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ACTIVATED

Vol 14 • Issue 7

QUARKS IN HIS GLORY

Seeing God's aura

Martha's Transformation

Goodness in action

My Life's Heroes

The unlikely helpers





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION GOOD—OR UPRIGHT?

I recently came across an interesting verse that fits with this issue's main theme of goodness. I had read it before, but this time it made more of an impression on me.

In his letter to the Romans, Paul says, "Now, most people would not be willing to die for an upright person, though someone might perhaps be willing to die for a person who is especially good."¹ The New King James Version uses "righteous" instead of "upright."

That got me thinking. What's the difference between an upright or righteous person and a good one? Theologian John Gill suggests Paul meant that the former is someone who is outwardly moral and keeps to the letter of the law, whereas a good person goes beyond their duty.²

I think the secret is simply that goodness is righteousness mixed with genuine concern for others. Without God's love to motivate us, we can't be good, but with it, we're able to go beyond simply doing the right thing, and make a more lasting difference.

Of course, Jesus is the only one who is fully good, but He expects us to try to imitate Him in our lives and actions. He said, "A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart."³ If we fill ourselves with His goodness and His love, we will be able to pass that on to others as well, to do good to all, whenever we have the opportunity.⁴

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Romans 5:7 NLT
2. See <http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/romans-5-7.html>.
3. Luke 6:45 NIV
4. See Galatians 6:10.

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A TRUE GOOD SAMARITAN

BY JULIANA CONNOLLY



RECENTLY, AFTER READING AN ARTICLE ON THE BBC NEWS WEBSITE,¹ I found myself faced with a few tough questions. The article, a modern-day “Good Samaritan” tale, is worth checking out as an inspiring example of the impact one sincere loving deed can have.

Reading this story made me evaluate my own track record of late. Would I have done the same? Would I be willing to risk my job to help a stranger in need? Unsatisfied with my replies, I also tried some less dramatic-sounding questions. Would my friends say I’m someone who lends a helping hand? Have I done any purely altruistic deeds recently?

If I’m really honest with myself, I’d have to say I’m more often than not absorbed in my own world. I think we all have days when we become a little too focused on our own problems, issues and desires, days

when we walk through life staring at our feet instead of looking up and out and around us. I’m reminded of the painfully honest quote: “There are two kinds of egotists: those who admit it, and the rest of us.”²

So I guess for “the rest of us” it’s healthy to be reminded every now and then about the world around us, about the needs of others, about the power of love; to stop and have a little chat with our conscience and see how we fare. There are lives we could touch if we’d look outward more, and sometimes we may need to hit the pause button and take a look around in order to do so.

The great thing is that we can reach out with love no matter where we live, what job we have, or what direction our life is going. I think this will be my prayer for some time to come.

JULIANA CONNOLLY LIVES IN AUSTIN, TEXAS, AND IS A RESEARCH AND PRODUCTION CONSULTANT FOR THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

1. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-12043294>

2. Dr. Laurence J. Peter (1919–1990)

Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which
He looks [with] compassion
on this world,
Yours are the feet with which
He walks to do good,
Yours are the hands with which
He blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are
the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are His
body.
Christ has no body now but
yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but
yours,
Yours are the eyes with which
He looks [with] compassion
on this world.
Christ has no body now on
earth but yours.
—Attributed to Teresa of Avila
(1515–1582) ■



QUARKS IN HIS GLORY

BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED

PETER AND I WERE TAKING A FEW DAYS' BREAK AT A SMALL BEACH TOWN. One late afternoon, I was taking a walk along the beach, when I looked up to find one of the most stunningly beautiful scenes taking shape before my eyes.

The scattered clouds began to take on pastel hues of peach, violet, and gold against the deepening blue of the sky. I love sunsets, but every once in a great while I encounter one that is so awe-inspiring that I can't take my eyes off it. And the Great Painter was certainly getting my attention with this one. It was as if He was pouring liquid colored light into each cloud. The colors crept higher and higher until they seemed to overflow, and their streams became a living, swirling

kaleidoscope of ever-changing beauty.

