling of being tossed and turned about in the ocean of woes. I've also learned to never stray far from the rock, because that is the one thing I can depend on.

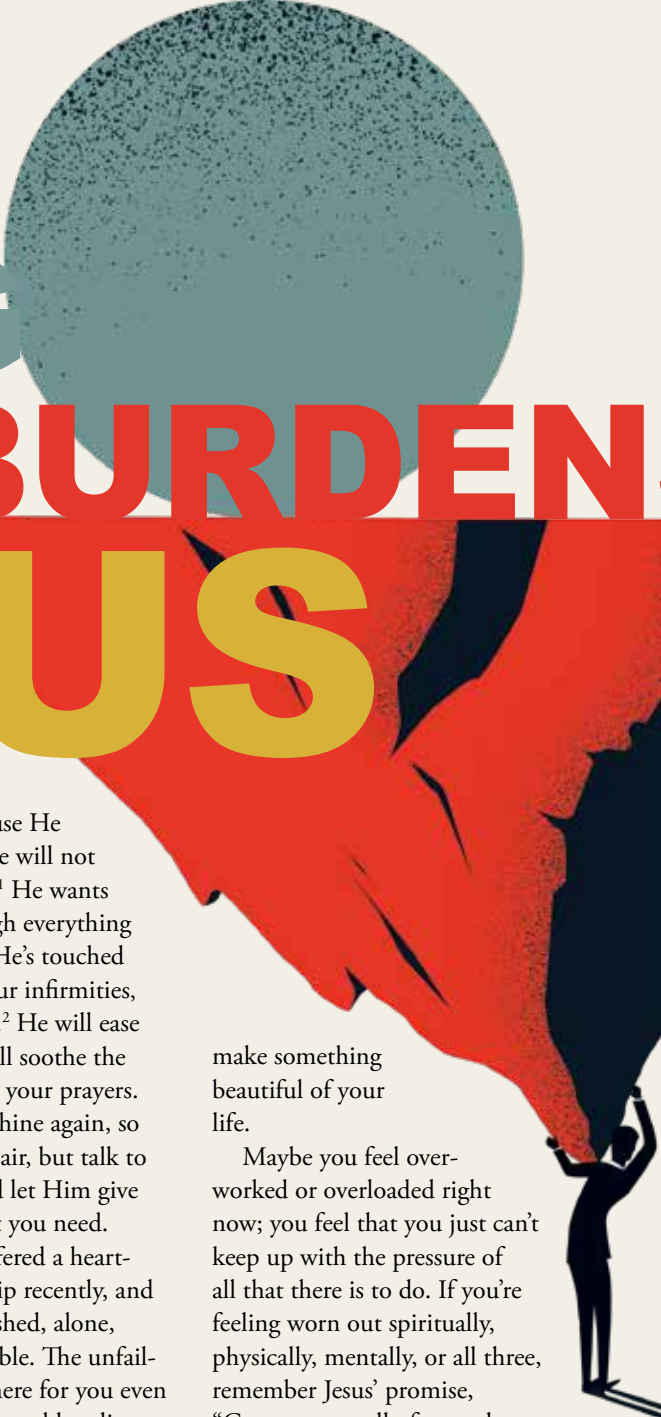
My rock is Jesus. He and His Word are my strength and salvation in times of trouble. I'm just a simple, vulnerable creature, but I know who to turn to and hold on to. And believe it or not, I've actually come to love the tumultuous seas. After all, I stick like an abalone. The stronger the waves, the tighter I cling to my Rock.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST¹ IN GERMANY. ■

1. <http://elixirmime.com>

BY MARIA FONTAINE

TAKING OUR BURDEN JESUS



EVERYONE EXPERIENCES SOME VERY DIFFICULT TIMES OF TESTING AT DIFFERENT POINTS IN THEIR LIVES. Maybe you're in the midst of one of these times and you're feeling weary and wondering what good will come out of this time of testing and when it is going to stop.

