

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# ACTIVATED

Vol 22 • Issue 9

## A PILGRIM'S JOURNEY

The destination is what counts

## Tetris Blocks

A question of fitting in

## Diamond in an Anthill

Spot the potential

## Swimming Lessons

Will you float or sink?



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION THE BEST INVESTMENT

Some time ago, I came across a quote that was attributed to Confucius, and it fits with this issue's topic of investing in people and the importance of learning: "If your plan is for one year, plant rice. For ten years, plant trees. For a hundred years, educate people."

A bit of further research showed that the Internet was mistaken, and the quote should actually have been credited to another Chinese philosopher named Guan Zhong. The exact translation is also slightly different, but the general meaning is the same, and I prefer the pithier version included above.

In the past 18 or so months, our world has lived through a pandemic, the scale of which is unprecedented in over 100 years. Millions of people lost their lives, and many more lost their livelihoods or endured enormous upheaval. Even for those of us who've been fortunate to escape the greatest disruptions, we've had a lot of time and opportunity to consider our lives and, perhaps, to refocus on what really matters.

In the case of parents, it has also been a time to reconnect more intimately with our children's education and upbringing, as schools were closed once, twice, or even more times in many countries. I've had to brush up on such diverse topics as long division, the temperature on various bodies in the solar system, and Caesar's fathering of an illegitimate son with Cleopatra. As the original quote alludes to, this has brought to life the importance of learning as a lifelong process and one that can continue to provide positive returns long after we've put our classroom years behind us.

While I think Guan Zhong's quote contains a lot of truth, I think it falls short. There's an even better investment to be made in people in every age. That's the investment in people's hearts and souls through listening to them, understanding them, comforting them, and—best of all—introducing them to Jesus, the One who can forgive their past, transform their present, brighten their future, and grant a future of eternal joy, fulfillment, and peace.

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

Website: [activated.org](http://activated.org)  
Email: [activated@activated.org](mailto:activated@activated.org)

Local contacts:

*South Africa:*

Tel: (082) 491 2583

Email: [sales@bighthought.co.za](mailto:sales@bighthought.co.za)

*India:*

Email: [activatedindia@activated.org](mailto:activatedindia@activated.org)

*Nigeria:*

Cell: +234 (0) 7036963333

Email: [activatednigeria@activated.org](mailto:activatednigeria@activated.org)

*Philippines:*

Cell: (0922) 8125326

Email: [activatedph@gmail.com](mailto:activatedph@gmail.com)

EDITOR Ronan Keane

DESIGN Gentian Suçi

© 2021 Activated. All Rights Reserved.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. Other Bible quotations are from the following sources: New International Version (NIV). Copyright © 1978, 1984, 2011 by International Bible Society. Used by permission. The Living Bible (TLB). Copyright © 1971 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission. New Living Translation (NLT). Copyright © 1978, 1996 by Tyndale House Publishers. Used by permission.

A young girl with braids is smiling brightly at the camera. She is sitting at a desk in a classroom, with another girl visible in the background. The desk is cluttered with school supplies like pencils and papers. The lighting is warm and focused on the girl in the foreground.

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

# growing PAINS

**DURING A WEEKLY SPELLING TEST WITH A CLASS OF FIRST-GRADERS,** I noticed that one of my students, Cindy, hadn't written anything on her test. "I can't remember any answers!" she choked out through tears. I took her hand and led her outside to take a few deep breaths. Together, we went over the phonetic sounds of the spelling words I'd taught that week. With some coaching and encouragement, she returned to her desk and managed to recall two out of eight spelling words. She was relieved to have remembered that much, but the experience seemed to have dealt her shaky confidence a hard blow.

That night after work, I sat entering spelling scores into my record book and came across Cindy's name. The distress in her little eyes flashed across my mind again, and I felt my own frustration being expressed

in her tears. I studied books about teaching and discussed my challenges with my colleagues. Still, I wasn't seeing myself making huge strides of progress in my abilities. I was looking forward to completing my first year as a teacher in a few months, but I felt I had hit a wall. In any case, Cindy and I had one thing in common: giving up wasn't a viable option!

