

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 24 • Issue 5

11 WAYS TO SAY "I LOVE YOU"

How to make those you
love feel special

Vanessa's Angels
Christianity at its best

**Biodegradable?
—or Upgradable?**
Will death be the end
of you?

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

KINDNESS WITHOUT LIMITS

In the last few years, there have been no shortages of global crises. On the one hand, the illness, conflict, and suffering we see on the news can breed fear and paint a negative view of the world, but there is a brighter side: they can also spark amazing generosity and empathy. God created men and women to, among other things, reflect His love and care for one another, and these generous and empathetic traits tend to shine especially bright in times of challenge and grief.

During the early days of the Covid-19 pandemic, when the U.K.'s National Health Service asked for volunteers to assist with everyday tasks, such as delivering medication or groceries to neighbors, the response was overwhelming. Nearly 750,000 people responded within four days, resulting in the largest volunteer mobilization since the Second World War.¹

While the pandemic may have caused much of the world to look like it was falling apart at the seams, many people took it on themselves to work on sewing it back together again with acts of kindness. The 2022 World Happiness Report showed an increase in volunteering, donating to charity, and helping strangers in 2021.²

The Bible tells us that kindness is one of God's attributes—"God our Savior showed us how good and kind he is. He saved us because of his mercy, and not because of any good things we have done."³ The Bible also lists kindness as one of the fruits of the Spirit that believers should strive to cultivate in their lives.⁴

Helping others is good for our own mental health and well-being. It makes us feel part of a wider community and connected with those around us. Not only that, kindness also breeds kindness. When we hear about or see the generosity and kind deeds of others, it inspires us to be kind too. And I think we can all agree that kindness is needed now more than ever.

1. "Acts of kindness did not decline during the pandemic.

In fact, they have risen." Lara Aknin, *Toronto Star*

2. <https://worldhappiness.report>

3. Titus 3:4–5 CEV

4. See Galatians 5:22–23.

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DOING WHAT I CAN

BY SIMON BISHOP

EACH MONTH I TRY TO REFLECT ON WHAT I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH IN MY MISSION WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE. This month has had some trying moments and a few disappointments when some goals I had fell through, but God encouraged me with some of the following thoughts.

The famous quote by John F. Kennedy, “Ask not what your country can do for you but rather what you can do for your country,” could be paraphrased for Christians: “Ask not what God can do *for* you, but rather what God can do *with* you.” Since I was a child, I always wanted to do great things for God, to be used in some great way, but as I’ve gone through life, I’ve seen that, for most of us who love God, it’s not going to be the great and showy things, but rather the small, sometimes seemingly insignificant things that go the furthest in showing His love to others.

When a woman entered a house and poured costly oil on Jesus’ feet shortly before His crucifixion, some of His own disciples criticized her, but this is what Jesus said about her: “She has done what she could.” And He went

further: “Truly I tell you, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”¹

My prayer is that I will continue to do what I can even if it seems small, even if it is unseen, even if it seems insignificant. So many times throughout the Bible, small deeds are used to teach a great lesson; for example, when Jesus “looked up and saw the rich putting their gifts into the treasury, and He saw also a certain poor widow putting in two mites (a fraction of a cent). So He said, ‘Truly I say to you that this poor widow has put in more than all; for all these out of their abundance have put in offerings for God, but she out of her poverty put in all the livelihood that she had.’”²

What that story tells me is that in addition to not making our relationship with God about what He can do for us, I also don’t have to worry that I’m not doing enough for Him. I can just focus on doing what I can and allowing my faith to grow in case He has more in store for me to do in the future.