But no matter what is going on in your life, God wants you to know that He loves you, He cares, and everything is in His hands. Even if no one else understands how your heart is aching, He truly understands. It may take time for the hurt you are experiencing to heal,

but it *will* heal because He has promised that He will not leave us comfortless.¹ He wants to comfort us through everything that we experience. He's touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and He understands.² He will ease your burdens. He will soothe the pain. He will answer your prayers. You will see the sunshine again, so don't give up in despair, but talk to your Best Friend and let Him give you the comfort that you need.

Maybe you've suffered a heart-break in a relationship recently, and you feel broken, crushed, alone, insecure, and unlovable. The unending love of Jesus is there for you even through your darkest and loneliest nights, and He can help you have faith in love once again. He won't leave your heart and life broken; even if it's shattered in a million pieces, He's able to find and gather each piece, to make you whole again and

make something beautiful of your life.

Maybe you feel over-worked or overloaded right now; you feel that you just can't keep up with the pressure of all that there is to do. If you're feeling worn out spiritually, physically, mentally, or all three, remember Jesus' promise, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."³

When it seems impossible to do everything that you need to do, ask God for His strength and guidance, and He will provide. If the burden

1. See John 14:18.

2. See Hebrews 4:15.

3. Matthew 11:28 NLT

4. From *The Paradoxical Commandments*, by Dr. Kent Keith.

5. See Philippians 4:19.

6. See Ephesians 3:16.

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becomes too much to bear, talk to Jesus about it and ask Him for the solution. He can guide you to ways to pace yourself. He can show you when you need to stop for a while and pray or read His Word or take some downtime to rest and enjoy life and your family and loved ones.

Maybe you've landed in a temporary situation where you seem to be getting stuck for a long time, or you simply can't find a place, a job, a home, or a career that seems right for you. Please don't despair, because Jesus is preparing a place for you—not only a place in heaven, but a place on earth here and now.

Remember also that God doesn't make mistakes.

God's men and women of faith throughout history didn't look for the places of service that suited *them*, but rather for what they could do for others. They were visionaries who believed that they could make a difference in the world, and they set out to make that difference, and many of them achieved their goal because they didn't give up.

I recently read something that I thought did a good job of describing the character of the visionary.

People are unreasonable, illogical, and self-centered.

Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies. Succeed anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

The biggest people with the biggest ideas can be shot down by the smallest people with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway.

People favor underdogs but follow only top dogs.

Fight for some underdogs anyway. What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight. Build anyway.⁴

Doing the right thing anyway, in spite of opposition or your feelings of discouragement or inadequacy, is the making of men and women of faith; it's the path to making a difference. And when you walk God's road, He won't fail to take care of you. You can count on His promises.

God has promised to supply all your needs according to His riches in glory,⁵ and He's promised to strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being.⁶ We know that He will never fail to take care of you, no matter what! And one day you're going to be so thankful that He brought you through each and every thing you experienced in this life.

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



Wings FROM WEIGHTS

BY VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG

THERE IS A BEAUTIFUL STAINED GLASS WINDOW IN THE HISTORIC WESLEY'S CHAPEL IN LONDON, inscribed with these words: "If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me."¹

People have always wanted wings—a way to be lifted above their earthly lives and troubles. It seems to be human nature to feel confined and discontented with "here." Things surely must be easier, brighter, better, freer "there," just over the next hill.

There's another verse where the Psalmist David echoes the

get-me-away-from-it-all sentiment. He says, "Oh, that I had wings like a dove! I would fly away and be at rest."² But he also knew the secret to finding that wonderful place away from it all, and he shared that secret with us: "The Lord sustained me."³

God sustained David through all his difficulties and tests, and He transformed his weights into wings. "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint."⁴ When we turn to God's Word and wait in prayer until God touches our soul, we mount up to realms of peace and rest and are truly "sustained by the Lord."

This old world strives to pull us down, but there is an upward pull that will lift us to the heart of God.