Over the rest of the semester, I felt like Cindy and I were on a journey together. I continued to encourage her every week when she got stressed out when she couldn't remember how to spell the words. Watching her determinedly fight through her anxiety to complete the weekly exams heartened me in my own attempts to find solutions to classroom problems. Whenever the little faces looked up at me with confusion and boredom, I realized that I had to change my way of presenting a concept.

Learning through mistakes can be a painful process, whether you're a first-grade student or a first-year teacher, but the struggles matured both of us. With time, Cindy was able to remember the vocabulary and take a spelling test without panicking when she forgot a word. She understood that the spelling test could help her see which words she needed to spend more time reviewing, and which words she had learned well. And though I was still making mistakes in my teaching, I too was growing in confidence and learning strategies to deal with classroom situations. It took a six-year-old to show me that I needed to fight through the growing pains to get to the goal I wanted to reach.

ELSA SICHROVSKY IS A  
FREELANCE WRITER. SHE LIVES  
WITH HER FAMILY IN TAIWAN. ■

# Overcoming

LIFE IS OFTEN LIKENED TO GOING TO SCHOOL, and that's a good analogy. God allows all sorts of things to happen in our lives to test us, to see how we'll react to them, to teach us lessons, and to help us grow spiritually. His desire through all this, of course, is that we'll apply ourselves, take the lessons to heart, learn from them, and live up to our full potential. In short, life's tests are designed by Him to help us become the people He knows we can be.

One of the things that God uses to bring us along, believe it or not, is our weaknesses. Everyone has their share of those. God allows them for different reasons, according to what He knows each of us needs and is best for us. Among other things, they teach us humility, patience, and other virtues; they teach us the power of prayer, which helps us to live closer to God and become more dependent on Him; and they help us to better understand others, thereby putting us in a better position to help encourage them through their problems and tests.

Our weaknesses are meant to help us, and they do so every time

1. Matthew 19:26
2. Jeremiah 32:27

BY MARIA FONTAINE

## Personal Weaknesses

we learn from them. The first step is to acknowledge that it is a problem, and the next step is to determine to do something about it, to overcome that weakness with God's help. Once you take those two steps, it becomes easier for you to recognize the problem when it crops up—and therein lies the test. Will you resist

the temptation or give in to it? And if you decide to resist it, will you tough it out, trying to overcome it in your own strength, or will you turn to God for help?

The right thing, of course, is to decide to resist it, and the smart thing is to ask God for help, because God can do things that are humanly



In school, you're taught a lesson and then given a test. In life, you're given a test that teaches you a lesson.—*Tom Bodett (b. 1955)*

He'll help you, but He won't make it too easy by giving you the answers to a test in advance. That wouldn't be a test. In fact, overcoming serious or longstanding weaknesses is rarely a matter of passing a single test. It's more like taking a course. A student who wants to become proficient in a certain subject has to study hard and be drilled over and over, often taking a number of tests before the final exam. But after he passes the course, he no longer has to undergo those same drills or repeat the same tests. He has those lessons down pat, so further testing isn't necessary. He graduates from that grade or level and moves on to another. It's the same with the school of life.

Once you've applied yourself and passed a certain course, then God doesn't need to keep giving you the same tests over and over. He may occasionally pop a quiz on you as a refresher, but if you've already passed the course and retained what you learned, the refresher won't seem nearly as difficult or demanding as the original test—just difficult enough to help keep you up to date and your skills sharp.

Once you've made major progress in overcoming one weakness, then

He can teach you other things or strengthen you in other areas. When you graduate from one grade or level to another, the work in the next one is usually a little more difficult, but you will have gained new abilities that will help you respond to that new challenge and you'll continue to make progress.

It doesn't matter whether the test is big or small. What's important to God is your willingness to accept each test as it comes and to trust that He knows what He's doing in bringing it along. He understands your heart. He understands what you need to keep growing. He understands what your spirit needs, and He knows exactly how to nurture and strengthen it.

So the next time you find yourself struggling with some personal weakness, instead of giving in to it or complaining that life is too hard, take it as a challenge. Choose to learn from it, and you'll soon find yourself excelling in the school of life.