SIMON BISHOP DOES FULL-TIME MISSION AND HUMANITARIAN WORK IN THE PHILIPPINES. ■

1. Mark 14:8–9
2. Luke 21:1–4

THE GOOD SAMARITAN

BY PETER AMSTERDAM



MANY OF US ARE FAMILIAR WITH THE PARABLE OF THE GOOD SAMARITAN IN LUKE 10:25–37. However, because we live in cultures very different from that of first-century Palestine, there are aspects of the story that we may not relate to. When we hear or read this parable, it doesn't necessarily shock us or defy the status quo of today's world. Yet the first-century listeners who heard Jesus tell this parable would have been taken aback by it. The message would have run contrary to their expectations and challenged their cultural boundaries.

Let's begin by taking a look at the cast of characters in the order of their appearance.

The parable tells us very little about the first character, the man who was beaten and robbed, but it does provide one fact that is crucial to the story. He was stripped of his clothes and was lying on the ground, severely beaten and unconscious.¹

These details are more significant than we might think, because people in the first century were easily identifiable by the style of clothes they wore and their language or accent. Because the beaten man had no clothes, it was impossible to tell his nationality. And because he was unconscious and unable to speak, it

was impossible to identify who he was or where he was from.

The second character in the story is the priest. Jewish priests were the clergy who ministered at the temple in Jerusalem for one week at a time every 24 weeks. There are no details given about the priest in this story, but those who heard Jesus' parable most likely assumed that he was returning to his home in Jericho after his week ministering in the temple.

The third character in the parable is the Levite. While all priests were Levites, not all Levites were priests. They were considered minor clergy and, like the priests, they served for a week at a time twice a year.

The Samaritan: The Samaritans were a people who lived in the hill country of Samaria between Galilee in the north and Judea in the south. They believed in the first five books of Moses, but considered that God had

1. See Luke 10:30.

ordained Mount Gerizim as the place to worship instead of Jerusalem.

In 128 BC, the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim was destroyed by the Jewish army. Between AD 6 and 7 some Samaritans scattered human bones in the Jewish temple, thus defiling it. These two events played a role in the deep animosity that existed between the Jews and Samaritans, evident within the New Testament. It was within this setting of cultural, racial, and religious animosity that Jesus told the parable of the good Samaritan.

Our last character is the lawyer. While the lawyer isn't part of the parable, it is because of the questions he asks Jesus that the parable is told. In New Testament times, lawyers were specialists in religious law and were called on to interpret and teach the laws of Moses. They examined the more difficult and subtle legal questions and gave opinions. This lawyer's motive for asking Jesus his questions might have been to begin a debate about the interpretation of Scripture. It also might have been that he was a spiritual seeker.

THE PARABLE

Luke tells us, "Behold, a lawyer stood up to put him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?'" The question of how to obtain eternal life

was debated among Jewish scholars in the first century, with the emphasis put on obeying the law as the means of gaining eternal life.

"[Jesus] said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How do you read it?' And he [the lawyer] answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself.'"²

As seen throughout the Gospels, this was exactly what Jesus had been teaching, and perhaps the lawyer had heard Jesus uphold this standard of loving God with all that is within us and loving our neighbor. But he goes on: "He ... said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'"³

The lawyer wants to know who is it *exactly* that he needs to love. He knows that his neighbor includes fellow Jews. But Gentiles weren't considered neighbors, though it does say in Leviticus 19:34 to "treat the stranger who sojourns with you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself." Based on this, the lawyer would have already assumed that his neighbors would be fellow Jews, along with any non-Jew living in his town, and he seems to want to know if Jesus agrees. It's in response to this question, "Who is my neighbor," that Jesus tells the parable.



2. Luke 10:26-27 ESV

3. Luke 10:29 ESV

“Jesus replied, ‘A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and he fell among robbers, who stripped him and beat him and departed, leaving him half dead.’⁴ While it was impossible to tell the nationality of the man, in the context of the story the listeners would most likely have assumed this man was a Jew.

“Now by chance a priest was going down that road, and when he saw him he passed by on the other side.”⁵ As mentioned earlier, it’s likely that the priest was returning from one of his weeks of service in the temple. Because of his status, he was likely riding on a donkey and could have transported the injured man to Jericho.