Everything else faded into unimportance alongside this masterpiece developing before my eyes. Gently, the expanding display flowed downward until it seemed to swallow up the ocean, turning it into a sea of vibrant colors, soft and smooth like a mirror in the distance, and spraying showers of golden light as the waves shattered on the sand just a few feet



from where I stood. I felt immersed in its beauty. It was as if the sunset were communicating God's encouragement and love to me.

The colors began to spill down in darker hues onto a promontory crowned with a small peak that jutted out into the water some distance away. It was as though the flow of living light had splashed over the edge of the sky onto the peak and the buildings dotting it, transforming them temporarily into glowing gems of iridescent reds and golds.

The vivid transformation of the sky gradually shifted from soft pastel hues to deeper and richer shades of blood red and burgundy, splashed with royal blues and copper streaks. Finally, after what must have been fifteen minutes, but had seemed like mere moments, the grand display began to recede. Its glory slipped peacefully into the gentle mists of the evening to paint the world another day.

As I stood there in the growing dusk, like a little child whose mind had been awed by the grand finale of a massive fireworks display, hoping against hope that it might all start over again, it struck me that this astoundingly glorious and impossibly complex show of power and beauty was a mere thought, a twinkle in the eye of God. It was only a tiny speck in the immensity of His abilities—just a mere quark in the vast universe of His power. If this small and fleeting moment stirred my soul like this and left me speechless with its awesome beauty, how could I possibly imagine or comprehend the Creator of it, who could gloriously splash the sky with such grandeur and wipe it clean in a moment, as if it was just His aura or atmosphere as He passed by.

We get so caught up sometimes in our earthbound realm, fretting and worrying that we are all alone in our troubles and have to try to solve them on our own. But at moments like this, the resounding reality that we are deeply loved by one who can explode the sky into such beauty with nothing more than a passing thought reminds me of just whom it is that I'm trusting in. What God said to me through that glorious heavenly art was, "I can create anything. I can sustain anything. I can protect anyone. I can solve any problem. I am beauty. I am power. I am love, and I do this for you."

Times like this help me to remember that this same all-powerful one who creates such momentary grandeur for His creations is closely attuned to our tiniest needs and desires, guiding and caring for us in ways big and small. How

could we ever worry that He might forget us, or that He might not be in absolute, perfect control of every detail of our lives?

*When comes the golden sunset
That trails God's way on high,
And with its radiant splendor
Illumes the evening sky,
How are the hills and valleys
Aglow with crimson rays,
While nature's deep toned organ
Lifts heavenward its praise:*

*"Holy, holy!" Angel voices sing it;
"Holy, holy!" Cloudy pinions wing it;
"Holy, holy!" Gleaming towers ring it;
"Holy, holy, is the Lord most high."*

*So God reveals at sunset
The grandeur of His throne,
The deeper, fuller glory
Reserved to be our own;
And in that hour's unfolding
Forgot are fear and pain
In love's abounding solace,
In heaven's great refrain.*

*Then come, blest hour of sunset,
Along the golden way,
And thrill us with the splendors
That fill life's perfect day.
God is the end of living,
He satisfies the soul,
And they who seek His glory
Will find in Him their goal.
—Calvin W. Laufer (1874–1938)*

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



BY IRIS RICHARD

My Life's Heroes

IT WAS 1977, and Karl and I had left Germany in a camper the previous year. Our journey had already taken us through Italy, what was then Yugoslavia, Greece, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and India. We hoped to make it to Nepal next, buy a mountain farm there, and settle in a peaceful life away from modern society.

Our budget was tight, and we usually ate at small roadside cafés or bought food from local market stalls, so perhaps it was not surprising that I contracted viral hepatitis. We had reached a lovely bay on the Goan coastline, but unfortunately there was no medical care nearby, and my

health deteriorated quickly. Some local villagers noticed my desperate state and took to visiting daily to feed me a diet of papaya and fresh coconut milk. Thanks to their help, I recovered and got back on my feet, 10 kilos lighter, but healthy again.

When we finally made it to Nepal, we eagerly joined a Buddhist monastery for a trial period, but didn't find what we were looking for. I believed there was something bigger than me, but I was confused. Which God should I pray to? I often wondered while gazing at the multitude of stars in the clear mountain sky.

