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Vol 15 • Issue 7

A HEART FULL OF JOY

Drawing on the Source

Looking Forward to Monday

Is it possible?

The Tea Lesson

Simple pleasures





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION PURSUING HAPPINESS

“Do you want to be happy?” The splash on a magazine cover caught my eye and made me chuckle. Surely *everyone* wants to be happy; and you'd think that after millennia of philosophers and theologians tackling the problem—not to mention the self-help books and articles published every year on the

topic—we'd have figured out the formula!

So how easy *is* it to be happy?

Consider what Abd-ar-Rahman III, the Emir and later Caliph of Córdoba in the 10th century, had to say: “I have now reigned above fifty years in victory or peace, beloved by my subjects, dreaded by my enemies, and respected by my allies. Riches, honors, power, and pleasure have waited on my call, nor does any earthly blessing appear to have been wanting to my felicity. In this situation, I have diligently numbered the days of pure and genuine happiness which have fallen to my lot; they amount to fourteen.”

Only 14?! If someone like that could hardly ever find it in himself to be happy, what chance is there for the rest of us? For some reason, the more we pursue happiness, the more it seems to elude us, remaining just beyond our reach.

God expects believers to be happy. “Happy are the people whose God is the Lord!”¹ King David confidently proclaimed. Yet I've felt unhappy on occasion, so what am I doing wrong?

I think my problem is that I look at happiness as a destination, a place I'll be at *when* I can achieve this goal, go on that vacation, get that dream house or car or job—maybe win the lottery—whereas it's really the scenery that I could experience along the way as I draw closer to God and reach out to others. Rather than a goal in itself, I'm learning that happiness can be the byproduct of a life lived on good terms with God and my fellow man.

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. Psalm 144:15

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The Tea Lesson

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER



ONE THING THAT I ENJOYED ABOUT THE YEARS I SPENT IN JAPAN is how adept the Japanese are at turning everyday activities into art forms. Such routine tasks as making tea, arranging flowers, gardening, and raking rocks have been transformed into cultural and spiritual experiences. I admire how they hold on to and appreciate the beauty of the simple tasks of life.

It is said that the tea ceremony is the culmination of all the arts. In the Japanese town where I lived, an annual public tea ceremony is held at a teahouse that was constructed in the local castle especially for this purpose. The not-to-be-missed experience unfolds like this:

As we enter the hushed interior and remove our shoes, a woman dressed in a traditional kimono welcomes us. Her relaxed manner, her graceful movements, and the

absence of all clutter in the room have a calming effect. The straw tatami mats gently massage the soles of our feet. The tearoom has large rice-paper doors that have been opened to reveal a lush garden with a fountain. The sound of trickling water soothes our nerves. On the wall is a poem extolling the beauties of the magnolia, and beneath it is a flower arrangement that is stunning in its stark simplicity. The angle at which each flower was placed has significance; together they illustrate the relationship between heaven and earth.

Our hostess prepares the tea with the dexterity of a dancer. Each motion—the tuck of the napkin in her oversized belt, the whisk of the brush in the tea, the swirling of the hot brew in the bowl—has been carefully choreographed and refined over a thousand years by the tea masters.

Our hostess has practiced her role ever since she was a girl.

We take the handmade, intentionally rough bowls and make the customary polite comments on their beauty. There is a front and a back to these bowls and a specific direction and manner in which they should be turned. Cakes are served on leaves. We exchange the usual pleasantries with our hostess about simple things and eventually leave as quietly and respectfully as we arrived. Somehow we feel different.

What the Japanese tea masters and others like them have discovered is that simple tasks can be turned into joyous, meaningful occasions.

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UNEXPECTED

BY IRIS RICHARD

OUR JEEP BUMPED ALONG THE RUGGED TRAIL that was going to take us to the main road and back home to Nairobi, after a successful humanitarian aid project in a distant rural area of Kenya. My thoughts were already traveling to the busy week ahead. The next project was around the corner and needed to be planned and organized, and there seemed to be too few hours in the day to get it all done.

