

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

ACTIVATED

Vol 12 • Issue 6

STEPPING STONES

Navigating this slippery
business called life

Progress Can Get Messy

How to make the most of
changing circumstances

Desert Places

Dead end or destiny's door?





PERSONALLY SPEAKING

The evening of December 9, 1914, an explosion set fire to a large scientific laboratory in West Orange, New Jersey. At least ten buildings were destroyed, along with years of research and development. Property loss alone was estimated

at \$7 million (\$148 million in today's dollars). "There go all our mistakes," the laboratory's founder and CEO said as he watched the blaze. "Although I am 67 years old," he told a *New York Times* reporter who was at the scene, "I'll start all over again tomorrow." The next morning's newspaper included a notice that all 7,000 of the lab's employees were to report for work immediately, to begin rebuilding. A disaster of lesser proportions would have demoralized just about anyone else, but years of trial and error had conditioned Thomas Edison to see disasters as opportunities.

Most of the reversals you and I face aren't nearly as catastrophic, but they have two things in common with Edison's inferno. First, regardless of their nature, they present us with a choice: How will we react to our change of circumstances? Second, depending on how we react, such changes inevitably change *us* for better or for worse.

On the first score, positive thinking and determination are powerful forces for making the most of difficult circumstances, but when we also enlist the help of all-powerful God, our chances for a positive outcome increase exponentially. "The eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth to show Himself strong in behalf of those whose hearts are [right] toward Him."¹

On the second score, if we ask God to use every challenge we face to help make us better people, He will. In fact, "Make me better" is one of His favorite prayers to answer.

Keith Phillips
For *Activated*

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1. 2 Chronicles 16:9 AMP

“DEVASTATED” DOESN’T BEGIN TO DESCRIBE HOW I FELT THAT DAY FOUR YEARS AGO. Circumstances beyond my control had seemed to conspire against me. I had been laid off from a job to which I had given my all for almost fourteen years. I can’t say that I took it well at first, alternating between anger and depression. I simply couldn’t see my way forward, nor could I come to grips with how my family would manage without the income we were accustomed to. Did the sun even shine that summer? I can’t recall.

Despair was something that ancient Israel’s King David also struggled with, and some of those struggles are recorded in the book of Psalms. I identified with his anguish. “Out of the depths I have cried to You, O Lord; Lord, hear my voice!”¹ “From the end of the earth I will cry to You, when my heart is

overwhelmed; lead me to the rock that is higher than I.”² There *was* a rock upon which I could depend, a rock upon which I could rebuild my life. That rock was Jesus Christ.

Being out of work, I had time on my hands. I immersed myself in God’s Word, meditated on His promises, and thought about Him as I walked, worked in the garden, and rested. Gradually my peace of mind and spirit were restored. My troubles didn’t seem so bad once I got my focus back on eternal truths and values. Finally I could agree with the apostle Paul when he said, in effect, “The present hard times can’t compare with the coming good times.”³

Life gradually became busier again. I found a part-time job, but less income meant moving my family to a smaller house. Downsizing was an adjustment, but it had its advantages—a simpler lifestyle,

less pressure, fewer complications, and the opportunity to pursue new interests.

Then a chance encounter led to a training course and an entirely new career—an opportunity that wouldn’t have come to me if I had still been working at my old job. I’m happier and more fulfilled in my new situation, and my family is better off than we were then. It was a big change of direction that I probably wouldn’t have made if I hadn’t been forced into it, but what looked like the end turned out to be a new start.

I climbed on the Rock, and He held me up.

CHRIS HUNT IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN ENGLAND. ■

THE ROCK

BY CHRIS HUNT

1. Psalm 130:1–2

2. Psalm 61:2

3. Romans 8:18, paraphrased

All things change, but JESUS never

BY DAVID BRANDT BERG

AS SURE AS THE NIGHT FOLLOWS THE DAY, LIGHT FOLLOWS DARKNESS. AS SURE AS THE SUN RISES, IT MUST ALSO SET. As sure as the rain falls, it must also rise again. As sure as “dust you are, and to dust you shall return,”¹ there must be a continual birth, life, death, resurrection. The cycle must be completed—the perfect circle of eternity—of which God is the designer, the beginning and the end, the Alpha and the Omega.²

God moves. He is a moving God. He is never still. He is always doing, going, saying, and effecting change in every sphere of creation. He is never static, except for Himself—“I am the Lord, I do not change”³—except for His Word—“Forever, O Lord, Your Word is settled in Heaven”⁴—and except for the future, His promises to His children—“Not one thing has failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spoke concerning you. All have come to pass for you; not one word of them has failed.”⁵

Yesterday, today, and forever, Jesus is the same. All things change, but Jesus never.⁶

Abide with me; fast falls the eventide;
The darkness deepens; Lord with me abide
When other helpers fail and comforts flee,
Help of the helpless, O abide with me.