It was Karl's turn to contract hepatitis next. By that time, we were

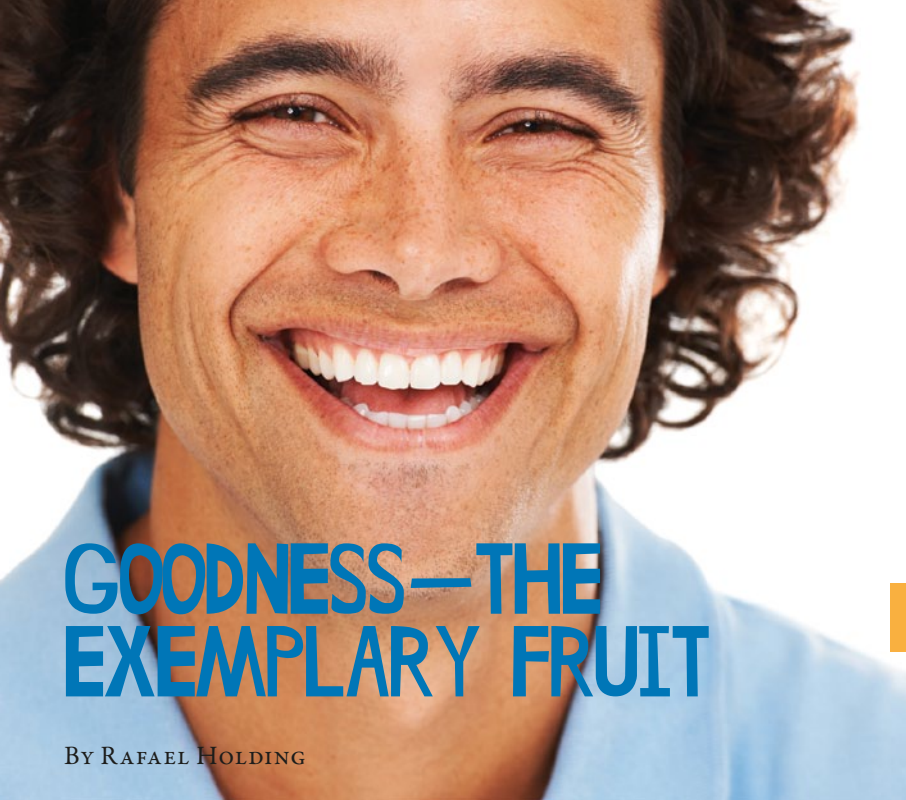
back in India, and I drove all night, while Karl was sprawled in the back of the camper with a high fever. In the early morning, I found a lodge where some young European travelers were staying. One of them, David, spoke German, and he helped us find a doctor and a room to rent.

David also decided to stay a few days with us. "Let me read to you from the book that changed my life," he said when we met the following day.

Reading a short passage from God's Word became a daily routine while Karl regained his strength. Before David left, he introduced me to his Savior, Jesus, and as a result His words from the Bible became my guiding light from that day onwards.

The Goan villagers were poverty-stricken strangers, but their compassion and concern saved my life. David was a stranger, but it's thanks to him that I found purpose and direction. My circumstances today are a result of the combined kindnesses of those selfless strangers I met in India that autumn.

IRIS RICHARD IS A COUNSELOR IN KENYA, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER WORK SINCE 1994. ■



GOODNESS—THE EXEMPLARY FRUIT

BY RAFAEL HOLDING

CHRISTIANS ARE EXPECTED TO BE GOOD PEOPLE. In fact, many non-Christians expect more from Christians than they do from themselves or anyone else. Jesus Himself told His first followers, “You are the light of the world—like a city on a hilltop that cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp and then puts it under a basket. Instead, a lamp is placed on a stand, where it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.”¹ That doesn’t mean we are to act in a self-righteous goody-two-shoes way. That isn’t the goodness Jesus gives.

1. Matthew 5:14–16 NLT
2. See 2 Samuel 11; Psalm 51; 1 Samuel 13:14.
3. See Acts 9:1–16.
4. See Luke 7:36–50; 8:2–3.

Rather it is genuine goodness of the heart shown in honesty, empathy, helpfulness, and a multitude of other ways.

Sad to say, as Christians we can take on the mistaken idea we’re supposed to be perfect, which no one is, of course, or can be. We’re far better off just doing the best we can, honestly and humbly admitting our faults and mistakes, and then giving God the glory for anything good we do. That’s His idea of goodness.