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

impossible. The Bible is full of promises about that, promises like, "With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"<sup>1</sup>, and "I am the Lord, the God of all flesh. Is there anything too hard for Me?"<sup>2</sup> God wants to help you overcome your weaknesses, and He can help you if you ask Him to.

# A PILGRIM'S JOURNEY

BY UDAY PAUL

**MY FAVORITE RAILWAY IN THE WORLD IS AUSTRALIA'S INDIAN PACIFIC.** The line runs between Sydney on the east coast to Perth on the west coast, traversing a whole continent and connecting two oceans, the Pacific and the Indian. It spans a distance of 4,352 km (2,704 miles) and crosses three time zones—farther than London to Istanbul.

For most of the 65-hour journey, the train travels through some of the most rugged and barren landscapes

(297 miles) there are no bends at all in the line; it is the longest stretch of straight railway track in the world.

After a seemingly endless journey, the train reaches its final destination—the city of Perth. It feels like arriving in another world altogether. The wealth of the city, beautiful streets, glittering buildings, parks and open spaces, a beautiful river flowing into the sea—it is hard to believe that just a little while before we only saw dust and scrub all around us. We

A shining new city also awaits us at the end of our journey—a city not built by the hands of men, but by God the Creator Himself. As Revelation 21 describes, it is a city unlike any on earth, prepared for His own children who love Him and abide in His love; a city in which, unlike the cities of men, goodness dwells and evil shall not enter; a city where we shall leave the heat, dust, and scrub of this world behind us. “The former troubles are forgotten



in the world. One section crosses the Nullarbor Plain, which is an arid, treeless plain with a moon-like landscape the color of cayenne pepper. The word “Nullarbor” is derived from the Latin *nullus arbor*, meaning “no trees.” Nothing but parched, infertile limestone soil surrounds the track and stretches endlessly into the horizon. For one stretch of 478 km

1. Isaiah 65:16–17

arrive at a shining new city, but only after huge, vast emptiness.

What an analogy of the Christian’s journey! As a pilgrim passing through this transitory world, the most efficient way to travel is by walking the path God has prepared for him or her, just as that train travels across the straight track laid out for it. Aided by God’s Spirit, we can pass through the desert of this world in the peace and comfort He gives.

... and shall not be remembered or come to mind.”<sup>1</sup>

So let us travel the path God has laid out for us, enjoying the journey and knowing that He is with us through it all and will get us to our heavenly destination safe and sound.

UDAY PAUL IS A FREELANCE WRITER, VOLUNTEER, AND TEACHER BASED IN INDIA. ■



# THE JOY OF LEARNING

BY SALLY GARCÍA

“THE WORLD IS SO FULL OF A NUMBER OF THINGS, I’m sure we should all be as happy as kings.” This line, inviting us to a world of exploration, was penned by Robert Lewis Stevenson in *A Child’s Garden of Verses*, and my father often quoted it to me when I was young. He had an insatiable curiosity, and as I grew up, the stacks of books in our little house grew higher on every shelf and in every corner. If we wanted to know something, we got books and investigated or we found people who were knowledgeable in the subject. Besides the books, there were all types of crafts we were interested in at the moment—weaving and spinning and dying wool, wood and leather work, calligraphy, crochet, embroidery, and innumerable kits.

1. 2 Corinthians 1:4 NIV
2. See John 14:26; 16:13.
3. See Luke 10:38–42.

After bringing home a few handfuls of shells from my first trip to the coast, I was curious to know their names and to sort them by shape. Soon we were writing shell dealers all over the world and buying specimens from every ocean. We joined a shell club that met once a month to identify, trade, and share our collections. It was an enriching experience for a young person, and I saw how much I could learn just from listening to and interacting with others who had more experience than I did.