The problem was that he couldn’t tell *who*, or what nationality, the man was, since he was both unconscious and naked. The Mosaic law required the priest to help a fellow Jew, but not a foreigner. On top of it, the priest didn’t know if the man was dead or not, and according to the law, going near or touching a dead body would cause him to be ceremonially unclean. Under these circumstances, he decided to pass by the man, staying on the other side of the road to make sure he kept the proper distance from him, and perhaps also to avoid discovering for certain who the

man was and whether he was alive, which might have required action from him.

The parable continues: “Likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side.”⁶ The Levite does the same as the priest, and in the absence of any clear religious injunction to help, he also makes the decision not to get involved.

The third person who enters the scene is a despised Samaritan, an enemy. Jesus describes all the Samaritan does for the dying man, things that the priest and the Levite, who both served in the temple, *should* have done. “But a Samaritan, as he journeyed, came to where he was, and when he saw him, he had compassion. He went to him and bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he set him on his own animal and brought him to an inn and took care of him.”⁷

The Samaritan has compassion on the wounded man, binds up his wounds, then pours on wine and oil for disinfecting. Beyond that, he lifts the man onto his own animal and takes him to an inn, presumably in Jericho.

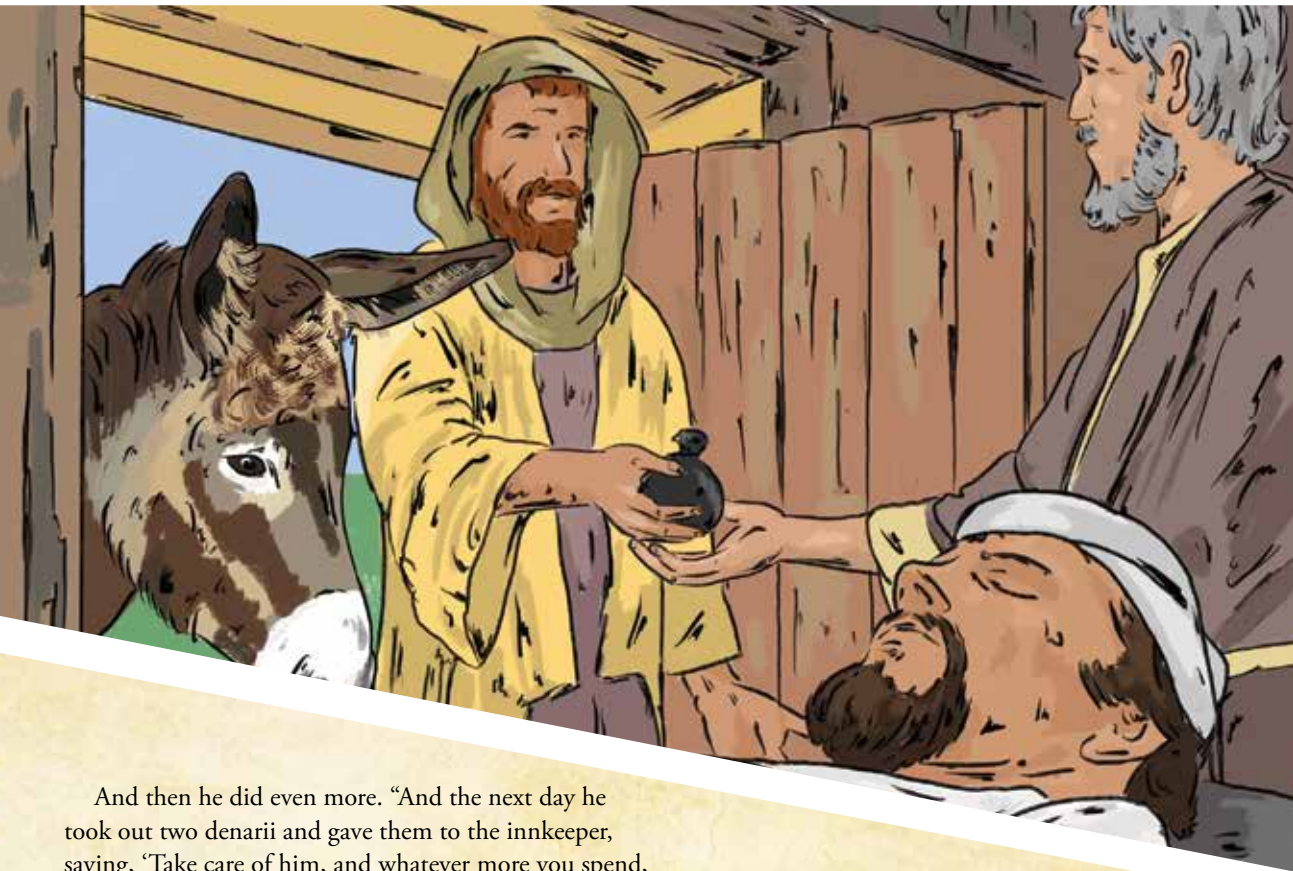


4. Luke 10:30 ESV

5. Luke 10:31 ESV

6. Luke 10:32 ESV

7. Luke 10:33–34 ESV



And then he did even more. “And the next day he took out two denarii and gave them to the innkeeper, saying, ‘Take care of him, and whatever more you spend, I will repay you when I come back.’”⁸ Two denarii was the equivalent of two days’ wages for a laborer. The Samaritan’s promise to return and pay any extra expenses ensured the safety and continued care of the beaten man.

Upon finishing the story, Jesus asks the lawyer: “Which of these three, do you think, proved to be a neighbor to the man who fell among the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” And Jesus said to him, “You go, and do likewise.”⁹

When the lawyer asked, “Who is my neighbor?” he wanted a categorical, black-and-white type of answer. But Jesus’ story showed that there is no short list limiting who you are responsible to love or who you are supposed to consider your neighbor. Jesus defined “your neighbor” as anyone in need whom God brings across your path.