If you do your best and trust God for the rest, His goodness will shine through.

RAFAEL HOLDING IS A WRITER IN AUSTRALIA. “GOODNESS—THE EXEMPLARY FRUIT” IS ADAPTED FROM THE *GET ACTIVATED* BOOK *GOD’S GIFTS*, AVAILABLE FROM AURORA’S ONLINE STORE ([HTTP://SHOP.AURORAPRODUCTION.COM/](http://shop.auroraproduction.com/)). ■

SINNING SAINTS

God’s idea of goodness is often quite different from ours. King David plotted the death of another man so he could have his wife. But David knew he was a sinner whose only hope was the love, mercy, and forgiveness of God, and because he repented greatly and loved God all the more after what he had gone through, God called David a man after His own heart.² God took the apostle Paul, a fanatical persecutor of the early Christians, and made him one of the greatest Christians of all time.³ Jesus took a demon-possessed harlot, Mary Magdalene, and made her one of His favorite followers.⁴

God’s idea of goodness is not sinless perfection. It’s a sinner who knows he has no righteousness of his own, but depends totally on the goodness of God. These are the only saints there are; there are no others! —*David Brandt Berg* (1919–1994) ■



BY ALEKSANDRA RADMANOVIC

WHAT IS BEAUTIFUL

I RECENTLY DID A SEARCH FOR HOW OFTEN THE WORD “BEAUTIFUL” APPEARS IN THE BIBLE.

I found out that the Old Testament is full of beautiful women. Sara was beautiful.¹ Rebecca was *very* beautiful.² Rachel was lovely in form *and* beautiful.³ Job’s daughters were more beautiful than any other women in the land.⁴ The list goes on and on. I think my favorite, though, is Abigail. Abigail was beautiful *and*

intelligent.⁵ What more would a woman desire be said of her?

I came to the conclusion that in this ancient biblical culture where spiritual qualities were more sought after than they are today, what was good, wholesome, and godly was also considered beautiful. And so a godly woman was considered beautiful both by God and by men. Beauty wasn’t so much about the outer shell, proportions, sizes, and shapes.

But what particularly caught my attention on this topic was a short story from the Gospel of Mark:⁶

MARK 14:3: “While he [Jesus] was in Bethany, reclining at the table in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, made of pure nard. She broke the jar and poured the perfume on his head.”

I had read this story before, but it had never registered with me that the woman actually broke the jar. Since the perfume was extremely expensive, the alabaster jar in which the perfume was held was probably worth a lot as well. Yet she broke it, possibly because she wanted to demonstrate that Jesus was worth everything to her. She was going to give Him her all, the best, the most precious and expensive thing she had, withholding nothing.

MARK 14:4: Some of those present were saying indignantly to one another, “Why this waste of perfume?”

It is so easy to judge things in a superficial way. The depth of someone’s motivation is hard to discern at times, especially when they act in an uncommon way.

1. See Genesis 12:11.

2. See Genesis 24:16.

3. See Genesis 29:17.

4. See Job 42:15.

5. See 1 Samuel 25:3.

6. The Bible quotations in this article are all taken from the New International Version (NIV).

7. See <http://thesaurus.yourdictionary.com/beautiful>.



IFUL?

MARK 14:5: “It could have been sold for more than a year’s wages and the money given to the poor.” And they rebuked her harshly.

MARK 14:6: “Leave her alone,” said Jesus. “Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to me.”

Here is the word I was looking for, *beautiful*, defined as “that which gives the highest degree of pleasure to the senses or to the mind and suggests that the object of delight approximates one’s conception of an ideal.”⁷ Jesus saw into her heart, past what was the proper, reasonable, usual, or expected act of someone’s faith and religious conviction, and proclaimed that to Him, her actions were ideal. And here we also see Jesus’ conviction to stand up and defend one who is

misunderstood and harshly and unjustly judged.

MARK 14:7: “The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have me.”

The world is full of deprivation and needy causes, but opportunities to express love to those who mean the most to us are limited.

MARK 14:8: “She did what she could. She poured perfume on my body beforehand to prepare me for my burial.”

The little thing that she could do meant a lot to the one she loved and believed in.

MARK 14:9: “I tell you the truth, wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her.”