If you read God's Word, share your heart with Him, and wait for Him to speak to you, you will find all the strength you need. But many people try to run on their own strength, hoping that they will somehow surmount their difficulties that way. They put the feet before the wings. But read that verse again. The running and walking come after the renewing. What chance does your soul have if you never take those moments to connect with God and draw strength from Him? "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart."⁵

VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG (1886–1968) WAS AN AMERICAN EVANGELIST AND AUTHOR. READ MORE ABOUT HER LIFE AND WORK AT [HTTP://VIRGINIABRANDTBERG.ORG](http://virginiabrandtberg.org). ADAPTED FROM THE ORIGINAL ARTICLE. ■

1. Psalm 139:9–10 KJV
2. Psalm 55:6
3. Psalm 3:5
4. Isaiah 40:31
5. Psalm 27:14



GOD CUT THE RED TAPE

ROSANNA DE ANGELIS

WHEN OUR FAMILY MOVED TO A NEW COUNTRY FOR MY HUSBAND'S WORK, we heard distressing stories about the process to obtain a local driver's license. My new friends told me of the hours spent in a driving course, taking the written exam, and finally a practical test in the local language. I heard of someone who had to take the exam three times, and another who waited a year for final approval. My head spun. With my children in school and my husband often away, being able to drive was an absolute necessity.

On the morning of the day that my husband and I went to do our paperwork, the office was packed, and the line didn't seem to be moving at all. My husband wanted to drive to another office, but by then it was the lunch rush hour, and we

eventually decided to wait until the afternoon.

So we enjoyed a nice lunch with friends, picked up our daughter from school, and then went to the government office to apply for our new resident IDs. On the way, we all decided that we would remain positive and trust that everything was going to work out.

Upon arrival we were greeted, given a number, and then almost immediately called to the window. The entire process for our new IDs took barely 15 minutes, and we decided to go to the office of transportation next to apply for my driver's license. When we were called to proceed to the window, I could hear God's still, small voice telling me to remain calm because everything was going to work out. I filled out my personal information and was told to pay the fee and leave my license with the clerk.

A few minutes later, I was called up again—to be told that the paperwork had been accepted! "Congratulations!" the clerk said as she handed me my new driver's license. I was overwhelmed with emotion and gratitude to Jesus for being concerned about something that was seemingly small in the great scheme of things but so important to me.

It's often in small ways like this that God reveals His presence, His power, and His love. We need to remember to ask God to teach us to hear His voice and follow His leadings. We can't do it all on our own; that's why He says, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."¹

ROSANNA DE ANGELIS IS AN *ACTIVATED* READER IN THE UAE. ■

1. Matthew 7:7 KJV



The Waters of God's Word

BY WILLIAM B. McGRATH

IN PSALM 27 WE READ THAT KING DAVID CONSIDERED IT HIS PRINCIPAL JOY TO BE ABLE TO GAZE ON THE BEAUTY OF GOD IN THE TABERNACLE

where the artifacts symbolizing God's intervention on behalf of His people were kept. Today we have a place just as beautiful and amazing to go to; we have His Word in its fullness, and His Holy Spirit dwelling within us to speak to our hearts personally.

Each time you read a Bible passage, things old and new can be discovered. Here's one example of a Bible account that I reflected on:

The story of Naaman, in 2 Kings chapter 5, is about the captain of the Syrian army who had success,

position, wealth, and high esteem. But he also had leprosy, which isolated him and caused the position that he had worked so long to attain to fade and lose its value.

His wife had a young Hebrew slave girl who mentions to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."¹

Naaman goes to the king of Syria, explaining why he wishes to see the prophet in Samaria. The king of Syria then sends him on his way, along with a letter to the king of Israel to explain why Naaman is passing through his country.

Naaman sets out to find Elisha in Samaria, prepared to pay a large

1. 2 Kings 5:3 NIV

2. Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*, Chapter Four, "The Seduction of Success."