Through this parable Jesus was making it clear that *our* neighbor is anyone in need, regardless of their race, religion, or standing in the community. There are no

boundaries when it comes to whom we should show love and compassion to. Compassion goes way beyond the requirements of the law, and we are even expected to love our enemies.

The beaten men and women whom we come across in our lives may not be physically half dead by the side of the road. But so many need to feel love and compassion, to receive a helping hand, or someone willing to listen to their heart cries, so they know that they matter, that someone cares for them. If God has brought you across their path, then He may be calling you to be that person.

Jesus set the bar for love and compassion in this parable, and His closing words to you and me—the listeners of today—are “Go, and do likewise.”

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

8. Luke 10:35 ESV

9. Luke 10:36–37 ESV



VANESSA'S ANGELS

BY STEVE LARSON

THE SUN WAS SLIPPING BELOW THE HORIZON AS I DROVE UP THE NARROW TWO-LANE ROAD IN CENTRAL MEXICO. I glanced at my wife, Amber, sleeping next to me. In the rearview mirror, I could see our three daughters—Tory, the brilliant four-year-old; Shelly, who had just turned two and hardly seemed to stop talking; and baby Vanessa. All were also fast asleep. I considered stopping for coffee but decided against it. Stopping would surely wake everyone up. Plus, we were in a race against time. I didn't mind driving in the evening, when the children were asleep and the vehicle was cool. It also gave me time to think. I needed that. It had been a long year!

My mind took me back to when Amber was pregnant with Vanessa. We had traveled to the U.S. West Coast to visit Amber's family, then to the East Coast to visit mine. Eventually we had joined a mission center in the south of Mexico, arriving just three weeks before Amber's due date. She had been having premonitions that something wasn't right with the baby. Of course, I told her that she worried too much. But Amber was right. Shortly after Vanessa was born, we were told that she had a heart condition that would require surgery. The full extent of her condition wasn't clear, but the doctors urged us to return to the U.S. for better medical care. Some friends in Dallas, Texas, agreed to take us in for a month. That's where we were headed now.

