

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

activated

Vol 16 • Issue 8

SET SAIL

Time to launch

His Desire, His Plan, Our Happiness

Following the footprints

42 Kilometers of Life

We can do this!





EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION OUR CONSTANT

Ask anyone, and they'll agree that today's world is very different from the one our parents and grandparents knew. The funny thing is that the feeling is not new by any means. "The cause of the ... increase in nervous disease is increased demand made by the conditions of modern life," affirmed an article

published at the end of the 19th century!¹ "The dreamy quiet old days are over," lamented William Smith nearly 130 years ago. "The hurry and bustle of modern life ... lacks the quiet and repose of the period when our forefathers ... took their ease."²

Besides the world constantly changing, our lives also go through seasons that bring different sets of challenges and opportunities. We cope with stresses and make decisions to the best of our abilities, but we can't know what the future holds, and past performance is no guarantee of future success. We might often feel, somewhat like the authors above, that we'd be better off if we could slow down the clock.

When everything in life seems to be changing, making us feel anxious, lost, or as though life is a terrifying journey through uncharted territory, we can rely on our unchanging God. He is constant. He is the same today as He was when He walked the earth, and He will be the same tomorrow.³ "The Lord's plans stand firm forever; his intentions can never be shaken."⁴

Even though we don't know what the future holds for us, come what may, it is impossible for God to leave us alone or to fail us when we need Him. "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer ... my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold."⁵

Samuel Keating
Executive Editor

1. G. Shrady (from P.C. Knapp), "Are Nervous Diseases Increasing?" *Medical Record*, 1896
2. Morley: *Ancient and Modern* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1886), 75

3. See Malachi 3:6.
4. Psalm 33:11 NLT
5. Psalm 18:2

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LOST IN MY HOMETOWN

BY ANNA PERLINI

I THOUGHT THE MOVE WAS GOING TO BE A SIMPLE CHANGE OF SCENERY, possibly requiring some minor adjustments at most. After all, I was returning to my home country, already knowing the language, people, and customs. If I had managed to get used to the scorching heat, spicy food, rickshaws, and monsoons of India and Nepal, where I had spent eight years as a volunteer, surely this move in the opposite direction wouldn't be too difficult.

I was in for a surprise!

From the moment I landed back in Italy, on what was supposed to be familiar ground, the challenges began: a sense of awkwardness, like I no longer belonged there, needing to catch up with changes in society, along

1. <http://www.perunmondomigliore.org>

with some serious health problems and concerns about the future. I got dizzy entering a superstore and dreaded traveling on fast highways. A friend reassured me, saying I was probably experiencing culture shock. It helped to put a handle on this very confusing mental and physical state.

At one point, I found myself in the hospital preparing to undergo a delicate operation. I had lost all confidence in the strong person I'd felt myself to be, and I was scared. Thankfully, it was during those lonely hours lying on my hospital bed, weak and hurting, that I was able to reconnect with heaven. I had a small New Testament with me and another devotional book that I started reading with desperation, as if my whole life depended on those words.

