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# activated

Vol 15 • Issue 11



## MAKING GREAT DECISIONS

10 simple steps for success

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Developing self-discipline



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION THE RIGHT CHOICE

At two years of age, my daughter Audrey has entered the delightful world of making choices—and making them known, usually, it seems, as loudly and emphatically as possible! Tantrums aside, I'm glad that she's learning to exercise her free will, and it's interesting to watch her learn about various choice

options. In life, making the right decisions can prove to be very challenging, but I hope to teach her that even if her parents aren't always around to help, she won't ever have to make them alone.

For believers, decision-making is meant to be a relational process involving ourselves and God. We bring all our anxieties to Him, knowing that He cares for us<sup>1</sup> and wants to be present and a participant in our decisions. Making godly decisions that honor God is one of the ways we show that we love Him with all our hearts, bodies, souls, and minds.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, one of the consequences of free will is that both we and others are able to make the wrong choices, which can sometimes have serious repercussions. In cases where someone has hurt us, God calls us to forgive: "Be kind and merciful, and forgive others, just as God forgave you because of Christ."<sup>3</sup>

The Bible states that God no longer remembers our sins<sup>4</sup>—He treats us as if they hadn't occurred. When we forgive, it means that even though we may remember the events that hurt us, we choose to live as if we did not.

That reminds me of how South African statesman Nelson Mandela described his thoughts when he was released after 27 years of imprisonment for opposing apartheid: "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

Samuel Keating  
Executive Editor

1. See 1 Peter 5:7.
2. See Luke 10:27.
3. Ephesians 4:32 CEV
4. See Hebrews 8:12.

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# BLIND MAN'S LEAD

BY OLIVIA BAUER

I HAD JUST MOVED TO WINNIPEG, Canada, and the Internet connection at my apartment had yet to be installed, so I was on my way to a nearby café to get online and do some work.

Halfway there, I suddenly wondered if I had remembered to take my wallet and stopped to check my backpack. At that instant I felt a blow against my ankle, and I spun around to see who was “attacking” me.

Imagine my surprise when I was met by a pleasant-faced blind man, white cane in hand, apologizing profusely. Under these circumstances, it was hard to be angry. The man said a few more words and continued down the street.

I *had* forgotten my wallet and went back to my apartment to retrieve it. On my way, I reflected on this odd little encounter. It wasn't the part where I got rapped on the ankle that had left an impression, but the image of this blind man striding confidently down the street.

I started thinking about my own life and current situation. I had recently moved to a new city, away from all my close friends and the colleagues I'd worked with for years and was still learning my way around. I needed to find a new job, but wasn't even sure what sort of job I wanted. I also needed to make several other related timely decisions. Could I manage both work and university? If not, which should I focus on? What

should my financial priorities be? And how could I sync those with my long-term goals? On some questions, I didn't even know where to start.

Being at the beginning of something new was exciting but also unsettling. Questions seemed to be more plentiful than answers.

In my mind's eye, I saw the blind man navigating the streets of downtown Winnipeg, unable to see where he was going, but going nonetheless—and doing so with confidence. If he can figure it out and find his way around, I told myself, I can too!

OLIVIA BAUER WORKS WITH A NOT-FOR-PROFIT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATION IN WINNIPEG, CANADA. ■

# IN A FOG?

BY MARIA FONTAINE, ADAPTED

**ARE YOU FACED WITH OPTIONS**, choices, and decisions, but you don't have any idea which direction to take? You know you want to move in the direction God is leading, but the problem is you don't know which direction that is. You're floundering, not knowing where to go, what to do, or how to do it. You can't see far enough ahead to know what the outcome of each choice will be. Very few things can be decided on their own, and many factors have to be considered in making each single decision.

I was reminded recently of the verse, "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart."<sup>1</sup> It led me to meditate on the wisdom of waiting for God to dispel the fog, rather than making decisions when we can't see clearly ahead. Given time, things fall into place, and we are able to see the way more clearly.