Truth and goodness and beauty, are but different faces of the same All.
—Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)

One of the principal rules of religion is, to lose no occasion of serving God. And, since He is invisible to our eyes, we are to serve Him in our neighbor; which He receives as if done to Himself in person, standing visibly before us.
—John Wesley (1703–1791)

If we understand our first and sole duty to consist of loving God supremely and loving everyone, even our enemies, for God’s dear sake, then we can enjoy spiritual tranquility under every circumstance.
—A. W. Tozer (1897–1963)

This woman believed in Jesus and she was motivated to act on her belief. She used what she had, did what she could, with originality and creativity, and wasn’t afraid to show it. That’s being genuine and authentic all the way. It made her famous and painted a fine picture of what God considers beautiful.

There are countless ways to serve God and express our love and adoration to Him. When the inspiration comes from within our hearts and we are true to ourselves, our actions, just like the actions of this woman, will leave a legacy for others to follow into the further beauties of God and His Spirit.

ALEKSANDRA RADMANOVIC IS A MOM, TEACHER, AND LIFE COACH IN BUCHAREST, ROMANIA. ■



Martha's Transformation

BY DINA ELLENS

I FIRST MET MARTHA AS SHE WAS SITTING ON A BENCH IN THE PARK WHERE I WAS TAKING MY BABY FOR A WALK. My husband and I had been married for two years, and we had just had our first child. Martha was staring vacantly into space and didn't acknowledge me when I sat down to tend to my lively eight-month-old boy who already didn't want to stay put in his stroller.

When she saw him, Martha's expression came alive, and she smiled at me and the baby. I struck up a conversation with her, and found out that she was a retired nurse and midwife. She was slim and petite, and although in her 60s, she still wore her hair in shoulder-length soft waves. She told me how she had never gotten married but always loved babies and had delivered hundreds of them.

As we continued talking, she explained that she had taken a leave of absence from her work due to long hours

and a demanding schedule. Later, I learned that she had actually had a nervous breakdown, and that as she struggled with her recovery and recurring depression, her temporary leave of absence had become permanent.

She explained that she enjoyed coming to the park because being out in nature made her feel at peace. I shared with Martha how Jesus had once said, "Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life,"¹ and before leaving the park that day, Martha prayed to receive Jesus as her Savior.

From that point on, Martha was a changed creature. She began studying the Bible and was soon spending most of her time helping others, while her bouts with depression grew fewer and further apart.

About a year later, Martha showed up at our door with a plastic baby bathtub packed full of items for a newborn. "This is for you," she said with a knowing smile. "Congratulations on being pregnant again!"

I was dumbfounded. I hadn't yet told anyone except my husband that I was pregnant again. But somehow

1. John 8:12 NIV

2. Proverbs 4:18 ESV

Martha knew. And she had taken the time to gather a lovely surprise present for me and the new little one on the way.

When the time came, my husband and I were overjoyed at the addition of a healthy baby boy to our family. After the delivery, however, some complications set in and I developed an infection and fever. Fortunately, it didn't affect my newborn, so he could stay in my bedroom with me, while my husband cared for our older son. I wasn't alone, though: When Martha heard about my condition, she immediately packed a bag and moved into my sickroom with me.

For the next two weeks, she was at my side day and night, caring for me constantly. After I'd finish nursing, she'd take the baby from my side, change his diaper, and put him to sleep in his bed. Martha prepared nourishing meals that helped build up my strength, and gradually the fever and infection began to subside. Through it all, Martha was a pillar of comfort and encouragement, talking with me, reading to me, and praying for me.

Martha continued to be a frequent visitor to our home, until one day she came with some serious news. She had been diagnosed with cancer and needed to enter the hospital right away. In spite of all that the medical profession could do, Martha passed away calmly and peacefully not long after.

One of Martha's favorite Bible verses was: "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day."² Martha had found her Savior, and from that moment on, the light of His love had shone ever brighter in her life and had inspired her to become more like Him.