3. See John 8:31, Ephesians 5:26, Titus 3:5, Psalm 119.

sum of money and hopefully have a glorious healing event. He expected the king of Israel to command Elisha to cure him, and that surely the God of Israel would grant the petition upon seeing the large payment and recognizing Naaman's importance on the social ladder.

But when Naaman and his company finally arrive at Elisha's house, a servant comes out to meet him instead of the prophet, and the servant tells him to go to the Jordan River and wash seven times. To Naaman, this is an insult, and he leaves angry. But one of his own servants, who had come on the journey, suggests that he at least try to comply and see if it might work. Naaman calms down, humbles himself, heads to the Jordan River where he dips seven times, and is marvelously healed!

In his book *Counterfeit Gods*, Timothy Keller tells us that this well-known Bible story is full of meaningful lessons for our contemporary society. Individual success, high achievement, position, and economic status are instilled by our

culture as top priorities—all the things Naaman had going for him. Naaman had done well for himself. He thought he should use his special connections and his wealth to approach Elisha and the Hebrew God. But he found out that the true God of the universe is “not an extension of culture, but a transformer of culture, not a controllable but a sovereign Lord ... whose salvation cannot be earned, only received.”²

Like Naaman, we may also hold the subtle desire of wanting God to put on some great show for us when we seek Him for answers to our fervent prayers. He will sometimes do astounding things, but not always. As this story brings out, He will often request that we do the simple, humble thing. Naaman was told to “go wash,” and at first that felt like an insult to him, an affront to his pride and status. Today we're told to wash ourselves in the water of God's Word.³

When we return again and again to His Word, it becomes our main joy and our priority, just as gazing on God's beauty and meditating on who

He is and what He does was so important to King David. When we go through hardship, when we stumble along our walk of life, when we suffer great disappointment, this is the one recourse that comes through for us over and over again to sustain us.

When Naaman did go down to the Jordan and washed himself “according to the saying of the man of God ... his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.” And Jesus tells us, “Now you are clean through the word which I have spoken unto you.” His Word cleanses and regenerates our spirits. And through the years, as we gaze more deeply and come to enjoy it more fully and understand it more completely, our assurance and faith gradually grow stronger. This simple thing, going to God's Word, changes our motivations, our identity, our views, and our actions.

WILLIAM B. MCGRATH IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN SOUTHERN MEXICO. ■



A Whole Lot of Something

BY AALIYAH WILLIAMS



HAVE YOU EVER HAD A CAKE THAT WAS MORE FROSTING OR FONDANT THAN CAKE ITSELF?

When I encounter a cake like that, I usually scrape off the topping and eat the cake. The top part was only fluff anyway, and I prefer the substantial, chocolaty cake part.

Certain breads don't sit well with me either—the kind where a bite will dissolve on my tongue, as if nothing was there at all. The thing is, just as there are cakes and breads that are a whole lot of nothing, there's a certain kind of communication that is the same.

1. Luke 3:16
2. www.just1thing.com

It's the kind of talking where we name-drop to make ourselves appear better in others' eyes, or where we exaggerate our accomplishments or other circumstances in order to appear more attractive to others. It's where we project an untrue image that we want others to have of us.

When we aren't authentic in our communications, we trade substance for sugar and cream, and there's only so much of that that anyone can take. It's funny, but all our bragging, boasting, and puffing ourselves up seems to have the opposite of the desired effect. People often like others who aren't afraid to be themselves, and they have a negative

reaction to those who try too hard to be liked.

There's someone in the Bible who knew a thing or two about being authentic. John the Baptist was a guy who didn't care about how others viewed him. He wore fur, ate bugs and honey, and probably never shaved. I'm guessing that he never tried to make himself appear better to others either.

He didn't hype himself up. When asked whether he was the Christ, he wasn't afraid to say that "One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose."¹ He spoke the truth at all times, and that's what gained others' trust.



ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

The longer I live, the more I realize the impact of attitude on life. The remarkable thing is we have a choice every day regarding the attitude we will embrace for that day. We cannot change our past. We cannot change the fact that people will act in a certain way. We cannot change the inevitable. The only thing we can do is play on the one string we have, and that is our attitude. I am convinced that life is 10 percent what happens to me and 90 percent how I react to it. —Charles Swindoll (b.1934)

In a society overflowing with hype, people who aren't afraid to be real and honest about where they're at or who talk about the core of what they believe—they stand out.

It is about having the courage to be the person God created each of us to be and staying true to that vision.

I've been mulling this over because I know it's an area of my life that constantly needs improvement. So far, I've come up with two basic points that have been a help to me in being authentic and genuine in how I show myself to others.

First, spend time with God. When I'm spending enough time with God, I become less concerned about what others think of me. I stop wanting

to create an image of who I think I should be, and become satisfied that God knew what He was doing when He created me. I have found that as I spend time with Him, He reveals to me what He had in mind when He made me and placed me where He did.

Second, be open. I need to let people get to know the person I am behind the smoke and mirrors. It's natural to want people to think well of me. I'm not sure if I'll ever grow out of the desire to be admired and loved, but where I'm wrong is thinking that a made-up version of who I am is better than the real me. The people I look up to and admire are those who

have revealed their hearts to me—friends, mentors, and others who have pulled back the surface layer of mundane conversation to show me their hearts.

Getting to that place where we decide to be real can make all the difference in our interactions with others, because it's so much better to communicate a substantial something than a whole lot of nothing.

AALIYAH WILLIAMS IS AN EDITOR AND CONTENT DEVELOPER. THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST 1 THING,² A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■



POSITIVE PROGRAM

BY RONAN KEANE

MOST OF US STRUGGLE WITH NEGATIVE THINKING AT SOME POINT IN OUR LIVES.

We put ourselves down for real or imagined faults and weaknesses, or we compare ourselves negatively to others. The use of positive statements that you can repeat to yourself is a technique for overcoming that negativity.

Our thoughts shape our attitude, our attitude shapes our actions, and our actions help to shape our future. A changed life begins with a change in thinking. The Bible instructs, “Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”¹ You set that process in motion by filling your mind with godly, positive thoughts. “Whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things ... and the God of peace will be with you.”² It takes practice to focus on the positive, but in time you will see results in a happier, more secure life.

The Bible is filled with positive affirmations. As we learn to apply

those to ourselves and everyday situations, we begin to see ourselves and life more as God does, and that is reflected in our thoughts and behavior.

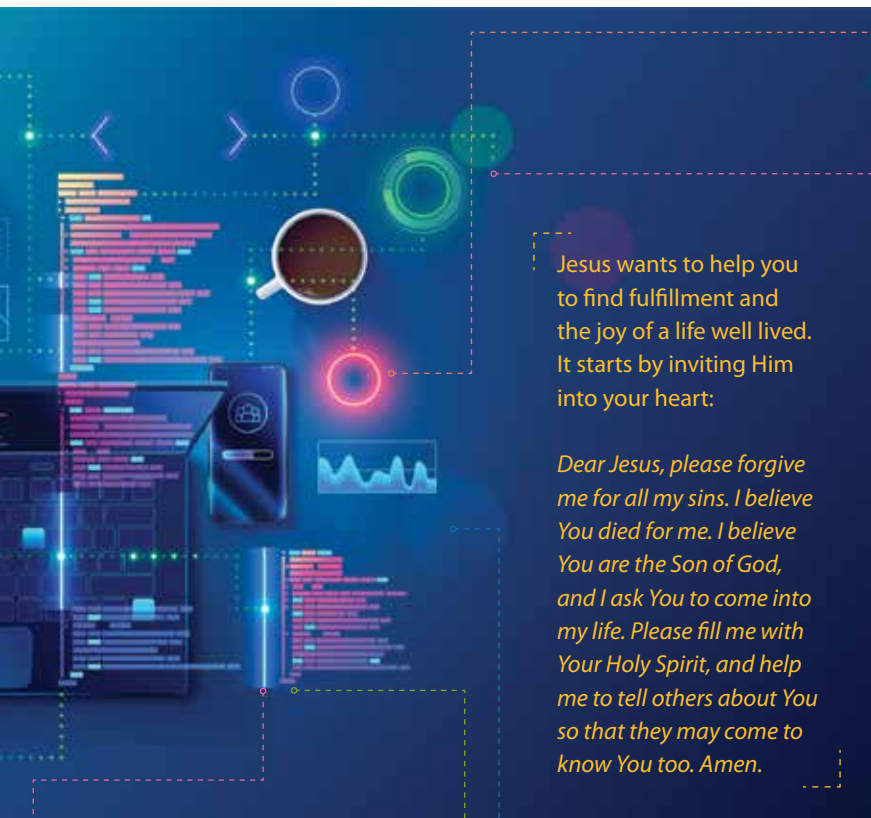
Here are a few examples to get you started. We are all different and have different needs, so choose the ones that seem to apply the most to you, or come up with some of your own.