WHAT COUNTS MOST?

Let us not be satisfied with just giving money. Money is not enough, money can be got, but they need your hearts to love them.

So spread your love everywhere you go.

—*Mother Teresa (1910–1997)*

A good deed is never lost; he who sows courtesy reaps friendship, and he who plants kindness gathers love.

—*Saint Basil (330–379)*

* * *

We arrived at our friends' house in the wee hours of the morning, to a beautifully prepared room. The girls were delighted to find two little beds, just their size. "Mommy, how long can we stay in this hotel?" Tory asked in wonder.

Our first trip to a cardiologist ended with an ambulance ride to the Intensive Care Unit of the Children's Medical Center. Vanessa spent over two months there, her tiny body struggling to cope with heart surgery, weak lungs, intubations, and strep infections. Amber and I took turns staying with Vanessa at the hospital, one of us by her side around the clock. And all the while these wonderful friends took care of our girls, cooked our meals, washed our laundry, loaned us a car when ours broke down, and even paid our highway tolls so we could take a shorter route to and from the hospital.

When we were finally able to take little Vanessa home to recover, they gave us their own bedroom, where there was more room for all the medical equipment that was needed for Vanessa's care. All that time, they never breathed a word about how much this was costing them.

Six weeks later, Vanessa slipped into a coma and was rushed back to the hospital. Over the next three months, a team of doctors continued to try to diagnose the problem. As the test results came back one by one, we were overwhelmed. Her brain was damaged. She was deaf and blind. Her heart condition would require multiple surgeries. Her condition was terminal. The doctors gave her a year—perhaps two—and released her into our care.

For months our friends had shared their all, asking nothing in return. We were sure that there was no way they could continue to support us. We found a small apartment close to the hospital and prepared to move there.

Then our friends did something we never expected. They asked us to stay. Had they considered what they were getting themselves into? Did they realize that Amber and I would need to take shifts with the baby 24/7? That Vanessa would need constant medical attention, weekly visits from nurses? It would turn their home upside down. And we weren't sure how much we would be able to contribute, financially or otherwise. Did they realize that this could go on for years?

They *did* understand and quietly replied, "Whatever you need, for as long as you need it, we're here for you!"

* * *

A few months later, while quietly resting, Vanessa passed from her mother's arms into Jesus'. That was twenty years ago. To this day, our friends' actions remain the most vivid example of sacrificial giving I have ever seen—true unconditional love and kindness, love that gives until it hurts and then some, even when it knows that those on the receiving end can never repay. Our friends didn't merely say they wanted to follow Christ's example, they *did* so! ■

KINDNESS BEGETS KINDNESS

BY GABRIEL GARCÍA VALDIVIESO

CONSIDERATION AND COURTESY NEVER GO OUT OF STYLE. We can't underestimate the power behind a simple act of thoughtfulness.

The other day, my wife and I went out for lunch with a young man who was visiting Chile. As we situated ourselves at our table, we could feel the uncomfortable “vibes” of our waiter—cold, grumpy, and rather curt. Perhaps he was already suspecting that we would be the type of customers that turn a waiter's job into a headache.

I decided to try a tactic that seldom fails—to treat him with respect and shower him with friendly gestures—some good-natured joking, positive comments, smiles, and sincere appreciation for his service. The change



Let your gentle spirit be known to all people.

—*Philippians 4:5 NASB*

Always be humble, gentle, and patient, accepting each other in love.

—*Ephesians 4:2 NCV*

was immediate, as his countenance brightened and he attended our table with courtesy and professionalism for the rest of the meal.

The other day, I was in the public restroom at the mall. Ever since the Covid-19 pandemic, I always carry hand sanitizer with me, in case the bathroom has run out. And sure enough, the dispenser was empty. As I was taking out my sanitizer bottle, I saw a teenager visibly disappointed as he tried to get the last drop of soap from the dispenser. So I offered him a squirt from my little bottle. He was surprised and grateful. I don't know what was going on in his life or day, but it seemed like this small act of consideration had somehow given him a spark of hope.