Swift to its close ebbs out life's little day;
Earth's joys grow dim; its glories pass away;
Change and decay in all around I see;
O Thou who changest not, abide with me.
—Henry Francis Lyte (1793–1847)

DAVID BRANDT BERG (1919–1994) WAS THE FOUNDER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

1. Genesis 3:19
2. Revelation 1:8
3. Malachi 3:6
4. Psalm 119:89

5. Joshua 23:14
6. Hebrews 13:8
7. Exodus 3:14
8. Psalm 46:4



UNCHANGING

By Virginia Brandt Berg

WHEN GOD SENT MOSES TO LEAD THE CHILDREN OF ISRAEL OUT OF EGYPT, HE TOLD HIM, “Thus you shall say to the children of Israel, ‘I AM has sent me to you.’”⁷ God’s name is “I AM”—not “I WAS,” but “I AM.” What a wonderful realization! What assurance! What security!

“There is a stream that makes glad the heart of man.”⁸ So many things in life change. So many springs run dry. So many sources of pleasure evaporate as the years go by. But the Christian’s joy and peace don’t dry up, because they have as their source an upper, everlasting fountain—the unchanging God.

EVANGELIST AND PASTOR VIRGINIA BRANDT BERG (1886–1968) WAS THE MOTHER OF DAVID BRANDT BERG. ■



PROGRESS CAN GET MESSY

BY MARIA FONTAINE

PROGRESS CAN BE A TWO-EDGED SWORD. ON ONE HAND IT'S WONDERFUL BECAUSE IT BRINGS US CLOSER TO OUR GOALS, BUT ON THE OTHER HAND THE CHANGE IT ENTAILS CAN MAKE US FEEL UNCOMFORTABLE, DESTABILIZED, INSECURE. We want the benefits, but we wish we could skip the difficult transition phase. That would be nice, but it's not realistic.

It's human nature to resist change, but we can override that impulse; we can each choose to be a change proponent.

One tip for riding the wave of change is to not brace yourself against it, expecting the worst. A surfer doesn't hold up his surfboard to try to stop the wave. Instead, before the wave reaches him, he starts paddling in the same direction the wave is moving, so when the wave

ONE OF LIFE'S PARADOXES IS THAT WE WANT THINGS TO GET BETTER, BUT WE DON'T WANT THEM TO CHANGE.—*DAVID BRANDT BERG*

does reach him, he is swept along by it. He trusts the wave to lift and carry him, and that trust transforms the experience into an exhilarating one.

During any time of change, it's vital to hold on to God's unfailing, all-knowing love. Remind yourself that He is in control and that He has your best interests at heart. No matter what's happened in the past or what may happen in the future, God is your constant.¹ He is your heavenly shepherd,² and He will not lead you astray or into harm's way.³ His love for you will never diminish.⁴ His strength and power will never wane.⁵

When you have the assurance of that kind of power behind you, you can approach life's ups and downs positively. When you have the promise "All things

work together for good to those who love God,"⁶ you think in terms of possibilities rather than problems. What new opportunities does this change open up? How can God help you turn a potentially negative situation into a positive one? That's what is known as expectant faith.

That kind of faith comes from spending time with Jesus, reading His Word, sharing your heart with Him, letting Him speak to you, and praising Him for His goodness. But if you get too wrapped up in trying to figure things out on your own, or if you neglect the needs of your spirit, you're not going to have the faith you need in times of change. Make some time for God every day, and keep that time sacred. Through your times of personal communion with Him, He will strengthen and renew your spirit.⁷ Then you'll be ready for anything, because you'll have the assurance that God is going to see you through.