DINA ELLENS TAUGHT SCHOOL IN SOUTHEAST ASIA FOR OVER 25 YEARS. ALTHOUGH RETIRED, SHE REMAINS ACTIVE IN VOLUNTEER WORK AS WELL AS PURSUING HER INTEREST IN WRITING. ■



PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

BY HENRY DRUMMOND, ADAPTED

LIFE IS NOT A HOLIDAY, but an education. What makes a person a good tennis player? Practice. What makes a person a good artist, a good sculptor, a good musician? Practice. What makes a person a good linguist? Practice. What makes a person a good person? Practice. Nothing else. If a person does not exercise his arm he develops no biceps muscle; and if a person does not exercise his soul, he acquires no muscle in his soul, no strength of character, no vigor of moral fiber, no beauty of spiritual growth.

Love is not a thing of enthusiastic emotion. It is a rich, strong, vigorous expression of the whole round Christian character—the Christlike nature in its fullest development. And the constituents of this great character are only to be built up by ceaseless practice.

HENRY DRUMMOND (1851–1897) WAS A SCOTTISH EVANGELIST, WRITER, AND LECTURER. ■

POINTS TO PONDER

Goodness in Action

It is a grand mistake to think of being great without goodness and I pronounce it as certain that there was never a truly great man that was not at the same time truly virtuous.

—*Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790)*

Do all the good you can, in all the ways you can, to all the souls you can, in every place you can, at all the times you can, with all the zeal you can, as long as ever you can.

—*John Wesley (1703–1791)*

Life becomes harder for us when we live for others, but it also becomes richer and happier.

—*Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965)*

Freedom, morality, and the human dignity of the individual consists precisely in this; that he does good not because he is forced to do so, but because he freely conceives it, wants it, and loves it.

—*Mikhail Bakunin (1814–1876)*

In life, you can never do a kindness too soon because you never know how soon it will be too late.

—*Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882)*

Goodness is love in action, love with its hand to the plow, love with the burden on its back, love following His footsteps who went about continually doing good.

—*James Hamilton*

Do not say that if the people do good to us, we will do good to them; and if the people oppress us, we will oppress them; but determine that if people do you good, you will do good to them; and if they oppress you, you will not oppress them.

—*Muhammad (570–632)*

Conquer a man who never gives by gifts; subdue an untruthful man by truthfulness; vanquish an angry man by gentleness; and overcome an evil man by goodness.

—*Indian proverb*

It is not what they profess but what they practice that makes them good.

—*Greek proverb*

The ideals which have always shone before me and filled me with the joy of living are goodness, beauty, and truth. To make a goal of comfort or happiness has never appealed to me; a system of ethics built on this basis would be sufficient only for a herd of cattle.

—*Albert Einstein (1879–1955)*

Good is a product of the ethical and spiritual artistry of individuals; it cannot be mass-produced.

—*Aldous Huxley (1894–1963)*

To be good is noble; but to show others how to be good is nobler and no trouble.

—*Mark Twain (1835–1910)*

Goodness is the only investment that never fails.

—*Henry David Thoreau (1817–1862)* ■

A MOTHER'S CHOICE



BY RENEE CHANG

NONE OF HER FRIENDS OR FAMILY UNDERSTANDS WHY SHE HAS DONE IT, and most of them would like to shake her out of her foolishness. Their objections make sense. After all, May is in her mid-forties and has been living alone ever since her daughter moved out. May is also in debt. And yet, here she is, raising her ex-husband's child by another woman.

May married early and was divorced by her early twenties, but even before that, she had been raising her first child alone, as her ex-husband had a drug addiction and spent as much time in prison as out.

Then twenty-some years later, he reappeared out of the blue and asked for a favor. He had fathered a new baby with another woman, and he wanted May to arrange for the baby

to be taken into an orphanage before he went to jail again. Little Joline had been abandoned by her mother, and it seemed she was destined for a childhood spent in an institution.

Instead of that, May arranged to keep the baby and has been raising her for the past five years. It hasn't been easy. May is working hard to make ends meet, and Joline is a handful. But May is undeterred.

"People have been telling me what a big burden Joline is, and how she isn't worth the sacrifices I make to look after her. But no one ever asks me how *I* feel or really listens to why I'm doing this.