I've also been on the receiving end of acts of kindness.

In the afternoons, I usually ride my bike through the park and stop to use the outdoor exercise equipment. One particular machine is for strengthening the abdomen without putting pressure on your back. I'd been using it for a while but had no idea that I wasn't positioning myself correctly. A friendly stranger happened by and took the time to show me how to use the machine to get the best advantage of the exercise without harming myself. I offered my heartfelt thanks, as he was the first person to take the time to point out my wrong position.

It's not hard to spread a bit of thoughtfulness and consideration as we go through our day. It's usually just a matter of seeing a need and responding.

We can start by greeting those we pass instead of walking by indifferently. A smile and some friendly words give reassurance that life is good.

Let's try to go a bit out of our way to be kind and make our part of the world a little brighter.

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



11 Ways to Say "I Love You"

IF YOU'RE LOOKING FOR WAYS TO MAKE THOSE YOU LOVE FEEL SPECIAL AND APPRECIATED, here are a few ideas to get you started.

1. PUT IT INTO WORDS. Those three little words—"I love you"—are still an excellent way to make sure those you love know it. Say them often.

2. TELL THEM WHY. What makes the person special to you? Tell him or her, and be specific. Whenever you find something new to admire or appreciate in someone, say so.

3. TAKE TIME TO LOVE. Spending time with someone says, "You're more important to me than all the other things that I could be doing right now."

4. DON'T WAIT FOR A SPECIAL OCCASION. Small, unexpected gifts and remembrances can sometimes convey love even better than big ones on birthdays or holidays.

5. BE CONSISTENT. When everything is going well, an expression of love can make it go even better; and when someone is having a bad day, love can turn things around.

6. BE AFFECTIONATE. Hug. Touch. Science has proven that there are physical and mental benefits to human touch.



7. BE HELPFUL. Going out of your way to be helpful or doing more than your share shows concern; it says "Your happiness is important to me, and I want to make your day a little better."

8. LISTEN WITH YOUR HEART. Make an effort to truly get to know and understand the other person, rather than assuming you already do.

9. SHOW RESPECT. Healthy relationships are built on mutual respect for each other's good qualities. Look for opportunities to show those you love that you admire them and believe in them.

10. BE UNSELFISH. Giving preference to the needs and desires of your loved ones shows that their happiness and well-being are more important to you than your own.

11. BE AUTHENTIC. It is often humbling to open up and let others see the "real you," but it's a necessary part of uniting hearts and minds. ■



THE GOOD PLACE

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

IN MY HIGH SCHOOL LITERATURE CLASS, we studied Jean-Paul Sartre’s play *No Exit*, in which hell’s occupants are confined to a room and have nothing to do but engage in fruitless, pointless discussions.

I once read another article about hell, where hell is depicted as a polished hospital-like facility with rooms full of people involved in much the same work they did on earth, but without any hope of achieving anything worthwhile: scientists engage in endless experiments that bear no results, soldiers fight battles that never end, trains never reach their destinations, and rockets don’t make it off the ground. Nothing ever gets done. In *Inferno*, the first part of Dante’s epic poem *A Divine Comedy*, part of hell is pictured as an endless mountain range that one must keep climbing, one peak after another.

But heaven is just the opposite. According to the Bible, heaven will be a place of everlasting peace, beauty, fruitful work, and fulfillment. We will experience complete joy as we live in the presence of God and fellowship with each

There is a way out of futility and uncertainty. Jesus can give you new meaning and purpose, starting when you invite Him into your life:

Dear Jesus, please forgive me for all my sins. I believe that You died for me. I open the door to my heart, and I invite You into my life. Please fill me with Your love and Holy Spirit, help me get to know You, and guide me in the way of truth. Amen.

other.¹ This is in stark contrast to the misconception of the blessed spending eternity floating on clouds and idly strumming harps.