I'm sure you can think of times in your life when you had to make a certain decision but you couldn't seem to get any answers; but when you waited in prayer and with faith, trusting God to come through for you, He eventually made the way clear—and you were glad you'd waited and trusted.

Waiting is an important element of the faith life. It's not easy, but it's part of the process that God uses to instruct us, teach us patience, build our character, and draw us closer to Him. The next time you're in a holding pattern or in waiting mode, be encouraged. The fog will lift—it always does!

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

1. Psalm 27:14

Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him, and he will help you.—*Psalm 37:5 NLT*

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under the heavens.—*Ecclesiastes 3:1 NIV*

If we look forward to something we don't yet have, we must wait patiently and confidently.—*Romans 8:25 NLT*

After waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.—*Hebrews 6:15 NIV*

Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for He who promised is faithful.—*Hebrews 10:23 NIV*

The testing of your faith produces patience.—*James 1:3*

See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop, patiently waiting for the autumn and spring rains. You too, be patient and stand firm.—*James 5:7–8 NIV*



# Riverside Walk

BY ANNA PERLINI

**LONG DISCUSSIONS REGARDING POSSIBLE CHANGES** made the future seem foggier by the day. Several years earlier, my husband and I, together with a few friends, had founded a humanitarian organization to try to help in the difficult aftermath of civil war in the former Yugoslavia.

From day one, it hadn't been an easy task, but we were encouraged by positive results, the volunteers working with us, and the numerous occasions when we were able to deliver aid and cheer up the children in refugee camps. Now most of our personnel were moving on; other NGOs were also relocating, and we started thinking about closing down our work. I felt somewhat sad and defeated.

"Why don't we go for a walk by the river?" my husband suggested one day. I was glad for the break and

agreed. It wasn't exactly a river, more of a lively stream running through the hills near home.

It had been raining heavily and there was no sunshine, only a soft, damp mist shrouding the bushes and trees. I thought the weather conditions closely resembled my feelings as we walked down the gloomy, muddy path. This wouldn't be the first time we'd close a chapter in our life's book and move on, but on this occasion, something didn't feel right. A little flicker in my heart was telling me we should persevere, in spite of logical reasoning and circumstances.

We started going over the pros and cons once again, but there was no obvious right decision, and the more we talked, the more confused we felt. Then we stopped, sat on some rocks, and opened up our hearts to our loving Creator to hear what He had to say about the situation. We felt His

encouragement that great things were still to come, along with more volunteers than we would have room for.

Fourteen years later, we are still here, and just last month we officially inaugurated a new training center, as more and more volunteers were arriving, eager to help out. The promise had come to pass.

How differently things could have turned out if we had not taken the time that day long ago to take a peaceful walk away from the pressing details of the situation, to look upward and get a clear vision from way above the clouds, where the sun is always shining.

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE ([WWW.PERUNMONDOMIGLIORE.ORG/](http://WWW.PERUNMONDOMIGLIORE.ORG/)), A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE FORMER YUGOSLAVIA SINCE 1995. ■



BY ALEX PETERSON

# MAKING GREAT DECISIONS

*PERFECT DECISIONS ARE FEW AND FAR BETWEEN*; however, a *great* decision is always possible! Great decisions don't all have fairytale endings, but they do achieve the best outcomes under the given circumstances.

The most successful decision-makers usually don't act on impulse, intuition, or even experience alone; they have a system that they work through step by step. Here is one such system:

- Define the issue. A problem well stated is a problem half solved. Employ the journalist's "who, what, when, why, and how" regimen. Why is the decision necessary? What is the objective? How can this decision change things for the better? Whom will it affect? When does it need to be made?
- Take a positive approach. See opportunities rather than only problems.

1. See Luke 14:28.  
2. See Matthew 7:7-8.

- List your options. The more alternatives you consider, the more likely you will be to identify the best solution.