My knee had been bothering me for the previous few days, and that eventually escalated into a constant dull pain. So far, I had managed to ignore it, but I knew I'd probably end up needing to get it checked. I just couldn't seem to find the time and kept putting it off.

After arriving home, I went to bed early, feeling exhausted and achy. During the night, a pounding pain woke me up, and I discovered swelling all around my kneecap. I popped some painkillers and tried to catch a bit more sleep. In the morning, the pain was even more intense, and I called my doctor, who immediately summoned me to his office. There, a thorough checkup, blood tests, and an x-ray confirmed that there was a deep-seated infection in my leg that was threatening to spread.

The doctor furrowed his brow as he looked over the results. "We need to hospitalize you immediately."

I tried to argue. "But I have pressing appointments and work to do this week."

"Your work has to wait!" the doctor insisted. "This infection has to be stopped, or you might even lose your leg!"

Relenting, I hobbled over to the adjacent hospital to check myself in. Then a nurse met me with a wheelchair and escorted me into a small room. After she left, quietness enveloped me, and the fact that I was grounded sank in. The room was sterile and white, and flower-curtained windows faced a treelined courtyard. There was a small TV attached to the wall, a sink with a small mirror, and a metal-frame bed. I sank into its covers, frustration and worry welling up inside of me.

Soon, the door opened and a nurse entered to set up a drip. "Don't worry, dear, you'll be better soon," she said reassuringly, then smiled and left the room. I was alone again.

I realized that I had two choices. One was to let the situation pull me down, dreading each minute I had to spend there. The other was to start searching for a glimpse of the silver lining that must be hidden somewhere behind



SMILE!

A merry heart makes a cheerful countenance.—*Proverbs 15:13*

The world is like a mirror: Frown at it, and it frowns at you; smile at it and it smiles too.—*Author unknown*

Most smiles are started by another smile.—*Frank H. Clark (1911–1990)*

A smile is the lighting system of the face and the heating system of the heart.—*Author unknown*

Wear a smile and have friends; wear a scowl and have wrinkles. What do we live for if not to make the world less difficult for each other?—*George Eliot (1819–1880)*

Smile. It's free therapy.—*Doug Horton (1891–1968)*

You'll find that life is still worthwhile, if you just smile.—*Taken from the song "Smile" (1954)*

A smile is worth a thousand words.—*Author unknown*

Wrinkles should merely indicate where smiles have been.—*Mark Twain (1835–1910)*

Smile at each other. Smile at your wife, smile at your husband, smile at your children, smile at each other—it doesn't matter who it is—and that will help you to grow in greater love for each other.—*Mother Teresa (1910–1997)*

There are hundreds of languages in the world but a smile speaks them all.—*Author unknown* ■

the dark cloud. I decided to choose the second option and prayed that God would help me find joy in this unexpected and potentially depressing turn of events.

A knock on the door brought me out of my reverie. It was a colleague with a large bouquet of flowers. This was soon followed by several phone calls by loved ones offering their best wishes for my recovery. I began to cheer up.

A tray with tea and cake was wheeled in for an afternoon snack, and I couldn't help but grin when I realized that it had been a long while since I had been served in bed! Later in the day, I rested, read, and watched a movie. It felt great to just relax and let myself enjoy this unexpected but much-needed break.

Within a few days, my knee improved and I was able to go home. In the meantime, others had managed my project just fine.

I'm glad that I chose joy, which brought along peace, and in turn helped to get me back on my feet quickly.

IRIS RICHARD IS A COUNSELOR IN KENYA, WHERE SHE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN COMMUNITY AND VOLUNTEER WORK SINCE 1995. ■



THE LOVE OF COLORS

BY ANNA PERLINI

ONE OF THE FIRST PRESENTS

I REMEMBER RECEIVING was a small set of tempera paints. Later came a set of oil paints, a tripod, and some canvas. I remember my first “masterpiece,” painted when I was 11 and on summer vacation in the mountains. It took me days, and the result was nothing amazing, but the sense of accomplishment was immense.

My subsequent teenage years were a riot of hobbies, art, music, politics, and whatnot. Then I got married and started traveling. It was inconvenient to carry around a set of oil paints—and anyway, who had time to paint? The last canvas I painted was a sunset in Sicily while pregnant with my first child.