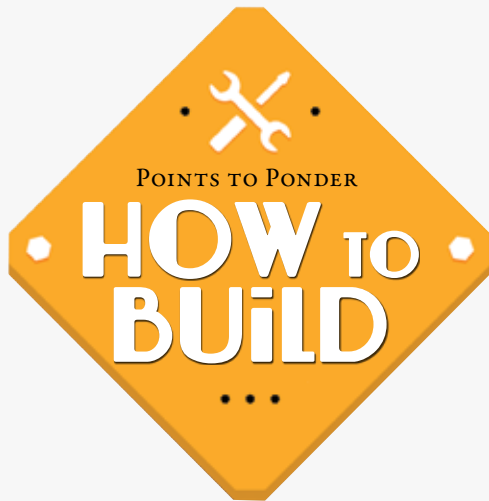
The joy of learning has been key to my life’s adventure. I try to remember Bill Nye’s admonition to be willing to start up conversations with strangers: “Everyone you will ever meet knows something you don’t.”

I was recently talking with a friend who was just diagnosed with breast cancer. She’s undergoing medical examinations before beginning a long series of chemotherapies. She told me about all the people

she’s meeting in the waiting rooms of the medical centers and the opportunities she has had to give a bit of comfort and plant seeds of faith. Though she is sobered by the seriousness of her situation, she seemed ready to learn from the whole process and looked forward to being able to “comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God.”<sup>1</sup> I admire her faith and courage, and I hope I can learn along with her.

Jesus was often called Rabbi, meaning teacher, and He promised that the Holy Spirit would teach us as well.<sup>2</sup> He gives us wisdom and insight into every experience and situation, from the seemingly insignificant to the transcendental. The true *joy of learning* is to sit at His feet and learn from Him.<sup>3</sup>

SALLY GARCÍA IS AN EDUCATOR, MISSIONARY, AND MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■



POINTS TO PONDER  
**HOW TO BUILD**



THE GREAT THING IS TO BE FOUND AT ONE'S POST AS A CHILD OF GOD, living each day as though it were our last, but planning as though our world might last a hundred years.—*C. S. Lewis (1898–1963)*

If you can't do great things, Mother Teresa used to say, do little things with great love. If you can't do them with great love, do them with a little love. If you can't do them with a little love, do them anyway.—*John Ortberg (b. 1957)*

The greatest things ever done on earth have been done little by little.—*Thomas Guthrie (1803–1873)*

What we hope ever to do with ease, we must learn first to do with diligence.—*Samuel Johnson (1709–1784), English author and critic*

I never could have done what I have done without the habits of punctuality, order, and diligence, without the determination to concentrate myself on one subject at a time.—*Charles Dickens (1812–1870), English novelist*

It's the little things you do day in and day out that count. That's the way you teach your children.—*Amanda Pays (b. 1959)*

Nothing of worth or weight can be achieved with half a mind, with a faint heart, with a lame endeavor.—*Isaac Barrow (1630–1677)*

Begin now to be what you will be hereafter.—*Saint Jerome (347–420)*

Perhaps the most valuable result of all education is the ability to make yourself do the thing you have to do, when it ought to be done, whether you like it or not; it is the first lesson that ought to be learned; and however early a man's training begins, it is probably the last lesson that he learns thoroughly.—*Thomas H. Huxley (1825–1895)*

The secret of success is constancy of purpose.—*Benjamin Disraeli (1804–1881)*

Inspiration comes of working every day.—*Charles Baudelaire (1821–1867)*

There is no such thing in anyone's life as an unimportant day.—*Alexander Woollcott (1887–1943)*

It's not what you do once in a while; it's what you do day in and day out that makes the difference.—*Jenny Craig (b. 1932)*





The elevator to success is out of order. You'll have to use the stairs ... one step at a time.—*Joe Girard (1928–2019)*

Today is only one day in all the days that will ever be. But what will happen in all the other days that ever come can depend on what you do today.—*Ernest Hemingway (1899–1961)*

The question for each man is not what he would do if he had the means, time, influence and educational advantages, but what he will do with the things he has.—*Frank Hamilton (b. 1985)*

Talent is cheaper than table salt. What separates the talented individual from the successful one is a lot of hard work.—*Stephen King (b. 1947)*

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 (b. 1947)*

Vision without action is merely a dream. Action without vision just passes the time. Vision with action can change the world.—*Joel A. Barker*