- Gather information. You will not only make better decisions if you have investigated thoroughly, but you will also have more peace of mind as you carry out your decision.<sup>1</sup>

- Be objective. If you already have an opinion on the matter, the natural tendency will be to look primarily for evidence to confirm that opinion. That works if you happen to be right, but if you're not, you're actually being drawn further away from a great decision. Welcome alternatives and opposing views. Remember that the goal is not to prove yourself right, but to make the right decision.

- Consider your options. Write down the pros and cons for each option and see how they stack up against each other. Try to determine both best-case and worst-case scenarios for each option. See if there is some way to combine several

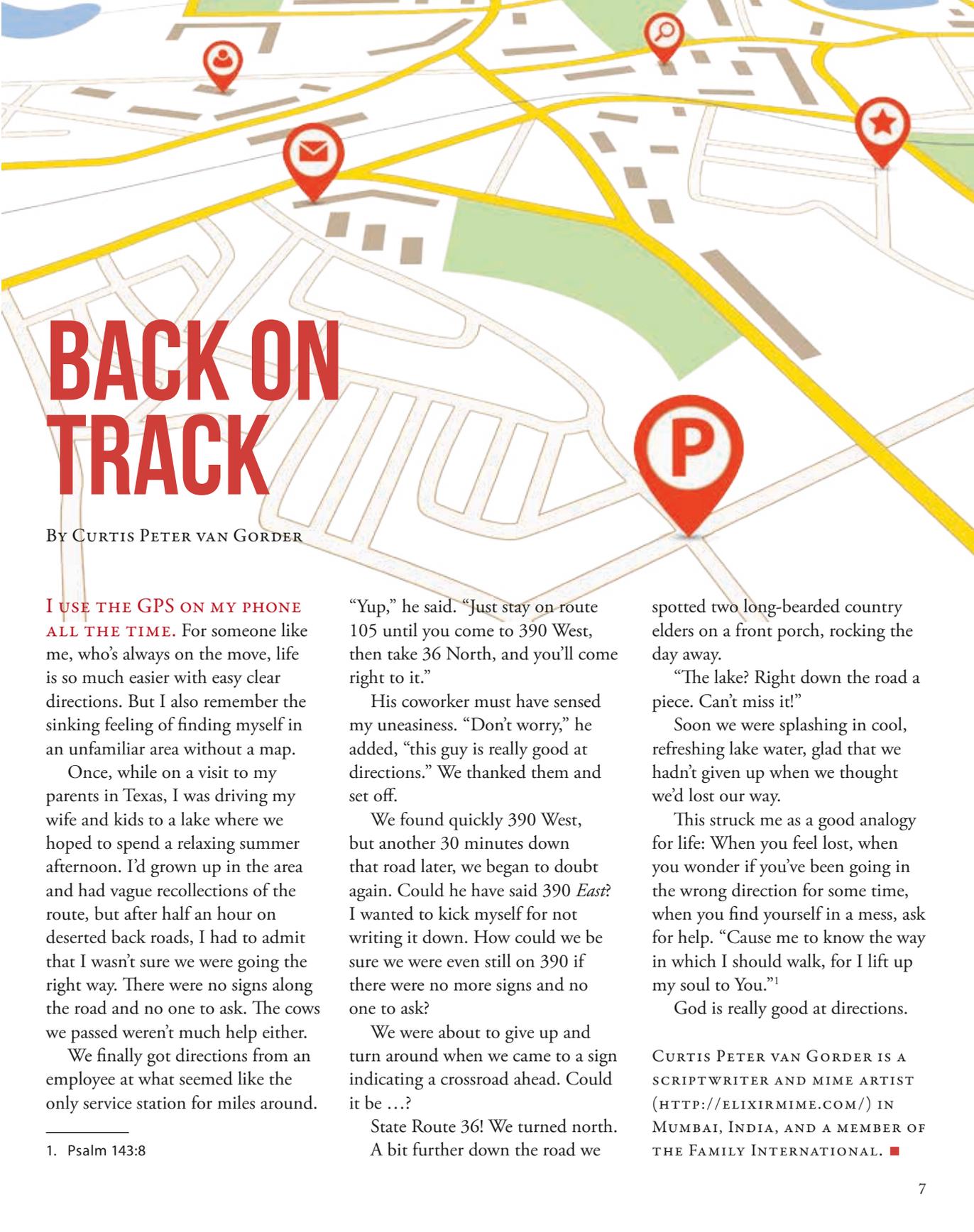
promising solutions into one potent solution.