And the joy we look forward to in heaven can begin right now. In the Lord’s Prayer, Jesus prays to God the Father, “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.”² And another time, when asked when the kingdom of God would come, He said, “The kingdom of God does not come with observation, for indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.”³ In other words, it’s already here in our hearts—or *can* be.

The 1828 edition of *Webster’s Dictionary* defined “life” as: “The enjoyments or blessings of the present life; supreme felicity; eternal happiness in heaven.” Again, it’s both here and now, and there and then.

The apostle John makes it more personal by saying, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”⁴

To know Jesus personally *is* to have a taste of heaven.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST WHO SPENT 47 YEARS DOING MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES IN 10 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES. HE AND HIS WIFE PAULINE CURRENTLY LIVE IN GERMANY. ■

1. See Revelation 21:4–7.

2. Matthew 6:10

3. Luke 17:20–21

4. John 17:3

A blue butterfly with white markings on its wings is flying in the upper right corner of the page. Below it, a hand is shown holding a small, light-colored seed. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light, possibly representing a bright sky or a window. The title "BIODEGRADABLE? —OR UPGRADABLE?" is written in large, bold, yellow letters across the middle of the image.

BIODEGRADABLE? —OR UPGRADABLE?

By KEITH PHILLIPS

DEATH IS PART OF THE LIFE CYCLE, not the end of life. This is evident throughout nature, but perhaps nowhere more clearly than in the example that Jesus gave His disciples when preparing them for His death. “Unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains by itself. But if it dies, it produces a large crop.”¹

The apostle Paul elaborated on this analogy when explaining our “end,” which will actually be our new beginning. “When you sow a seed, it must die in the ground before it can live and grow. And when you sow it, it does not have the same ‘body’ it will have later. What you sow is only a bare seed, maybe wheat or something else. But God gives it a body that he has planned for it, and God gives each kind of seed its own body. . . . It is the same with the dead who are raised to life. The body that is ‘planted’ will ruin and decay,

but it is raised to a life that cannot be destroyed. When the body is ‘planted,’ it is without honor, but it is raised in glory. When the body is ‘planted,’ it is weak, but when it is raised, it is powerful. The body that is ‘planted’ is a physical body. When it is raised, it is a spiritual body.”²

It’s hard to imagine what those spiritual bodies will be like, but the Bible gives some clues in its accounts of the resurrected Jesus, coupled with this statement by Paul: “He will transform the body of our humble condition into the likeness of His glorious body.”³

Jesus appeared as a man, but usually even His closest friends didn’t recognize Him immediately.⁴ He had substance—“flesh and bones.”⁵ He walked, talked, and could eat,⁶ but He could also materialize and disappear at will.⁷

Jesus was still very much Himself, but His body had undergone a quantum upgrade. The same will be true for us. “In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye . . . we will be changed. Then the saying that is written will take place: Death has been swallowed up in victory.”⁸

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. ■

1. John 12:24 HCSB
2. 1 Corinthians 15:36–38, 42–44 NCV
3. Philippians 3:21 HCSB
4. See Mark 16:12; Luke 24:13–16, 36; John 20:14.
5. See Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:38–43; John 20:16–17, 27; Acts 1:3.
6. See Luke 24:15–17; John 20:16–17; Acts 1:3.
7. See Mark 16:19; Luke 24:31, 36, 51; John 20:19, 26; Acts 1:9.
8. 1 Corinthians 15:52, 54 HCSB



ALL THINGS TO ALL PEOPLE

BY UDAY PAUL

THE BIBLE TELLS US, “Do not be shaped by this world.”¹ It also tells us to “become all things to all people.”² At first glance, these instructions may seem contradictory, but they can actually complement each other. God does not want us to conform to ungodly attitudes, no matter how prevalent they may be, but He does want us to be attuned to society in ways that enable us to better show His love to others and bring them closer to Him.