Ever tried. Ever failed. No matter. Try Again. Fail again. Fail better.—*Samuel Beckett (1906–1989)*

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 (1879–1955)*

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 (b. 1954)*

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 Schuller (1926–2015)* ■



Invest in the human soul. Who knows, it might be a diamond in the rough.—*Mary McLeod Bethune*

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

# DIAMOND IN AN ANTHILL

I CAME ACROSS A GEM OF AN ARTICLE FROM A 1997 *READER'S DIGEST* about what was then the world's largest-producing diamond mine—the Argyle mine, in Western Australia. At its peak, it yielded tens of millions of carats per year, including 90% of all pink diamonds.

The story begins in 1969. Nine diamonds were found in the Leonard River. The geologists figured there must be a significant deposit in the area—but where? Like all good mysteries, these early discoveries were only tantalizing teasers of what might be.

It took several years for the Argyle diamond-hunters to gather the personnel and resources to begin exploring the area in earnest. They

worked their way up the river, and seven years later, they found two more diamonds. What if they had quit after six years?

At this point, they were so sure that they were on the threshold of a great discovery that they bought up all the helicopters, four-wheel drives, and maps in the area to discourage any competition. Sure enough, they soon discovered the Argyle pipe in a dormant volcano. However, it still wasn't until 1983—fourteen years after their first discovery—that production began!

Out of all the diamonds discovered in Argyle, 50% were flawed and could only be used for industrial purposes, 45% were non-gems, and

only 5% were gem quality. Among the gem quality stones, 16% were yellow, 2% were white, 2% were gray, and less than 1% were pink, red, or green. The different colors are caused by the environment the diamonds were created in: yellow (nitrogen), blue (boron), and pink (no one knows for sure).

After the ore is crushed three times, spun in a centrifuge, X-rayed, and blown by needle blasts of air, the diamonds begin to roll off the assembly line. There are eight standard shapes that a diamond can be cut into. Only a master knows which shape will suit which rock. One slip at the cutting stage could cost tens of thousands of dollars in lost carats.

Mining operations stopped at the Argyle mine in November 2020, and the site is now being decommissioned and rehabilitated. That makes me think—what legacy will I leave after my mine is played out? Whatever it is will be the result of putting my life in the hands of the Master to cut and shape me to bring out my full potential.

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

# ORDINARY DAYS

BY LI LIAN

IN ANN KIEMEL'S BOOK *I'M OUT TO CHANGE MY WORLD*, there's a section in which the author is explaining to her mom about an ongoing difficulty she is experiencing in her life. Her mother's reply goes like this:

“Don't [you] know  
That life is made up of  
ordinary days  
When there's no one to pat you  
on the back?  
When there's no one to praise  
you?  
When there's no one to honor  
you?  
When there's no one to see how  
brave and noble you are?  
Almost all of life is made up of  
ordinary days  
And it's how you live your  
ordinary days  
That determines whether or not  
you have big moments.”

Ordinary days. We've all had our share of those. Between work, deadlines, to-dos, appointments,



phone calls, caring for our families, cooking, cleaning, and laundry (which is probably somewhere at the bottom of the list), we find ourselves exhausted and frustrated at the end of the day with the feeling that we're not accomplishing anything significant and seem to be nowhere closer to reaching our goals.

It's during times like this that a quote from Marian Wright Edelman comes to mind: “We must not, in trying to think about how we can make a big difference, ignore the small daily differences we can make which, over time, add up to big differences that we often cannot foresee.”

It seems that if I want to make the most of my ordinary days or change something in my life, I have to start with daily steps in that direction. Most children don't start walking or riding a bike from one day to the next, and that gold medal the athlete is proudly holding up to the flashing cameras is the result

of many ordinary days of consistent training.

It's the ordinary days that build character. It's the ordinary days of making the right choices and doing the right actions that shape our future. Let's do our best to make something out of our ordinary days. Who knows? The Big Moments may be waiting just around the corner.