- Be true to yourself. Leave out any alternatives that compromise your values.
- Make a decision. When you're convinced that you've found the best course, commit to it.

- Be open to change if circumstances change. Once you make a decision and begin acting on it, a better option may open up. This is sometimes referred to as the "boat-and-rudder effect." It's not until a boat is in motion that the rudder can come into play.

- Ask Jesus. Last but certainly not least, pray for guidance at each step of the decision-making process. If you're smart, you'll be like the man who said, "I may not know all the answers, but I know the Answer Man!" Jesus has the answers; ask, and He will lead.<sup>2</sup>

ALEX PETERSON IS AN *ACTIVATED* EDITOR AND STAFF WRITER. ■



# BACK ON TRACK

BY CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER

**I USE THE GPS ON MY PHONE ALL THE TIME.** For someone like me, who's always on the move, life is so much easier with easy clear directions. But I also remember the sinking feeling of finding myself in an unfamiliar area without a map.

Once, while on a visit to my parents in Texas, I was driving my wife and kids to a lake where we hoped to spend a relaxing summer afternoon. I'd grown up in the area and had vague recollections of the route, but after half an hour on deserted back roads, I had to admit that I wasn't sure we were going the right way. There were no signs along the road and no one to ask. The cows we passed weren't much help either.

We finally got directions from an employee at what seemed like the only service station for miles around.

"Yup," he said. "Just stay on route 105 until you come to 390 West, then take 36 North, and you'll come right to it."

His coworker must have sensed my uneasiness. "Don't worry," he added, "this guy is really good at directions." We thanked them and set off.

We found quickly 390 West, but another 30 minutes down that road later, we began to doubt again. Could he have said 390 *East*? I wanted to kick myself for not writing it down. How could we be sure we were even still on 390 if there were no more signs and no one to ask?

We were about to give up and turn around when we came to a sign indicating a crossroad ahead. Could it be ...?

State Route 36! We turned north. A bit further down the road we

spotted two long-bearded country elders on a front porch, rocking the day away.

"The lake? Right down the road a piece. Can't miss it!"

Soon we were splashing in cool, refreshing lake water, glad that we hadn't given up when we thought we'd lost our way.

This struck me as a good analogy for life: When you feel lost, when you wonder if you've been going in the wrong direction for some time, when you find yourself in a mess, ask for help. "Cause me to know the way in which I should walk, for I lift up my soul to You."<sup>1</sup>

God is really good at directions.

CURTIS PETER VAN GORDER IS A SCRIPTWRITER AND MIME ARTIST ([HTTP://ELIXIRMIME.COM/](http://elixirmime.com/)) IN MUMBAI, INDIA, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■

1. Psalm 143:8

# AN OCTOPUS ON ROLLER SKATES

BY CHRIS MIZRANY



**WHAT DO A RECORD-BREAKING TIGHTROPE-WALKER, a martial arts expert, and a successful businessman have in common?**

They have learned self-discipline. In each of their professions, discipline is the key—discipline that’s manifested in allocating time to practice, honing their skills, and in some cases, giving up things in their diet or personal life to achieve their goals.

Self-discipline is more than holding back from some things, more than buckling down to do what is necessary out of duty. It is a means to an end. Reaching their goals means so much to them that the effort and sacrifice of leading a disciplined life is almost a non-issue. They are willing to push themselves to the limits of endurance to achieve success. And their discipline clearly shows in their achievements.