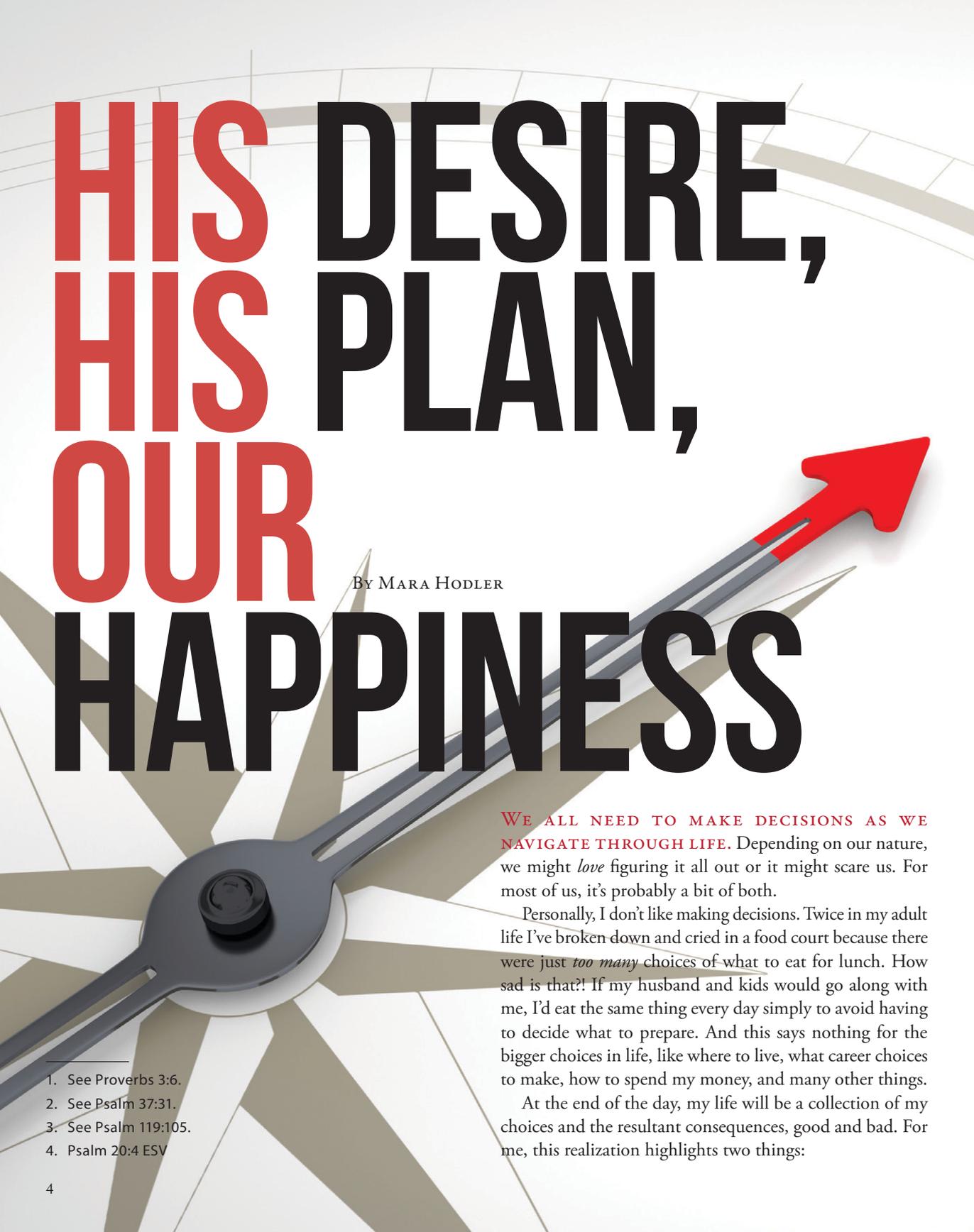
It brought me back to life spiritually and to new beginnings. Every word in my little books was jumping out of the pages, filling my soul with a newfound sense of clarity and direction.

By the time I left the hospital, my body was still aching, but my heart and spirit weren't the same.

I slowly gained strength, a little more each day, and eventually went on to another fulfilling phase in my life.

Every time I look back at that very trying and debilitating period, I'm thankful I "got lost" for a while, as it renewed my passion and prepared me for my next job.

ANNA PERLINI IS A COFOUNDER OF PER UN MONDO MIGLIORE,¹ A HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION ACTIVE IN THE BALKANS SINCE 1995. ■



HIS DESIRE, HIS PLAN, OUR HAPPINESS

BY MARA HODLER

WE ALL NEED TO MAKE DECISIONS AS WE NAVIGATE THROUGH LIFE. Depending on our nature, we might *love* figuring it all out or it might scare us. For most of us, it's probably a bit of both.