Then nothing for many long years.

When my children were small, I encouraged them to draw, and my son Mark showed a particular inclination for art and eventually became

a cartoonist. He would often ask, “Mom, why don’t you start drawing and painting again?”

Once, at the end of a visit, he again asked if I would paint something for him, and this time, I agreed. Mind you, it felt like aeons had passed since that last sunset in Sicily, and I was very rusty! I could hardly handle the brush, and it took a while to remember the most basic shading techniques.

I finished the painting—mostly to please my son—and intended to put my art supplies away again afterwards, but only two months later, some friends asked me to help paint a large 6x8-meter mural. It was daunting, and to top it off, I had to work while standing on an elevating arm! The response was encouraging, though, and that turned out to be the beginning of a new hobby painting murals in schools, hospitals, youth centers, and private homes.

Now I enjoy transforming any gray, shabby place into a celebration of colors and cheerful images. Once, an elderly patient confided that since those happy kids on the hospital wall in front of his bed “were continually smiling” at him, he didn’t feel so lonely anymore! Those “happy kids” were the creation of our paintbrushes.

I believe everyone has some forgotten passion buried deep inside, waiting to be reawakened. Watching people’s reactions when their space is transformed has certainly awakened my old passion for art, and now my paints are always ready for the next gray wall.

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FINDING “IT”

BY KEITH PHILLIPS

NEHEMIAH SAID IT WAS THE SOURCE OF TRUE STRENGTH.¹

The psalmist David found it in God’s presence and offered it back to Him as a love gift.² Jeremiah found it in God’s Word.³ King Solomon said it was one of God’s rewards for right living.⁴ Jesus promised it to His followers and said it came through believing and doing what He said.⁵

The apostle Paul named it as one of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, as well as one of the hallmarks of the kingdom of heaven within.⁶ And Paul should know; it sustained him through imprisonment, persecution, and numerous other perils.⁷ The apostle Peter said it couldn’t be put into words, but that it was “full of glory.”⁸

1. See Nehemiah 8:10.

2. See Psalm 16:11.

3. See Jeremiah 15:16.

4. See Ecclesiastes 2:26.

5. See John 15:11.

6. See Galatians 5:22; Romans 14:17.

7. See 2 Corinthians 11:23; Acts 20:24.

8. 1 Peter 1:8

9. Luke 11:9,13

“It” is “the joy of the Lord.”

And the good news is that the joy of the Lord is not reserved only for prophets, psalmists, kings, and apostles. Many millions of believers of all ages and down through the ages have thrilled to it and lived by it—and you can too. It’s free, and it can be yours starting right now with a simple prayer asking Jesus to fill you with the Holy Spirit’s “joy unspeakable.” Jesus has promised, “Ask, and it will be given to you. ... If you know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!”⁹ Then don’t be surprised if you’re happier than you’ve ever been in your life, or that your joy and happiness spill over on others. Like all the other best things in life, the joy of the Lord is best when shared.

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 U.S. ■



My God, the Spring of all my joys,
The Life of my delights,
The Glory of my brightest days,
And Comfort of my nights!

In darkest shades, if He appear,
My dawning is begun,
He is my soul’s bright morning star,
And He my rising sun.
—Isaac Watts (1674–1748)

Make me hear joy and gladness.
Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and renew a steadfast spirit within
me. Restore to me the joy of Your
salvation, and uphold me by Your
generous Spirit.—Psalm 51:8,10,12

A HEART FULL OF JOY

BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED

THE JOY GOD CAN GIVE YOU ENABLES YOU TO BE HAPPY EVEN IF THINGS AREN'T PERFECT IN YOUR EARTHLY SITUATION, because it reaches beyond that. God promises that things will turn out all right in the future, and that He has strength available for you in the present.

God wants to help you be happy even if things aren't perfect yet and all the physical circumstances aren't lined up. His joy can allow you to be happy and praiseful and carefree, even when you are surrounded by many cares, because it comes from the highest heavens, way, way beyond any of these earthly problems. Jesus is our bridge, our door to that world of happiness.