Most of us can probably improve our level of self-discipline. Even if you don’t aspire to cross a chasm on a rope, how about getting through that pile of work on your desk, meeting your fitness goals, or improving your time management? Self-discipline is not really about denying oneself; it is, in fact, liberating oneself. A friend once said to me, “Only when you’re truly disciplined can you be truly free.” A simple sentence of wholesome wisdom that changed my viewpoint completely.

On another occasion, the manager of an international chain store told me, “Success is not only about what you want to do. It’s about what you must do to achieve.” When you’re self-disciplined, you’re able to go beyond things that might have limited you or held you back before.

*New York Times* bestselling author Jackson Brown Jr. put it this way:

“Talent, without discipline, is like an octopus on roller skates. There’s plenty of movement, but you never know if it’s going to be forward, backward, or sideways.” On the other hand, if we channel our energies in the right direction, toward the things that are important to us, we are positioned to achieve powerful forward movement.

Jesus was the ultimate example of discipline. He did what had to be done, even when it was not just hard but resulted in His death. The discipline and commitment He manifested for His cause had world-changing results.

If we’re willing to discipline ourselves, we too can change our lives and our part of the world.

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

# STOLEN SILVER

BY KEITH PHILLIPS

**VICTOR HUGO'S LITERARY CLASSIC *LES MISÉRABLES*** tells the story of Jean Valjean, whose already difficult life is brought down by one lone decision when he steals a loaf of bread to feed his sister's starving children. As a consequence, he spends the next 19 years in the notorious Bagne of Toulon prison. Unable to find work after his release because he is an ex-convict, Valjean begs at the home of the bishop of Digne, who feeds him and gives him a bed for the night. But Valjean, overcome by despair at what seems an impossibly bleak future, yields to temptation, steals some of the bishop's silver, and slips away in the night.

He doesn't get far, however, before he is arrested with the silver and hauled back to face the bishop. Knowing what will happen to Valjean if he is convicted a second

time, the kind bishop takes a chance on Valjean and tells the police, "I gave him the silver."

Valjean is free from the legal consequences of his action, but not yet from his bad habits. After he steals yet again, he is driven to another point of decision, and this time he repents, and from that moment on he is a changed man. He goes through more upheavals and faces more tough decisions in the years that follow, but he remains true to the new course God has helped him chart.

*Les Misérables* is a moving portrayal of the redeeming power of God's love, but it also illustrates how our lives are shaped by our decisions. Even seemingly small decisions can be far reaching. How can we ensure that we make right decisions? The only way is to involve God in the decision-making process, because He

alone knows what's best. He wants to see us make good choices and is always there to back us up when we do. The smartest decision we can make is to ask for His help.

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. ■

## CHOOSING JESUS

Dear Jesus, I invite You into my life. Please forgive my mistakes and be with me in my daily struggles. I ask that You light my path with Your guidance and warm my heart with Your love. Give me strength to make the right choices, to please You, and to do what I can to make the lives of others easier and happier.



# A CHALLENGING THOUGHT

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED

RECENTLY I CAME ACROSS A FAMILIAR BIBLE VERSE, which I've read, heard, and even quoted hundreds of times, but when meditating on it, thinking of its practical application and the enormity of the consequences of ignoring it, I more fully realized its importance.

Matthew 6:14–15 says, “If you forgive others their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you, but if you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.”<sup>1</sup>

There's no wiggle room within these verses. Whether we do or don't

forgive others has a direct effect on our own relationship with God.

A bit later, the apostle Peter asked the obvious question: “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who wrongs me? Up to seven times?”

“Not just seven times,” Jesus replied, “but seventy times seven.”<sup>2</sup>

That's 490 times. Jesus used a pretty big number to emphasize that there isn't any point where we can feel justified to stop forgiving someone.