- ▶ **Whether or not I feel capable of this task, I am going to do my best and trust Jesus to do the rest. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13).**
- **I made a mistake today, but I’m determined to learn from it, get up, and try again. “The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the Lord upholds him with His hand” (Psalm 37:23–24).**
- **Things may not be working out the way I had hoped—at least not yet—but I’m going to keep trusting that God has something good up His sleeve. “We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).**
- ▶ **I am not perfect, but I’m special to God because He gave me a unique mind, a unique personality, unique abilities, and a unique destiny. “I am fearfully and wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works” (Psalm 139:14).**
- **Nothing can come between me and God’s love. “I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor**

1. Romans 12:2
2. Philippians 4:8–9
3. See Romans 4:21.



MING >>>



Jesus wants to help you to find fulfillment and the joy of a life well lived. It starts by inviting Him into your heart:

Dear Jesus, please forgive me for all my sins. I believe You died for me. I believe You are the Son of God, and I ask You to come into my life. Please fill me with Your Holy Spirit, and help me to tell others about You so that they may come to know You too. Amen.

myself, and I'm going to make someone else's day better. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35).

- **I** am not going to give up! I refuse to call it quits! Jesus promised that His strength is there for me as long as I keep trying. "Let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart" (Galatians 6:9).
- **I** may not have as much materially as some people, but I have things that matter more—integrity and peace of mind. "Godliness with contentment is great gain" (1 Timothy 6:6).
- **G**od wants to guide me through today and help me make the very most of it. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take" (Proverbs 3:5–6 NLT).
- **G**od will help me make the right decisions. "If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5).

These aren't mere random, feel-good statements that don't have any solid foundation. Each is based directly on one of God's unfailing promises, and what He has promised, He will also perform.³ With God, there are no limits! ■

angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38–39).

- **I** have nothing to fear because God is love and He is always with me. "He Himself has said, 'I will

never leave you nor forsake you'" (Hebrews 13:5).

- **G**od wants me to find joy in Him and in the life He gave me. "These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full" (John 15:11).
- **T**oday I'm going to think more about others and less about



BY IRENA ŽABIČKOVÁ

BECOMING THE PERSON GOD WANTS YOU TO BE

I am the vine, you are the branches. He who remains in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit. For without Me you can do nothing.—*John 15:5*

BESIDES DYING FOR OUR SINS, Jesus also came down to earth as a man to be an illustration of God, to show through His actions what God is like. Hence it makes a lot of sense for us to strive to be more like Christ, to follow His example.

But to change ourselves is not easy. There was a time when I tried studying various self-help books which teach how to improve in different areas of my life where I felt a change was needed. I found some good advice there on what to do and how to go about it. However, I quickly realized that they primarily rely on willpower and self-discipline, which are fallible. We all have probably experienced trying to change something about ourselves

1. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org>

because we read it in a book, or perhaps we felt that God was leading us in this direction, only to fail pitifully, making a mess of things or of ourselves. It has happened to me, and I ended up discouraged and felt like I would never be able to make progress.