God loves you even when you're bad or late or behind or sinful or



unloving or disappointing. He never stops loving you, and most important, never stops having the faith that victory is right around the corner, because it is. His faith in each of us can enable us to be joyful even when things are looking pretty bleak, because we can trust that the best is yet to come.

To have this joy, it's vital to see today in the context of all eternity, not letting the little things that happen here and now have so much of an influence on our happiness and peace. Today's problems become small compared to the eternity of good that can await us with Jesus. So look forward with faith, and that will make your present much better too.

We sometimes feel that we can't be joyful unless all our problems are

gone. The minute something negative crops up, it pokes a pin in our joy balloon and we feel that the joy is gone. But God's spiritual joy is based on so much more than that. We can be happy during the rainstorms of life because we know that above the clouds the sun is still shining.

Start looking for the things in each day that He brings along to make you happy, to give you pleasure or enjoyment or satisfaction or contentment. God wants to see you enjoying these gifts and taking pleasure in every blessing that He's given. But He also wants to teach you about a more permanent joy, a more lasting happiness that isn't dependent merely on earthly things.

The happiness God brings is faith-based; it sees beyond the moment



If you haven't yet experienced the joy of the Lord, you can right now by praying the following prayer:

Jesus, I need something in my life that can bring me the kind of joy that circumstances can't rob me of. I've been told that *You* can give me joy that nothing can steal from me—not pain nor sorrow nor loss. If *You* can bring that into my life, I want *You*. Please walk with me as my friend and give me a reason to live every day. Thank *You* so much.

and revels in the eternal nature of God's love. You're allowed to be happy. You're allowed to be hopeful for the future even if you've made a mess of the present. You're allowed to believe that God loves you even if you think you've disappointed Him. You're allowed to give and share large portions of love, because you're never going to run out of love. You're allowed to have fun and let yourself relax, because these things are good and healthy and He loves to see you do them.

The point is, God wants you to be happy. And nothing in your circumstances needs to change before you can start. All you have to do is accept the joy and relief and encouragement He wants to give you, accept His promises, claim them, and change your perspective. And that can happen instantly, the minute you reach out with faith and believe.

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

GOD'S HAPPINESS IS AVAILABLE EVEN IN TIMES OF DIFFICULTY

In all my trouble I am still very happy.
—2 Corinthians 7:4 CEV

Now I am glad to boast about how weak I am; I am glad to be a living demonstration of Christ's power, instead of showing off my own power and abilities. Since I know it is all for Christ's good, I am quite happy about ... insults and hardships, persecutions and difficulties.
—2 Corinthians 12:9–10 TLB

Dear friends, don't be surprised about the fiery trials that have come among you to test you. ... Instead, rejoice as you share Christ's suffering. You share his suffering now so that you may also have overwhelming joy when his glory is revealed.
—1 Peter 4:12–13 CEB

While you are going through your trial, you can recall your past victories and count the blessings that you do have with a sure hope of greater ones to follow if you are faithful.—*Ezra Taft Benson (1899–1994)* ■

A woman with blonde hair, wearing a white lace dress, is smiling and holding a large bunch of colorful balloons (pink, purple, red, yellow, white) in her right hand. She is standing outdoors next to a tree trunk. The background is bright and sunny.

I Love Life!

BY EVELYN SICHROVSKY

THE WALLS OF MY BEDROOM ARE BRIGHTENING WITH A NEW DAY'S SUN. I rub my eyes, stretch, and yawn, allowing my thoughts to travel far on memory lane. Through the twists and turns of my life, I've made what I like to think is a discovery—though surely many others have long found this secret. I have discovered what makes a person

happy and how I can be happy too.

For many years, foremost on my criteria for joy was optimal health and freedom from physical pain. Growing up with asthma and other health problems meant that was a hard goal for me to attain! But over time, what I once believed to be the biggest enemy of my happiness has become my greatest teacher on the subject.