1. Malachi 3:6

5. Jude 25

2. Psalm 23:1

6. Romans 8:28

3. Jeremiah 29:11

7. Isaiah 40:31

4. Jeremiah 31:3

MARIA FONTAINE AND HER HUSBAND, PETER

AMSTERDAM, HEAD THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

Desert Places

BY MARIE BOISJOLY

CAMINO TEDIOSO. ¡NO SE DUERMA! (SPANISH FOR “MONOTONOUS ROAD. DO NOT FALL ASLEEP!”) It wasn’t the first such warning sign we had passed. For several hours, as far as the eye could see, there had been little but unending stretches of desert, saguaro and candelabra cactuses, and the occasional mesquite bush. My husband and I were crossing Mexico’s Chihuahuan Desert, the third-largest desert in the Western Hemisphere.

A while later we stopped at a gas station—the only building of any kind we had come to in over an hour—and I got out to stretch my legs. As my husband was paying for the gas, I struck up a conversation with the young attendant.

“Are you from here?”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“It must be difficult to live in such an isolated place. Don’t you get lonely and bored?” I asked.

“No, ma’am,” he replied, “because God is here. I see Him in the wildlife. . . .” He began enumerating. “There are the chameleons, the coyotes, the rattlesnakes, the roadrunners scurrying after lizards, the golden eagles searching for black-tailed jackrabbits. And from this dry, sandy soil He gives us the delicious dragon fruit and *nopales* (prickly pears).”

His candor and enthusiasm were as refreshing as they were unexpected.

Later, as we continued to

pass through what seemed unending barren wastelands, I thought about the young man’s words and was reminded of others to whom God came in desert places.

Hagar fled into the desert, but was found and blessed by God there (Genesis chapter 16).

Moses received his call from God in the Sinai Desert (Exodus 3:1–10), and it was there that God later gave him the Ten Commandments (Exodus 19:1,3).

Elijah took refuge in a barren wilderness and heard God’s voice there (1 Kings 19:7–8,13).

John the Baptist lived in the desert until he received his call from God to prepare the way for the coming Messiah (Luke 1:80; 3:2).

Jesus was tempted and overcame Satan while on a desert retreat before embarking on His public ministry (Matthew 4:1).

God sent Philip to explain the way of salvation to the Ethiopian eunuch on a desert road (Acts 8:26–39).

Are you going through a dry, desolate, “desert” experience? Take heart. God is in the desert.

MARIE BOISJOLY IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN MEXICO. ■



“THE DESERT SHALL REJOICE AND BLOSSOM AS THE ROSE. . . . THEY SHALL SEE THE GLORY OF THE LORD, THE EXCELLENCY OF OUR GOD.—ISAIAH 35:1–2”





Getting up & going on

POINTS TO PONDER

IF YOU FEEL THAT YOU HAVE MADE MISTAKES, TAKEN WRONG TURNS, EVEN FAILED MISERABLY AT THIS OR THAT, YOU'RE IN GOOD COMPANY.

Many of God's heroes in the Bible did too, but they learned from their mistakes. And God came to them, sitting in the midst of failed dreams or disappointed hopes, and gave them a new reason to live. That's what He can do when we give up on our own plans and projects and decide to try His. He gives us goals to help us grow and move in the right direction, and then He helps us attain them. Give Him a chance. Let Him give you the good things He has for you.—*Nana Williams*

Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.—*Albert Einstein*

Never let go of hope. One day you will see that it all has finally come together. What you have always wished for has finally come to be. You will look back and laugh at what has passed and you will ask yourself, How did I get through all of that?—*Author unknown*

Do the one thing you think you cannot do. Fail at it. Try again. Do better the second time. The only people who never tumble are those who never mount the high wire. This is your moment. Own it.—*Oprah Winfrey*

Ever tried? Ever failed? No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better.—*Samuel Beckett*

Don't waste energy trying to cover up failure. Learn from your failures and go on to the next challenge. It's okay to fail. If you're not failing, you're not growing.—*H. Stanley Judd*

I am not judged by the number of times I fail, but by the number of times I succeed; and the number of times I succeed is in direct proportion to the number of times I can fail and keep on trying.—*Tom Hopkins*

Adversity pushes the envelope of accepted performance. Until a person learns from experience that he can live through adversity, he is reluctant to challenge himself to press his limits. Failure prompts a person to rethink the status quo.—*John C. Maxwell*

Commit yourself to a dream. Nobody who tries to do something great but fails is a total failure. Why? Because he can always rest assured that he succeeded in life's most important battle—he defeated the fear of trying.—*Robert H. Schuller*