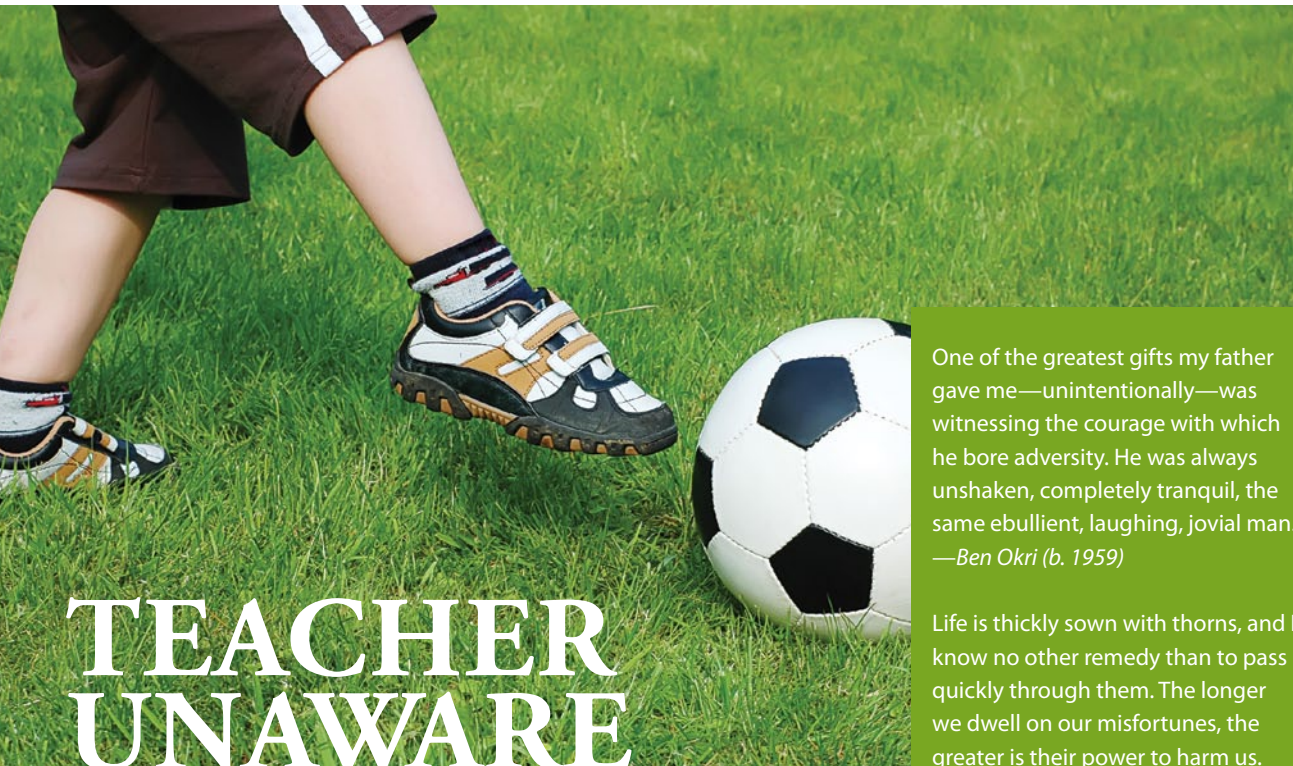
"After my last failed relationship, I felt I had lost everything to live for and that I'd never have a normal family. But when I first saw Joline's smile and felt her little hand clasp one of

my fingers, I knew then that there was someone who loved me and needed me. Joline is not a burden, she's my source of love and joy."

Just then, Joline came over and placed her arms around May's neck and kissed her cheeks. "I love you, Mommy. You're the best in the world!" May's face lit up as the proud mother she is.

It dawned on me then. May was right, even though others had misjudged her. Rather than letting life's misfortunes and struggles drag her into a spiral of self-pity, she had chosen to focus on giving what she still had. And in doing so, she also found the happiness that had been eluding her.

RENEE CHANG IS A DIRECTOR OF A CONSULTANCY COMPANY IN TAIWAN. ■



TEACHER UNAWARE

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

THE WEATHER WAS PERFECT, and most of my friends were looking forward to a relaxing holiday weekend, but not me. A recent bout of illness had left me far behind in my schoolwork, and I faced a mountain of projects, reports, and assignments to complete before the end of the month. I felt overwhelmed and undercharged.

After several hours of frantic work, I still hadn't made much headway, so I decided that some time in nature might lift my spirits, and I headed toward a large nearby park. The usually quiet lanes and lawns were alive with parents and children, and their excited laughter and voices filled the air.