To further drive this home, He used some other very large numbers in the story of a king who wanted to

settle his accounts with his servants or subjects:

One man owed the king ten thousand talents. A talent is 2,000 ounces (125 pounds, 57 kg), so this man owed the king 20 million ounces of what was probably either gold or silver. If it was silver, that would be equivalent to about US\$ 400 million today; if it was gold, then it would be worth about US\$ 25 billion. Either way, that was an enormous debt. Because the man couldn't pay, the king ordered that he and his wife and children and all that he had be sold. The man implores the king to have patience, and out of pity, the

1. ESV
2. See Matthew 18:21–22.
3. See Matthew 18:23–35.
4. See Romans 3:23.
5. See Mark 11:25.
6. Colossians 3:12–14 CEV

king not only grants him a delay but pardons his debt altogether.

Sadly, the forgiven servant later finds one of his fellow servants who owes him a hundred denarii—one denarius is estimated to be worth about US\$ 20 today, which means the fellow servant's debt would be about US\$ 2,000—in any case, a much smaller sum than his own debt, which he had been released from. Nonetheless, the forgiven servant has his colleague imprisoned for being behind in his repayments.

When the king hears of it, he summons the forgiven servant and says:

“You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you pleaded with me. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?” In anger, the master has him thrown into jail as well.

Jesus ends this story with an alarming statement: “This is how My heavenly Father will treat each of you

as well, if you do not forgive your brethren.”<sup>3</sup>

There are times when other people sin against us or hurt us—whether intentionally or unintentionally—just as there are times when we hurt others or sin against them. People may treat us unfairly on occasion, deceive us, steal from us, or slander us behind our back. They may cheat us or break their word. Whatever the case may be, whatever the offense, whatever the hurt, we are commanded to forgive.

Forgiving doesn't mean the other person was in the right, nor does it mean that the loss or harm caused by their actions is undone. It simply means that rather than focusing on who's right and who's wrong, you leave that in God's hands, along with the repercussion of the person's actions. You take the high road and forgive.

All of us sin, and each of us falls short of the glory of God.<sup>4</sup> Like the unforgiving servant, we each owe a huge debt to God—a debt so large

that none of us can ever repay it. Through Jesus, God forgives that debt; but He also calls us to forgive others in like manner.

Looking at it from the point of view that if we don't forgive others when they sin against us, God won't forgive us when we sin against Him can be disconcerting. The good part is, we can also see it as a promise: if we forgive others, God will forgive us.<sup>5</sup> If we show mercy, then mercy will be shown to us. If we forgive, we will be forgiven.

“God loves you and has chosen you as his own special people. So be gentle, kind, humble, meek, and patient. Put up with each other, and forgive anyone who does you wrong, just as Christ has forgiven you. Love is more important than anything else. It is what ties everything completely together.”<sup>6</sup>

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

The weak can never forgive. Forgiveness is the attribute of the strong.—Mahatma Gandhi (1869–1948)

# THE MAGIC OF FORGIVENESS

BY VICTORIA OLIVETTA



“I WISH YOU HAD BEEN BORN A BOY!” I don’t know how many times I heard my mother say that as I was growing up. I understand better now, considering her own upbringing and the attitudes of Argentine society at the time, how disappointing it must have been for her to have had only one child, and for it to have been a girl. However, at the time

1. Matthew 10:8
2. Luke 6:36–38 NLT
3. Matthew 6:12 NLT

it hurt me deeply. I was also often sick for months at a time during the cold, damp Buenos Aires winters, and being unable to go to school or play with friends during those times added to my loneliness and sense of isolation.

My father died when I was 15, and I held a part-time job to pay for my tuition at a private high school. I put a lot into my studies and training to become a secretary, but my efforts were rarely rewarded with the love and approval that I longed to receive

from my mother. I became very rebellious, and she eventually kicked me out of the house to face the world alone.

I could no longer afford to study, but I rented a room and eventually found a better job. As time passed, I continued to feel unhappy and unfulfilled. Finally, in desperation, I asked God to do something with my life.