Anything wonderful can happen in that little margin of time when you don't give up but keep on believing.—*David Brandt Berg* ■

ADAPTED FROM THE WRITINGS
OF DAVID BRANDT BERG

STEPPING STONES

THE NEXT TIME YOU FIND YOURSELF FEELING DOWN AND OUT, YOU MAY BE ABOUT TO DISCOVER JUST HOW CLOSE AND CARING GOD IS, because it's through life's most trying times that we learn He is always at our side. He loves us, wants only the best for us, and is able to bring about positive results from everything that happens to us—even troubles. Each difficulty or disappointment can become a stepping stone to lead us to higher ground.

GOD'S LOVING PLAN

God has promised in His Word, "All things work together for good to those who love God."¹ He will never let anything happen to you, His child, that isn't for your good. Although a lot of things may have happened to you that didn't look very good at the time, you'll find out sooner or later, if you haven't already, that in some way they *were* good for you.

God's answers to our prayers are infinitely perfect, but sometimes He doesn't answer the way we want Him to because He sees ahead and knows that our desires would harm us or others if He were to grant them. Often we later find that what we were asking for was actually a stone that merely looked like bread, while He was trying to give us bread that in our shortsightedness looked like a stone.²

THE DARKEST TIMES

God's purposes aren't always immediately clear, but you can always rest assured that you're in His care and that things will work together for good in the end, someway. When you're going through trying times, in spite of the difficulty, in spite of the confusion, in spite of the disappointment or heartbreak, in spite of the loss, you must hold on to the knowledge that God loves you. His love is unchanging, unfailing, and unending. No matter what happens, no matter how bleak the outlook, no matter how difficult the battle, no matter how long and dark the tunnel, no matter how severe the suffering, He loves you. He doesn't give His love stingily. He doesn't mete out a little here and there as you earn it. He always pours forth His love freely and abundantly.

Even through the most trying times, He is "a friend who sticks closer than a brother."³ "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me."⁴ He is there in the darkness. He is there in the trial. He is there in the confusion. He is there in the depths. He is there because He loves you. He is there to help you through.

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He doesn't like to see you suffer and be unhappy, but He knows those experiences will help you to become the better man or woman He knows you can be.

PATHWAY TO GLORY

When you come to the end of life's road and look back at all that happened to you, you'll see just how much God loved you and how faithfully He cared for you all along the way, especially when the going got rough. It will be clear then that the rocks in your path were not placed there to cause you to stumble, but they were meant to be stepping stones to better things.

So no matter what hard turns your road may take, remember that Jesus is with you. He cares, and He will eventually cause even the "worst" situations to work together for your good. He has promised that.

FOR MORE ON HOW TO PASS THROUGH LIFE'S TESTS AND TRIALS VICTORIOUSLY, ORDER THE *GET ACTIVATED* BOOKLET *OBSTACLES ARE FOR OVERCOMING* FROM ONE OF THE ADDRESSES ON PAGE 2. ■

1. Romans 8:28

3. Proverbs 18:24

2. See Matthew 7:7-11.

4. Psalm 23:4

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG

By *Abi F. May*

The Old Testament prophet Habakkuk knew what it meant to trust in God no matter how badly things were going.

Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;
Though the flock may be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the Lord,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
The Lord God is my strength;
He will make my feet like deer's feet,
And He will make me walk on my high hills.
—*Habakkuk 3:17-19*

If Habakkuk had been born 2,500 years later, perhaps he would have put it this way:

Though factories close,
And farms go bust;
Though the economy fail,
And jobs be lost;
Though currencies fall
And savings fade;
Yet we can rejoice in the living, loving God
For He is to be trusted;
He will keep me going;
His love will carry me through
And on to better things.



The View from My Window

BY ABI F. MAY

MONTH BY MONTH, SEASON BY SEASON, THE VIEW FROM MY WINDOW IS CONSTANTLY CHANGING.

In **January** the trees are bare and the grass is faded, stubbly, brown.

In **March** there is evidence of new life. Tiny buds have appeared on branches. Flowers struggle to poke through rain-sodden soil still tinged with early morning frost. Birds have returned and are busy searching for food and building nests. The distant hillside has a faint green tint—new grass growing through last year’s brown remains.