The apostle Paul was a good example of this kind of flexibility as he worked to spread Christianity to a great variety of people. When addressing a predominantly Jewish audience in Antioch, for example, he reminded them of the history of Israel from the time of Moses to the time of David, and then he showed how Jesus had fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies about the coming Messiah.³ But when Paul spoke to the Areopagus council in Athens, made up of sophisticated Greeks who would not have been interested in hearing a history of the Jewish people, he began by referring to an altar he had seen in

the city, which bore the inscription “To an Unknown God.” Then he quoted Greek poets to show that the attributes of this god—creation, providence, and judgment—were fulfilled in Jesus.⁴

Francis Xavier (1506–1552) also lived the “all things to all men” principle. In order to relate to the Indian people who considered humility a virtue, he wore shabby attire and traveled on foot. When he later visited Japan, however, he found that humility was not considered a virtue and that poverty was despised. So Xavier adapted his dress code and brought sumptuous gifts to the emperor. He did what was needed to present Jesus in the best possible light to the people he wanted to reach.

Jesus Himself “became all things to all people” when He left the grand halls of heaven and the intimate fellowship that He shared with His Father to come to earth in human form.⁵ He did this so that He could better relate to us, better understand our problems and weaknesses, and sacrifice Himself for the forgiveness of our sins.⁶ Jesus wants us to follow His example⁷ and manifest our love for others by reaching people where they’re at.

1. Romans 12:2 NCV

2. 1 Corinthians 9:22 ESV

3. See Acts 13:14–49.

4. See Acts 17:22–31.

5. See Philipians 2:5–7.

6. See Hebrews 2:17.

7. See 1 John 2:6.

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MOTIVATING REWARDS

BY MARIE ALVERO



“WE HAVE TO PAY FOR SCHOOL LUNCHES THIS YEAR,” my daughter informed me after the first day of school. I already knew this. During the previous school year, the school district had subsidized school lunches for all the kids, as part of the state’s Covid relief, but the school system wasn’t able to sustain that for another year. This led to a family conversation on how even the things that appear free to us actually always have a cost that needs to be met in some way.

I went down a rabbit hole with that, thinking about the things we do for others, like donating our time, money, and resources to others. It’s free to them, but it costs the giver. Does anyone pay for that? Which got me thinking about rewards in heaven and whether or not we should be motivated by said rewards. Can I think *I won’t get “paid” for this here on earth, but I will in heaven?*

Jesus talked a lot about rewards in heaven, for example: “The Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory

with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what they have done.”¹ “I assure you that whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you belong to Christ will certainly be rewarded.”²

Jesus made over 40 references to rewards, treasures in heaven, crowns of life, eternal life, and what you receive for obedience, compassion, and suffering for Christ’s sake. The rest of the Bible also has a lot to say on the subject.

The point is that rewards in heaven are supposed to be motivating. The idea of “winning big” in heaven is supposed to be a source of strength and resolve for things that cost us in this life. That doesn’t mean that we shouldn’t be motivated to love as God loved us, “in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.”³

But when that’s hard, when it costs you, remember, “I am coming soon! And when I come, I will reward everyone for what they have done.”⁴

1. Matthew 16:27 NIV
2. Mark 9:41 CEB
3. Romans 5:8
4. Revelation 22:12 CEV

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

MORE BLESSED

I know you struggle with not always feeling My love. You wish it could be tangible and feel more real at times. You wish you could feel My presence when you need comfort, and hear My voice audibly when I speak to your heart. But believe by faith that I am with you, and that I will reward you for your faith and bless you with manifestations of My love and care.

One way you can experience My love more is by showing it to others. When you do that, you can feel My love being channeled through you. If you're pouring out, you will in turn be filled to overflowing. So if you've been feeling unloved and empty, start giving love, and My love will pour into your life.

Your world will be full of beauty as you pour out My love to others!