When I was sixteen, I underwent an emergency surgery to remove a ruptured gangrenous cyst and spent New Year's Day in the hospital. When I was able to get out of my wheelchair and take my first post-surgery steps, I could hardly contain my joy! Those slow, shaky steps were the best New Year's gift I could have asked for. I suddenly realized that joy can come from

1. See Psalm 118:24.

something as simple as being able to walk.

As silly as it may sound, I was also happy that I could use the bathroom unaided. After the surgery, I was hooked to a catheter for several days. When it was finally removed and I could use the bathroom again, I was filled with appreciation for something I had always taken for granted.

Another source of joy is being able to breathe easily. My asthma has always made recognize this as a blessing, but an experience a few years ago gave it new meaning. I underwent an abdominal CT (computerized tomography) scan at a large hospital, and halfway through I was injected with a contrast medium. Unbeknown to us, this substance can be very dangerous for asthma sufferers. As the fluid entered my bloodstream, I experienced terrible pain and immense pressure in my lungs. Within minutes, I went into toxic shock, brought on by a severe allergic reaction. I was rushed to ER, where nurses administered antidotes and hooked me to a respirator. Two intense hours later, I was finally out of danger.

I will never forget how I felt when I returned home. I stood by the window in the sunset's rosy hue, breathing deeply and thinking, *I can breathe painlessly again. I am here, I am alive!* The indelible memories of that day have become a touchstone

of my life. Whenever I am discouraged or weary, I relive those moments and feel anew the joy of realizing how blessed I am.

The ordeal also filled me with gratitude for my sight. At the height of the allergy, my face had swollen so tightly that I could barely open my eyes. I longed to see my father, who was standing by my bed holding my hand, but I could only dimly make out his frame through the slits of my eyelids. When I was again able to open my eyes, I couldn't stop looking at everything around me in excitement and awe.

Being able to walk, use the bathroom, breathe, see—it's true, my criteria for joy have changed drastically. I'm finding more to be happy about than I ever thought possible, as I learn that my happiness has little to do with my circumstances and so much to do with my perspective. My life is full of challenges and joys, equally worth celebrating!

I open my eyes again and sit up. A ray of golden sunlight is streaming through the window and over the foot of my bed. I wiggle my toes in its glow and smile. It's a new day, and I'm going to rejoice and be glad in it!¹

EVELYN SICHROVSKY IS AN ENGLISH MAJOR STUDENT. SHE IS ALSO INVOLVED IN MISSIONARY VOLUNTEER WORK AND LIVES WITH HER FAMILY IN TAIWAN. ■

I LOVE LIFE

By Evelyn Sichrovsky

I love life—

Its mystery, its changing way,
The ups and downs, twists of the
road
That have taught me to pray.

I love life—

Its thorny blooms, its rainbow
hues,
Gold sunlight forming diamonds of
The tears night's shadows knew.

I love life—

Its summer rays, its sparrow songs,
Bright roadside daisies, simple joys
That cheer my spirit on.

I love life—

Its rugged peaks, its biting gales,
The storm-lashed uphill climb lit
by
A Light that never fails.

I love life—

Its desert spans, its silent days,
Long lonely barren lanes that build
Courage to burn unfazed.

I love life—

Its dawns and dusks, its ebbs and
flows,
Each day touched by the beauty of
A God who loves and cares and
knows. ■



LOOKING FORWARD TO MONDAY

BY INGIBJÖRG TORFADÓTTIR

SUCCESSFUL ICELANDERS WERE QUOTED IN A RECENT NEWSPAPER ARTICLE GIVING ANSWERS TO THE SAME SET OF QUESTIONS. One response to the question “Do you have any life advice for the readers?” got my attention: “On Sunday, always look forward to the working week.”

That’s easier said than done! I thought.

My job as a nurse manager at a retirement home is rather stressful, and although I work shifts, my working week usually begins on Monday morning. More often than not, I’m somewhat grumpy on Sunday evenings as I think about the week ahead, how little I got done over the weekend, or my lack of proper rest. Sometimes I even begin getting frustrated on Sunday *morning*.

I try to stay positive and thank God for His blessings when I feel this

way, but often that turns into asking Him to take care of this or that. So it becomes prayer time, which isn’t bad, but it doesn’t necessarily change my feelings about the start of the working week.