That same week, I met a member of the Family International, and we got into a deep conversation. That



led to many other meaningful conversations about God and spiritual truths, and I found the answers to my most troubling questions. I felt that God wanted me to share this joy and fulfillment with others, and I became a full-time Christian volunteer.

My new work took me to different parts of the country and abroad for months or years at a time. During this period, I kept in touch with my mother, but we never had any meaningful exchanges. When I started a family of my own, the children included my mother in their projects, like making Christmas cards for family and friends. I also sent her photos from time to time so she could see how her grandkids were growing, and I wrote her about the things they were learning. Still, nothing I did ever seemed to make her happy.

As time went by, I thought I'd forgiven my mother, but I realized it's very simple to forgive someone if I don't have to live around them or see them very often. It's much harder to forgive someone I have to face regularly, who might continue to hurt me.

Sure enough, when I came back to Argentina and met my mother again after years of being abroad, her disapproval and lack of affection reopened emotional wounds that I thought had healed, and within only a few visits, we were already fighting again.

One day I was listening to a song called “La magia del perdón” (“The Magic of Forgiveness”), and it pricked my conscience. I listened to it over and over, until I knew that the only thing I could do was forgive. Then and there, I prayed for God to help me forgive each unkind word, fit of anger, and everything else that my mother had done that had caused me pain.

I thanked God for showing me that I needed to show mercy to my mother because I needed mercy myself. I too had failed and hurt others many times, but Jesus had never stopped loving me. I realized He had never stopped loving my mother either, and He wanted me to do the same. I started crying thinking about all the years of closeness that my mother and I had lost, and how much she must have suffered as a result.

Jesus told His followers, “Freely you have received, freely give.”<sup>1</sup> “Be merciful, just as your Father also is merciful. Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. The amount you give will determine the amount you get back.”<sup>2</sup>

He also taught us to pray, “Forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us.”<sup>3</sup> I had received God's forgiveness; now I needed to share that gift with my mother.

The next time I visited my mother, I was a changed person. That seemed to change her too. She prepared a delicious meal, shared her favorite recipes, and we recalled positive memories. Since then, seeing and talking with my mother is like catching up with a good friend I haven't seen in a long time. The path of forgiveness seems difficult and bumpy at first, but the longer we travel it, the smoother it gets. Now I can tell others about the magic of forgiveness, because I have experienced it.

VICTORIA OLIVETTA IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN ARGENTINA. ■



# A BRIDGE TO CROSS

POINTS TO PONDER

BE KIND TO ONE ANOTHER,  
tenderhearted, forgiving one another,  
as God in Christ forgave you.  
—*Ephesians 4:32 ESV*

Forgiveness does not change the past,  
but it does enlarge the future.  
—*Paul Boese (1923-1976)*

Without forgiveness, life is governed  
by an endless cycle of resentment  
and retaliation.—*Roberto Assagioli*  
(1888–1974)

He that cannot forgive others  
breaks the bridge over which he  
must pass himself; for every man  
has need to be forgiven.—*Author*  
*unknown*

Anger makes you smaller, while for-  
giveness forces you to grow beyond  
what you were.—*Cherie Carter-Scott*  
(b. 1949)

Forgiveness is almost a selfish act  
because of its immense benefits to  
the one who forgives.—*Lawana*  
*Blackwell (b. 1952)*

The one attitude which gives rise  
to hope amidst misunderstanding  
and ill will is a forgiving spirit.  
Where forgiveness becomes the  
atmosphere, there hope and heal-  
ing are possible.—*C. Neil Strait*  
(1934–2003)

Forgiveness is the key that unlocks  
the door of resentment and the  
handcuffs of hate. It is a power that  
breaks the chains of bitterness and  
the shackles of selfishness.  
—*Author unknown*

Love's power does not make fussy  
historians. Love prefers to tuck the  
loose ends of past rights and wrongs  
in the bosom of forgiveness—and  
pushes us into a new start.  
—*Lewis B. Smedes (1921–2002)*