LI LIAN IS A COMPTIA CERTIFIED PROFESSIONAL AND WORKS AS AN OFFICE AND SYSTEMS ADMINISTRATOR FOR A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION IN AFRICA. ■



# TETRIS BLOCKS

BY CHRIS MIZRANY



**SOME PEOPLE THINK THAT EVERYONE HAS A PLACE IN LIFE,** and we all just need to find our place and “fill” it. Others believe that we are all free to make our own way, follow our own truth, and decide of our own accord what and who to be.

In the end, regardless of which path they choose, many people end up desperately searching for their little niche at home, at work, or in their group of friends or community, and wedging themselves tightly in, so pleased to have found it, and hoping to settle in for life.

In our scramble for individuality, destiny, or impact, we can relegate ourselves to human Tetris blocks, turning frantically till we find a place we feel fits us just right. And too often, we can lose our purpose and passion in the process and replace it

with “perfect” placement. Just like those blocks, *who we are* disappears.

It doesn't have to be like this. Yes, we each do have a purpose, but it's not to cram ourselves into normalcy, nor to be “just like” some great mentor, nor to endlessly search for ways to leave our mark. Rather, we find both purpose and place in realizing that we are loved, redeemed, chosen children of God, and that He made each of us unique for a reason.

Perhaps your place in life is one that no one's ever thought of yet—because it's made just for you. Or maybe, like me, you find yourself in a cycle of work and home, doing your best to care for your loved ones and reach out to others, yet not always feeling like you're accomplishing anything extraordinary. That's okay too. This world needs men and women who stand out in everyday life—not because *we're* amazing, but

because we have a God who is. He could have made us perfect, but He didn't; He made us just the way we are.<sup>1</sup> We can each fill multiple roles and find joy in sharing those roles with others.

CHRIS MIZRANY IS A MISSIONARY, PHOTOGRAPHER, AND WEB DESIGNER WITH HELPING HAND IN CAPE TOWN, SOUTH AFRICA. ■

God's help, advice, and guidance is available to all. Even better, He *wants* to help you! Just ask Him:

*Jesus, I want to know You and have You by my side always. Please come into my heart and forgive me for the wrongs I've done. Please give me wisdom to make good decisions. Fill me with the Holy Spirit and help me get to know You better and draw closer to You through reading the Bible. Amen.*

1. See Philippians 2:13.



BY KEITH PHILLIPS

# SWIMMING LESSONS

HAVE YOU EVER NOTICED HOW SOME PEOPLE CAN STAY AFLOAT WHEN ENGULFED IN TROUBLES AND HARDSHIPS, while others sink to the bottom? What sets the swimmers apart from the sinkers? From what I've seen, the biggest factor seems to be faith in God's love. When those who understand how much God loves them find themselves in over their heads, they know He won't let them drown. So, unlike those who don't have such faith, they don't wear themselves out struggling just to keep their heads above water—or worse, panic and go down all the quicker. Buoyed by their faith, the swimmers can concentrate their energy on getting to solid ground.

If you feel more like a sinker than a swimmer, you can get ready for the next sink-or-swim situation by strengthening your faith in God's love. The scope and depth of His love are beyond our comprehension, but the Bible likens it to the love of a father for his children. "He is like a

father to us, tender and sympathetic to those who reverence him."<sup>1</sup> God doesn't enjoy seeing you in trouble. He isn't trying to make life hard for you. He is on your side and wants to see you happy and fulfilled. That doesn't mean He will never let you have problems, but when you find yourself in over your head, you can be sure He will be there for you. In fact, there is a verse in the Bible in which He promises that very thing: "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you."<sup>2</sup>

The first step in learning to swim is learning to float, and that starts with learning to relax and not fight the water. Put yourself in God's hands, lie back, relax, and let Him support you. Practice in the shallows, and you will be ready for whatever the future may hold.