One Sunday, I decided I’d give this advice a try, and began repeating in my mind—and sometimes out loud—“I can’t wait to go to work.”

I started getting flashes of the people I work with and realized how much I look forward to seeing them. Then I thought of one patient in particular who always seems pleased to see me. Every Monday, he greets me with a cheerful smile and says something like, “It’s so good to see you. We missed you over the weekend.” I realized I wouldn’t trade that for anything.

This helped me see the whole situation in a more positive light and realize all the good that has happened since I took this position. I’ve always

felt that being a nurse was my calling, and I was reminded of how much I love my job.

I have also begun doing this on my way to work. It makes me smile and have a nice happy countenance when I get out of the elevator at my fourth-floor department. My lovely department—how I’ve missed it over the weekend!

Now I feel like the weekends are too long. My department is where I’m meant to be!

INGIBJÖRG TORFADÓTTIR IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN REYKJAVÍK, ICELAND. ■

How do prayer and gratitude make a difference in your working life? Tell us about it! Write to activated@activated.org.

GRATITUDE THERAPY

BY ANNE SPRING

THE WINTER HAD BEEN AN EXCEPTIONALLY LONG ONE IN THE BALKAN PENINSULA. How we had been waiting for spring to come! Finally, the beautiful flowers sprang up, the trees budded and then burst forth with new life, and the birds sang their praises that winter had ended once again.

Everyone, I think, looks forward to this time of year when God's beautiful creation can be enjoyed to the full—everyone, that is, except severe hay fever sufferers. We unfortunate souls dread the arrival of spring. Happy expectation is replaced by worry and anxious anticipation. Pollen, one of the marvels of God's creation and the sower of life, becomes our number-one enemy. Long walks in the forest, bike rides,

strolls through meadows, and even bouquets of flowers at home are all out of the question.

I had suffered from such allergies for many years. Each spring I would start sneezing, my nose would run constantly, and my eyes would water to the point that they would develop a yellow film and I could hardly see. When my children would bring me bouquets of wildflowers as a gift, I would smile while holding my breath and quickly hand it over to my husband to discreetly discard. But this spring, I was determined to fight my hay fever—with “gratitude therapy.”

Every time I would begin to have a sneezing fit or my eyes would begin to itch and run, I made a conscious effort to direct my thoughts toward thanking God for something. One day, He told me that He was going to heal me. From that minute on,

I thanked Him for that promise every time I felt my allergies coming on, and from that minute on, I was healed. My allergies were totally gone. Since then, spring has been pleasantly different for me. I now enjoy long bike rides with my husband, strolling through the fields, and even smelling the flowers.

I became a partaker of God's divine nature,¹ including His healing power. And as a bonus, I learned a habit of gratitude.

ANNE SPRING IS A DIRECTOR OF HEALING HEARTS BALKANS ([HTTP://HEALINGHEARTSBALKANS.ORG/](http://healingheartsbalkans.org/)), WHICH HAS BEEN OPERATING IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA SINCE 1995. HER FIRST BOOK, *UNPLUGGED FROM THE NORM*, WAS RELEASED IN LATE 2013 AND IS AVAILABLE ON AMAZON. ■

1. See 2 Peter 1:4.



THE SMILE GAME

BY ANNA THERESA KOLTES



WHEN I WAS A LITTLE GIRL, my sister and I used to play the Smile Game. Whenever we were out and about, running errands with our mom, going to the supermarket, or waiting at the stoplight, we'd have a little competition to see who could find the most smiles amongst the people passing by.

We'd watch businessmen hurrying while talking on their cell phones, drivers honking past, beggars holding out a frayed hat, parents trying to keep up with their energetic children, teenagers buried in their cyber world. A potpourri of frazzled faces, faraway faces, scowling faces, blank faces ... We'd tally up our smiles, surprisingly few in number—a giggling couple, young and in love; a grandma laughing at her grandson's

antics; a salesman approaching a new customer ...

Years passed, and the Smile Game was long forgotten. As a teenager, I wasn't much different from those other tense faces on the street, lost in my music and in a rage at the world in general.