By **May** the buds have matured into flowers. New leaves are sprouting daily. The trees and bushes buzz with activity. It seems as though a lush green carpet has been rolled out to fill every blank space. The hillside is alive with movement. In one direction, newborn lambs huddle close to their mothers. In the other, cows feed on rich pastureland.

July. Every tree in sight is covered with a thick canopy of leaves. The flowerbeds in my back garden are in full bloom, yielding splashes of yellows and pinks, reds and whites. The emerald green lawn is speckled with small white daisies with bright yellow faces. Songbirds flit from branch to branch.

September. Green leaves are turning gold and red. Flowers are fading. The wistful sound of tall grass rustling in the breeze heralds the end of a season.

October. Leaves are dropping from the trees. A few flowers struggle to survive, but more of their petals are blown away with each chilly blast of autumn wind.

November. The hillside is empty once more. The animals have been taken to shelter, and the trees are bare except for a light dusting of snow. Barely a sliver of green remains.

Change is nature’s way. May we welcome change with as much dignity and grace as the world around us.

ABI F. MAY IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL AND AN *ACTIVATED* STAFF WRITER. ■



“ LOOK ABROAD THROUGH NATURE’S RANGE,
NATURE’S MIGHTY LAW IS CHANGE.
—ROBERT BURNS (1759–1796) ”

THE SERENITY PRAYER

God, grant us the...

Serenity to accept things we cannot change,
Courage to change the things we can, and the
Wisdom to know the difference
Patience for the things that take time
Appreciation for all that we have, and
Tolerance for those with different struggles
Freedom to live beyond the limitations of our
past ways, the
Ability to feel your love for us and our love for
each other, and the
Strength to get up and try again even when we
feel it is hopeless.

—Reinhold Niebuhr (1892–1971)

ANSWERS TO YOUR QUESTIONS

Q & A

Shaken by Life's Changes



Q: *I prefer stability and routine to big changes and drama, but the latter seem inevitable. That's unsettling. How can I learn to handle changing circumstances so they don't rock my world so much?*

A: You're right; change is inevitable. In fact, life is a never-ending series of twists and turns. Growing up takes about 20 years; growing into the person God wants takes a lifetime. Helping our children through their growing pains changes us nearly as much as it does them. When those dearest to us go through upheavals, it affects us too. Relationships at every level evolve continually. Big-picture issues—the economy, politics, the environment—affect us. We can't escape changes, but we can learn to make the most of them. Here's how:

► **IDENTIFY THE ISSUES.** Separate the aspects you have some control over from those you don't, and commit all aspects to God, who is ultimately in control of everything.

- **UNDERSTAND THE ISSUES.** Differentiate between the practical aspects and the emotional, and deal with each accordingly. Together they may seem overwhelming, but individually they are usually manageable.
- **KEEP AN OPEN MIND.** What you've been doing or the way you've been doing it may have worked reasonably well so far, but there may be better alternatives.
- **ENLIST GOD'S HELP.** Circumstances may overwhelm *you*, but God cannot be overwhelmed. "There are some things that people cannot do, but God can do anything."¹ That's the *God factor*.
- **STAY POSITIVE.** Focus on the opportunities, not the obstacles.
- **FIND AND GIVE SUPPORT.** Chances are, you're not the only one involved. Communicate and find ways to make things work out to everyone's advantage.
- **BE PATIENT.** Progress is often a three-step process—one step back and two steps forward.
- **THINK LONG-TERM.** "He [God] who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ."² ■

A PRAYER FOR TIMES OF CHANGE

Heavenly Father, Your creation is changing continually—seasons and cycles in perpetual motion. Help me to flow like that, to not be afraid to let go of my comfortable habits and routines in order to discover new things. Instead of holing up in the security of the familiar, help me to venture out into new territory. Help me to not stagnate, but to progress and continue to grow. Most of all, help me to change in the ways You want me to change, so I can become all You know I can be.

1. Matthew 19:26 CEV

2. Philippians 1:6



FEEDING READING

Crisis CONTROL

THERE IS A WAY TO REMAIN HOPEFUL EVEN IN THE MIDST OF CRISES. THE MORE WE READ AND ABSORB GOD'S WORD, THE MORE OUR FAITH GROWS AND THE MORE WE TRUST THAT HE WILL TAKE CARE OF US.¹

ASK GOD FOR HELP.