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. ■

## NEW BEGINNING

The nearer my approach to the end, the plainer is the sound of immortal symphonies of worlds which invite me. For half a century I have been translating my thoughts into prose and verse: history, philosophy, drama, romance, tradition, satire, ode, and song; all of these I have tried. But I feel I haven't given utterance to the thousandth part of what lies within me. When I go to the grave I can say, as others have said, "My day's work is done." But I cannot say, "My life is done." My work will recommence the next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes upon the twilight, but opens upon the dawn.—*Victor Hugo (1802–1885)*

1. Psalm 103:13 TLB
2. Isaiah 43:2

BY CHANDRA REES

# JUST BE THERE

**MOST PARENTS WILL PROBABLY ATTEST THAT ONE OF THE ONGOING CHALLENGES OF PARENTING IS SPENDING QUALITY TIME WITH YOUR CHILDREN.**

What makes it especially tricky is that what defines quality time can be different with each parent and each child.

My eldest daughter loves to have a plan when it comes to spending time together. Her idea of quality “mommy time” requires advance knowledge of exactly what activities we will be doing and my active participation from start to finish. My second daughter, on the other hand, is largely self-entertaining, and her

books and toys can keep her occupied for extended periods of time. I must be present and show some interest in her make-believe world, but she’s happy to absorb herself in what she’s doing.

However, when it comes down to it, I’ve realized that quality time is simply being there for my children. It’s a time when I get to know them each personally and experience their growth and development as an active participant rather than as a mere spectator.

Quality time isn’t about endless hours of one-on-one time with each child, nor is it about perfectly orchestrated hours where all activities

flow like clockwork. It’s about being Mom to the children I love, listening to them when they have something to tell me; it’s being attuned to little subtle changes in their behavior and in their actions that indicate that they need my help. It’s about communication that goes beyond instructions or reprimands and gets a glimpse of their hearts. It’s about resisting the urge to tend to the pile of laundry awaiting me and instead cherish a few extra minutes of story time. It’s a sacred time when I am entirely devoted to my children and leave the clamor of the workplace and deadlines behind, even if just for a little while.

It’s placing a higher value on the future that I am building through how I raise my children than on the immediate urgencies that can so easily clutter my day.

I want to someday look back on these years and know that I made the right choices by making time each day to show my children how much I love and care for them. There’s no better way to do that than to just be there for them and make whatever time we have into “quality” time.

CHANDRA REES IS A FREELANCE CHILDREN’S AUTHOR AND MOTHER OF FIVE IN THE USA. ■



BY MARIE ALVERO

# TEACH ME



## TODAY A QUIET PIECE OF KNOWLEDGE CAME TO ME.

For a moment, I had a glimpse into the mind of my child, when she didn't know I was watching, and I saw a side of her that isn't normally obvious. She was fiercer than I normally see her, and I saw how differently she has interpreted some of her life's experiences from what I expected.

My daughter has probably tried to tell me these things many times, but I didn't hear her. I insisted on seeing her the way I wanted to see her, and on hearing what she said through the filter of my understanding of and expectations for her. It turns out there is so much I don't know or understand about her.

1. Psalm 107:9 NLT
2. Proverbs 4:7 NLT

Why is it so uncomfortable to be aware of what we don't know? Why do we think that the expectation would be that we should know something? The Psalms tell us that God "satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things."<sup>1</sup> Those who longed and hungered for truth and His goodness received His words of truth and were empowered to change their part of the world!