Sometimes I know that I need to change a certain aspect of my behavior or mindset, and I try and try, only to fail again and again. But when I make space for Jesus to work in me, there is visible progress without the same struggle and fatigue on my part. And how do I make that space for Him? Very simply: I spend more time with Him. More time talking to Him and hearing His answers. More time praising Him and dwelling in His presence, meditating on His Word, tuning

out this world and its business and everyday struggles.

When I manage to spend time like this, I can literally feel the impact it has on me. I come away a different person—one filled with joy instead of sorrow, peace instead of struggle, trust instead of worry, love instead of envy, forgiveness instead of bitterness, generosity instead of selfishness. On my own, I often try and fail, but when I spend time with Jesus, His Spirit and His Word work in me to change my mindsets and behavior.

I have discovered that dwelling in His presence and studying His Word are keys to becoming more like Him and who He wants me to be.

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The Widow of Zarephath

BY MARIE ALVERO



THE BIBLE RECORDS MANY PASSAGES ON GENEROSITY. It's an important trait of the Christian life, and as followers of Jesus, we are called to be generous, joyful givers. But I know that sometimes I feel dry, spent, and with very little resources mentally, physically, spiritually, and financially. I want to give, but I feel like I am scraping the bottom of the barrel, and it's taking all I've got just to get through the day.

This brings to mind a story in the Bible. The land of Israel and the surrounding areas are in the midst of a drought and famine. It hasn't rained in years and people are literally starving. The prophet Elijah had been miraculously sustained by a brook, but one day, God called him to head to Zarephath, a little city in the foreign land of Sidon. At the outskirts of town, he meets a widow who is gathering sticks and asks her for a drink of water.

"As she was going to get it, he called to her, 'Bring me a bite of bread, too.' But she said, 'I swear by

the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal, and then my son and I will die.'

"But Elijah said to her, 'Don't be afraid! Go ahead and do just what you've said, but make a little bread for me first. Then use what's left to prepare a meal for yourself and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There will always be flour and olive oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!'"¹

I'm sure this widow facing imminent starvation felt far more spent than I do. I wonder what motivated her to be willing to give the prophet a drink of water even before he told her of God's promise? Did she maybe think, at that point, that she had nothing to lose? As a foreigner, she may not even have known or believed in the God of Israel, yet she was willing to give the last of what she had to God's prophet.

We often think of generosity as giving from our abundance, but what if it's giving from our scarcity? Could giving from our lack of time, strength, grace, wisdom, and resources give God room to work in ways that He would not have if we felt "stocked up" on everything?

I don't know if the widow ever had a full pantry, but I can imagine that over the next years, every time she poured oil out of her cruse or scooped up a cup of flour from her jar, she was reminded of how God took the last she had to offer and paid her back with continual sustenance.

So perhaps I'm not called to be generous because of my abundance (though I recognize that I have much more than so many). Perhaps I'm called to give because of my faith in God, knowing that what I have is firstly His and for His glory.

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1. 1 Kings 17:11-14 NLT

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

A PIECE OF THE PUZZLE

I can see the questions that have come up in your mind since things don't seem to be going as smoothly as you had expected or hoped. You wonder if you got it right, if you made the right decisions and choices along the way.

I understand the questions, sadness, hurt, and despair that you feel. I want you to know that I'm right here by your side. You are My child, and I love you and care for you with tenderness. I never put you in a place too small to grow in. This is a situation in which you can grow—an opportunity to learn new lessons and nurture qualities of My Spirit such as humility, faith, trust, and dependence on Me.

Be patient and allow Me to work in the situation. You are on My “potter's wheel,”¹ and if I'm going to make something beautiful of your life, I ask that you sit still and give Me time to work. You don't have to worry that you're going to be spinning on that wheel forever. Just remember that the time in the Potter's hands is what's making you an even better vessel.

Trust Me, for I do all things well. The work that I have begun in you, I will complete until the end.

1. See Jeremiah 18:1–6.