The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears, and delivers them out of all their troubles.—*Psalm 34:17*

In the day of my trouble I will call upon You, for You will answer me.—*Psalm 86:7*

Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.—*Hebrews 4:16*

1. Romans 10:17; Psalm 18:30

MEDITATE ON GOD'S PROMISES.

The mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who ... remember His commandments.—*Psalm 103:17-18*

You are my hiding place and my shield; I hope in Your word.—*Psalm 119:114*

Whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.—*Romans 15:4*

TRUST GOD TO RESOLVE THE PROBLEM.

Behold, I am with you and will keep you wherever you go; for I will not leave you until I have done what I have spoken to you.—*Genesis 28:15*

And those who know Your name will put their trust in You; for You, Lord, have not forsaken those who seek You.—*Psalm 9:10*

So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised.

—*Hebrews 10:35-36 NIV*

REMINDE YOURSELF OF GOD'S GOODNESS AND FAITHFULNESS.

The mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from you.—*Isaiah 54:10*

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God.—*Romans 8:28*

[Be] confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it.

—*Philippians 1:6*

THANK HIM FOR ANSWERING YOUR PRAYERS.

Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good! For His mercy endures forever.—*Psalm 107:1*

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.—*Philippians 4:6-7* ■

IT'S NOT ONLY CHILDREN WHO GROW. PARENTS DO TOO. As much as we watch to see what our children do with their lives, they are watching us to see what we do with ours. I can't tell my children to reach for the sun. All I can do is reach for it myself.—*Joyce Maynard*

I don't know what planet I was on when I thought that when I became a parent, all the skills I'd need would simply come to me. It wasn't long before I realized that parenting, for the countless incomparable joys it has brought into my life, is hard work. Being a parent has meant adjusting my aspirations and priorities to match my new reality. Every day is a learning process as I adapt to the evolving needs of my children.
—*Katuscia Giusti*

No one ever promised me it would be easy, and it's not. But I also get many rewards from seeing my children grow, make strong decisions for themselves, and set out on their own as independent, strong, likable human beings. And I like who I am becoming, too. Having [children] has made me more human, more flexible, more humble, more questioning.—*Anonymous father*

PARENTS' CORNER

Growing Together

If I had my child to raise all over again,
I'd build self-esteem first, and the house later.
I'd finger-paint more, and point the finger less.
I would do less correcting and more connecting.
I'd take my eyes off my watch, and watch with my eyes.
I'd take more hikes and fly more kites.
I'd stop playing serious, and seriously play.
I would run through more fields and gaze at more stars.
I'd do more hugging and less tugging.
—*Diane Loomans*

Children keep us in check. Their laughter prevents our hearts from hardening. Their dreams ensure we never lose our drive to make ours a better world. They are the greatest disciplinarians known to mankind.—*Queen Rania of Jordan, Hello Magazine*

When seen only as presiding over a child's growth, parenting can be frustrating and burdensome. However, when seen as an opportunity for personal growth for adults, parenting is one of the most creative and affirming experiences that life offers. It gives us chances to improve ourselves and broaden our own personal horizons as we model for our children the qualities we would like to see in them. For some of us, our own children give us a chance to become the parents we wish that we had.—*Jack C. Westman, M.D.* ■





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The 5 Ws of Praise

A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

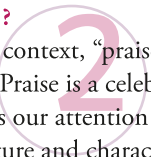
WHO?

“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.”¹ Are you breathing? Then that includes you.



WHAT?

In this context, “praise” means “grateful respect or reverence.” Praise is a celebration of God’s goodness and grace. It turns our attention away from our problems and on to the nature and character of God Himself. It’s not exactly the same as thanking Him. When we thank God, we acknowledge the things He has done for us; but we praise God for who He is and for the virtues He embodies, independent of our circumstances.



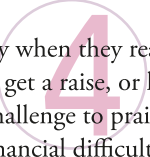
WHERE?

Anywhere. Right where you are will do just fine.



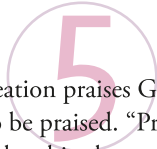
WHEN?

Who isn’t happy when they reach a goal, receive an award, land a new job, get a raise, or have a child or grandchild? It’s more of a challenge to praise when we fail, lose our job, run into financial difficulties, or fall ill. Praising God when we least feel like it is difficult, but it’s at these very times when our praises are most needed and can have the greatest effect.



WHY?