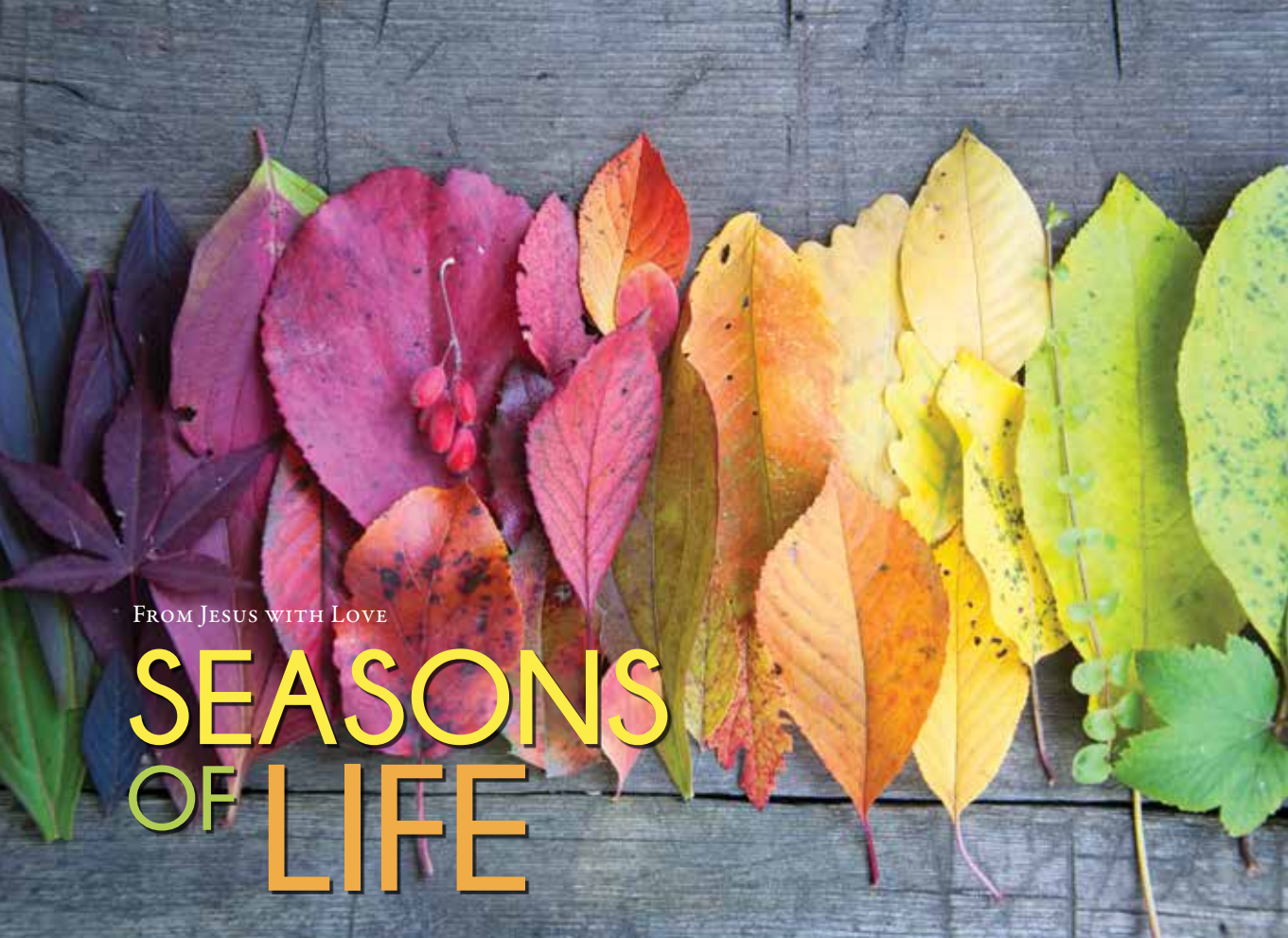
This is true spiritually, but also relationally and intellectually. If we think we know something, we might miss what's actually there. We'll only see what we're accustomed to seeing, and hear what we're accustomed to hearing, unless we learn to slow down, observe, and let go of the preconceived.

We read in the book of Proverbs, "Getting wisdom is the wisest thing you can do! And whatever else you

do, develop good judgment."<sup>2</sup> I can get stuff done. I can go places. I can get possessions, but much more important in life is gaining wisdom and understanding.

Worse, I can miss things, like really *understanding* my child, if I think I already see it all and know it all. For a long time, that feeling of not knowing scared me. I preferred to stay in the shallow familiar waters, rather than launching out into anything unknown. But I have come to recognize this place of not knowing as a place of learning, and to say, "Here I am. Teach me!"

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



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 be tempted to just give up and stop trying.

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 learn in life. The end of one path doesn't mean the end of all paths. Just as the seasons come and go in their cycle, so periods of success or setback, fulfillment or disappointment, and emotional highs and lows come and go. You may be on the down end of the cycle now, but that won't last forever.

The sooner you come to Me and share all your concerns and cares with Me, 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.