I had been walking for some time when a child's eager squeal caught my attention. I turned to see a father playing soccer with his young son, who looked about three years old. The little boy ran wildly around the field, kicking and chasing the ball. He often didn't even make contact with the ball, and he missed many of the shots his father passed him, but he continued playing with such passion and enthusiasm that I couldn't help but smile.

After watching for a while, I noticed something unusual about the father's right arm. While the rest of his body moved nimbly with him as he ran and kicked, his right hand and arm hung motionlessly by his

One of the greatest gifts my father gave me—unintentionally—was witnessing the courage with which he bore adversity. He was always unshaken, completely tranquil, the same ebullient, laughing, jovial man.
—Ben Okri (b. 1959)

Life is thickly sown with thorns, and I know no other remedy than to pass quickly through them. The longer we dwell on our misfortunes, the greater is their power to harm us.
—Voltaire (1694–1778)

side. Undaunted, he motioned to his son with his one good arm and passed him another shot.

I headed home in the setting sun with the pair's infectious laughter still echoing in my ears. I don't think that father would consider himself a great moral teacher, but unbeknownst to him, that Sunday afternoon he became my inspiration. His cheerful, selfless example put my petty problems in perspective and encouraged me to face my challenges with the same spirit of courage and faith.

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A SPIRITUAL EXERCISE

BY ABI F. MAY

THE GOODNESS OF GOD

THE GOODNESS OF GOD ENDURES CONTINUALLY.—*PSALM 52:1*

Good things show up in our lives in a myriad of ways: friends and family, health and happiness, a roof overhead and food on the table, the enjoyment we derive from music, art, and literature. The Bible teaches us that God is the origin of these blessings. “God’s gift to us is the happiness we get from our food and drink and from the work we do.”¹ “Whatever is good and perfect comes down to us from God our Father, who created all the lights in the heavens.”²

These gifts, as wonderful as they are, are just a small illustration of God’s love. How easy it is, in the busy activity of daily living, to overlook the greatest manifestation of God’s goodness—His gift to us in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. “God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”³

1. Ecclesiastes 3:13 CEV

2. James 1:17 NLT

3. John 3:16

4. Romans 6:23

5. See 1 Peter 2:24.

We could say that Jesus is the goodness of God made flesh. And this gift leads to another: “The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”⁴

God didn’t *have* to send His Son; and Jesus didn’t *have* to lay down His life for our sakes, but He did, and as a result, we are eligible to receive forgiveness of sins and the assurance of an eternity in God’s loving presence. Without Jesus’ sacrifice, without His sufferings on the cross, without His death, without His resurrection and triumph over the grave, we would not have the promise of everlasting life.

For this exercise, take some time to thank God for His gift of salvation. Thank Him for sending Jesus to die in your place. Thank Him for the gifts of forgiveness and redemption. Use your own words, or you may like to say this prayer:

“Thank You, God, for sending Your Son, Jesus, to bear the punishment for all my mistakes and shortcomings.⁵ Please keep my heart, mind, and life open to You, so that I always remember Your goodness.”

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*Redeemed—how I love to
proclaim it!
Redeemed by the blood of the
Lamb;
Redeemed through His infinite
mercy,
His child, and forever, I am.
—Fanny Crosby (1820–1915)*

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

More than a Speck

As you take time to be filled with Me, I always replenish your resources. The more you give Me of yourself, the more I can give you of Myself—My love, My power, My anointing, My gifts, My insight, My wisdom, My blessings, My strength, My provision, My protection, My creativity, My intelligence, My contentment, My joy, My peace.

All these things are part of My goodness. All are yours for the taking and can become a bigger part of your life, day by day. As you get to know Me better and learn to receive from Me more clearly and directly, you can have more and more of these wonderful gifts and treasures. They grow and multiply within your own heart, and spread into the lives of others whom your life touches.

Never think that you are just one among many, a speck in the world, and that what you do doesn't have an effect on others or on society around you. It does. You can make the world a better place, in your own special way, through the things you say and do. You can work with Me to bring more of My nature, love, and goodness into the world. When you are being led by Me and working in the power of My Spirit, the things you do help to accomplish My perfect plan in the lives of all involved.