The Bible tells us that all of creation praises God,² and that it’s because He deserves to be praised. “Proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among all peoples. For great is the Lord and most worthy of praise.”³



Praise benefits us too. It propels us into God’s loving presence,⁴ strengthens our relationship with Him,⁵ and strengthens us spiritually.⁶ As we focus our thoughts on God and praise Him for His goodness, He renews our spirits, increases our faith, and fills us with peace and contentment. Praise puts our problems in perspective.⁷

HOW?

Silently in your heart or out loud, talk to God. Pray, sing, shout, even jump for joy—whatever you feel like doing to express gratitude. If you don’t know what to praise God for, here are some ideas to get you started:

- Praise God for His grace.⁸
- Praise Him for His goodness.⁹
- Praise Him for His kindness.¹⁰
- Praise Him for salvation.¹¹

EXERCISE IT!

What is the worst problem you are currently facing? Describe it to yourself in a few words, perhaps even write it down, but don’t dwell on it. Now push it to the back of your mind by praising God for good things He has done for you in the past, as well as His promise to care for you in the present and future. ■

1. Psalm 150:6
 2. Psalm 148:7–10; 19:1; 148:2–3
 3. 1 Chronicles 16:23–25, NIV
 4. Psalm 100:4

5. Proverbs 8:17
 6. Psalm 28:7
 7. Psalm 43:5
 8. Ephesians 1:6

9. Psalm 135:3
 10. Psalm 117
 11. Ephesians 2:8–9





BY SCOTT MONTROSE

THE WAY HOME

I WAS LISTENING TO FRANKIE MILLER SINGING “*A LONG WAY HOME*” when the lyrics took on personal meaning.

Oh, it’s a long way home
In the night alone
When your songs are all gone
And your life runs on;
It’s a long way home.

You are the only one
Who can feel all the miles
I’ve gone
On my way back home.

I’d heard that song many times before, but this time was different. It *does* seem a very long way home when you realize you’ve lost your way in life, like I had.

It began with one bad decision, which led to another. Before I knew it, I had spiraled downward. Entangled in brambles of selfishness and pride, I felt a gulf between God and me.

The first step on my way back to my Father’s arms was admitting to myself and Him that I had made a mess of things and needed His help. That didn’t turn back time or instantly make everything right—I still had a long way to go—but it was a start.

Another song began—Frankie’s raspy voice singing “You’re the Star.”

You gave me hope
When all around was lost,
And I could see no point in trying. ...

The road I travel is so clear
Since you came into my life. ...

You’re the star
The shinin’ light
The mornin’ dawnin’. ...

The morning dawn. ...
You’re the star
Above the storm.

Again, I’d heard those words dozens of times, but now they seemed to have been written specially for me. God’s love was the star, the light that broke through my darkness, my guiding light through the storm. He gave me hope when I saw none, purpose when I had none, and the will to keep going. Suddenly the road didn’t seem so long.

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

THE FATHER’S ARMS

God never rejects us or withdraws His love. He always has hope for us, no matter how far we’ve strayed. So if you feel far from God, you need only open your heart to receive His love and forgiveness.¹ If you will start going God’s way, if you will turn toward Him and start trying to find your way home, the Father will come running toward you and receive you with open arms of love.²—*David Brandt Berg*



To find your way into God’s loving arms, start by praying the following prayer:

Jesus, I want to know You and experience Your love. I open my heart and invite You in. Amen.

1. Isaiah 1:18; 1 John 1:9

2. Luke 15:18–24



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

seasons of life

When you hit bottom, when dreams give way to disappointment, when all you've worked so hard for goes to pieces, you are tempted to despair. In extreme situations you may even be tempted to end it all yourself, right now.

That's when you must remember that you were created for a purpose, and that purpose isn't a single, one-time thing; it's multifaceted and complex. As long as you live, there will be something more you can accomplish, something more you are *meant* to accomplish, and there is always more to get out of life. The end of one dream doesn't mean the end of all dreams. Just as the seasons come and go in their cycle, periods of success or setback, fulfillment or disappointment, and emotional highs and lows come and go. You may be down now, but that won't last forever.

The sooner you ask Me to show you what I have for you next, the sooner you will find new inspiration and purpose. The best may be just around the corner, but you'll never know if you stop here. Take My hand and let Me lead you into a new season of fruitfulness and fulfillment.