Not to forgive is to be imprisoned  
by the past, by old grievances that do  
not permit life to proceed with new  
business. Not to forgive is to yield  
oneself to another's control... to be  
locked into a sequence of act and  
response, of outrage and revenge,

tit for tat, escalating always. The  
present is endlessly overwhelmed and  
devoured by the past. Forgiveness  
frees the forgiver. It extracts the  
forgiver from someone else's night-  
mare.—*Lance Morrow (b. 1939)*

Resentment is like drinking poi-  
son and then hoping it will kill  
your enemies.—*Nelson Mandela*  
(1918–2013)

Returning hate for hate multiplies  
hate, adding deeper darkness to a  
night already devoid of stars. Darkness  
cannot drive out darkness; only light  
can do that. Hate cannot drive out  
hate; only love can do that.—*Martin*  
*Luther King, Jr (1929–1968)*

People have to forgive. We don't have  
to like them, we don't have to be  
friends with them, we don't have to  
send them hearts in text messages,  
but we have to forgive them, to  
overlook, to forget. Because if we  
don't, we are tying rocks to our feet,  
too much for our wings to carry!  
—*C. Joybell C. ■*

# PRODIGAL DECISIONS

## QUIET MOMENTS

BY ABI MAY

**THE PRODIGAL SON IS PROBABLY ONE OF THE BETTER KNOWN OF JESUS' PARABLES.<sup>1</sup>**

It tells of a young man who leaves home, goes astray, regrets his decisions, and eventually returns to the loving, warm welcome of his father. It's a theme that's been retold countless times in literature and life, portrayed in art, danced in ballet, and even played in contemporary music, such as the Rolling Stones' cover on their album *Beggar's Banquet*. It's a story of humanity that transcends nationality, creed, place, or even era, a story that is as poignant and relatable today as it was two millennia ago.

In many respects, it's a story about decisions. The young man's fateful decision to leave home, wasting his

life and inheritance, is part of the narrative; then there are the better decisions, when he comes to his senses and makes up his mind to return.

The father also has decisions to make. Should he accept his son with open arms or chide and punish him for his mistakes? And it's this part of the story that contains a detail that is often overlooked.

Imagine the scene: the young man, thin, bedraggled, and rather the worse for wear from his terrible experiences of dire poverty. The father, crying tears of joy as he embraces his boy. Yet the moment when the father opens his heart to welcome his son is not as we often picture it, with the son kneeling, pleading for forgiveness, expressing his repentance for going astray. No, this crucial moment comes earlier:

“While he was still a long way off, his father saw him coming.

Filled with love and compassion, he ran to his son, embraced him, and kissed him.”<sup>2</sup>

His boy hadn't yet spoken a word, but the father—who had no doubt gone through anguish and heartache for many months or even years—didn't hesitate. In fact, he didn't even wait until his son had arrived; he ran out to meet him.

This is a picture of God's unconditional love. He doesn't wait for us to say exactly the right words, He doesn't look at our bedraggled state or how life has left us the worse for wear and stand back until we clean up our act. He doesn't chide us for past mistakes and wrong decisions. From the moment we turn to Him, He receives us with open arms and forgives us.

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1. See Luke 15:11–32.

2. Luke 15:20 NLT



FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# THE RIGHT DIRECTION

I want you to live a meaningful life—one that both you and I will be proud of. You are the one who is ultimately responsible for your life, the one who must make the right choices that will lead you to the right places, but you can commit your ways to Me and ask Me to direct your paths. Then, through the decisions that you and I make together, you can be confident that your life is following a good path.

Sometimes the process of finding My will may be a little tricky. You may have to wait and exercise patience. Circumstances change. People change. You change. However, keep reminding yourself that I *want* you to find My will, and your patience and faith will be rewarded.

I created you. I have been with you from the beginning of your life and will be with you until the end. It will always be between you and Me. Nothing and no one can replace My role in your life. As you seek Me with all your heart, you will find Me and My answers.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See Jeremiah 29:13.