When I was 15, during a family holiday at the beach, a friend of my parents invited us to dinner at his restaurant. It was a beautiful, breezy location beneath the palms, with a pastel sunset. He was a cheerful and hospitable gentleman, and made sure we were all comfortable and at ease. After a few moments of conversation, he looked at me, suddenly concerned, and asked,

“Why don't you smile? Are you sad?”

Caught off guard, I assured him I was feeling great. But it wasn't the

first time someone had asked me that and it shook me out of my self-revolving world.

I had thought I was the only one who could see the clouds above my head, but I was wrong. Our “personal rain clouds” are, in fact, part of the same sky that everyone lives beneath, and the streets we walk intersect.

Even today, I find myself having to fix my expression now and again. After all, God gave us our senses to enjoy, nature to admire, and a future to look forward to.¹

So be happy! Walk in the sunshine.

And you never know—someone may be playing the Smile Game on you.

ANNA THERESA KOLTES IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND GLOBETROTTER. ■

1. See Jeremiah 29:11.



LIVE THE MOMENT

QUIET MOMENTS

BY ABI MAY



PETER WAS AWESTRUCK. Along with James and John, he'd trudged up the mountain following Jesus, when suddenly "[Jesus'] face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light." The spectacle was soon even more amazing: Moses and Elijah—dead for many centuries—appeared and started talking with Jesus.¹

It's not surprising that Peter was astonished, but he wasn't quite beyond words. Peter, the outspoken and sometimes impulsive follower of Jesus, the one who had the courage to step out on the water at Jesus' command,² was a man of action. His response to the extraordinary event unfolding before his very eyes was perhaps typical. Not content to listen quietly to the conversation in front of him, or to reflect on its meaning,

he interrupted them with a bold suggestion.

"Master, this is a great moment! What would you think if I built three memorials here on the mountain—one for you, one for Moses, one for Elijah?"³

A great way, perhaps, of recording the event, but his interruption brought the conversation to an abrupt end. God spoke from the cloud, and the disciples were petrified and fell flat on their faces. When they opened their eyes, Moses and Elijah were gone.

We all sometimes fail to treasure the present until it's too late and the moment has passed. A brilliantly colored butterfly alights on a rock in the garden; we rush to get our camera, but by then the butterfly has flown away. We wander slowly to admire the architecture of the town we visit on holiday, but don't seem to see the history of our own neighborhood. We count the days to a vacation in

the country, not appreciating the trees and flowerbeds in the local park. We might find more fulfillment and satisfaction in our lives if, instead of living in hope for the future, we focused on the moment.

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This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.—*Psalm 118:24*

The present moment is always a season which may be used or may be neglected, but which can never be recalled.—*Canon Wynne (c. 1850)*

The golden moments in the stream of life rush past us, and we see nothing but sand; the angels come to visit us, and we only know them when they are gone.—*George Eliot (1819–1880)*

1. Based on Matthew 17:1–8.
2. See Matthew 14:27–29
3. Matthew 17:4 MSG

A person with their arms raised in a field of tall grass at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. The person is silhouetted against the bright light of the sun. The grass is tall and swaying, and the sky is filled with soft, golden light and some light clouds.

FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

TODAY IS GOING TO BE A GOOD DAY

Every day is filled with things to praise Me for. Some are obvious, others are veiled; some are spectacular, others are disguised as common occurrences or even problems. Yet everything that comes your way is meant to be received with praise and thanksgiving. As the apostle Paul wrote, “In everything give thanks; for this is the will of God.”¹

You can give thanks for each situation, because I can bring good out of each situation.² Even when the outlook is bleak, you can thank Me that I am in control. And because I love you and look out for you, you can be sure that everything that comes your way fits within My plan.

The more you recognize My hand in everything that happens and thank Me for that, the more inspiration and joy and passion for life you will find. It will show in your work, in the way you relate to others, and in the way you react to circumstances and events. It will show in your attitude, in your decisions, and in your actions. You will be more positive, more proactive, and more productive. You will be happier and will make others happier in the process.

1. 1 Thessalonians 5:18

2. See Romans 8:28.