Personally, I don't like making decisions. Twice in my adult life I've broken down and cried in a food court because there were just *too many* choices of what to eat for lunch. How sad is that?! If my husband and kids would go along with me, I'd eat the same thing every day simply to avoid having to decide what to prepare. And this says nothing for the bigger choices in life, like where to live, what career choices to make, how to spend my money, and many other things.

At the end of the day, my life will be a collection of my choices and the resultant consequences, good and bad. For me, this realization highlights two things:

1. See Proverbs 3:6.
2. See Psalm 37:31.
3. See Psalm 119:105.
4. Psalm 20:4 ESV

1. I really need God's help.

2. I also need a plan.

The beauty in all of this is that God is eager to be an active participant if I will allow Him to. *If* I acknowledge Him, He *will* direct my path.¹ *If* His Word is in my heart, *none* of my steps will slide.² *If* I hold up His Word, it *will* be a light to my path and show me the way to go.³ God's got His part squared away, so what about mine?

A good place to start is to study God's Word and the standard He's given us to live by. God's Word is like reflectors on a dark road. The reflectors show you the divide between the lanes, so you don't veer into oncoming traffic, and they show you the edge of the road, so you don't drop off into a ravine. Knowing God's Word gives you a set of boundaries and provides guidance to help keep you on course.

Sometimes it's really simple: I know God's Word tells me to be loving and kind, so asking a question like "What's the loving thing to do?" can reveal the obvious best choice. But sometimes it's more complicated, like when all options fall within God's will, or when I have a strong personal feeling about a situation which affects my decision-making process. It can be difficult to come to a decision that we can be at peace with. But remember that the Bible says He *will* direct our paths if we acknowledge Him, so we can expect His help and guidance if we ask for it.

Have you heard the saying, "If you don't know where you're going, you'll probably end up somewhere else"? God's Word assumes we've made plans: "May he grant you your heart's desire and fulfill all your plans."⁴

Naturally, just because we have a plan—and even if it aligns with God's plan—doesn't mean that it will materialize instantaneously, or without struggle or challenge. If your path is anything like mine, it's not a straight shot. However, having a general plan, goal, or destination helps me as I make daily choices along my path.

When I come to a fork in the road, my plan helps me know which path to take. When I feel alone in my journey, it helps me remember that I chose this path because of where it would take me. When other paths seem easier, or for some other reason entice me, I remember that this destination is the desire of my heart.

God has a unique plan for each of our lives. Since God created us in His image with free will to make decisions, we get to be active participants in *determining* and *pursuing* that plan. If you already know where you're going, stay close to God's Word and let it guide you along the path. If you aren't sure where you're going, focus on living as God's Word teaches us to, and God will put His plan in your heart. Once His plan, His desire, is in your heart, you will know what to do.

MARA HODLER IS A FORMER MISSIONARY TO THE FAR EAST AND EAST AFRICA. SHE CURRENTLY LIVES IN TEXAS WITH HER HUSBAND AND CHILDREN, AND RUNS A SMALL FAMILY BUSINESS. ■

GOD'S GPS

BY CARLOS CAMPOS



TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENTS can help us understand a bit more about God and how He manages His affairs. For example, prayer can be illustrated by the cell phone, used to immediately communicate with someone on the other side of the world. Computers are capable of storing and processing every bit of a company's information. This helps us understand how God knows us so well that the Bible says that even our very hairs are numbered.¹

One of the miracles in the Bible that has always caught my attention is the one where Jesus tells Peter to catch a fish and take out of its mouth a coin needed to pay a tax.²

1. See Matthew 10:30.

2. See Matthew 17:24–27.

3. See Matthew 21:1–7.

4. Isaiah 30:21

A similar miracle occurs when He tells His disciples to go to a neighboring town to find the donkey that He would ride on His triumphal entry into Jerusalem.³ *How did Jesus know where and when His disciples would find the right fish and donkey?*

I have often seen God's GPS at work in my life. He's often guided me to something that I'd lost, or to meet a certain person, or to find a place. And many times it's not only the right place, but also the precise moment.

My wife and I recently prayed to find a mechanic who was qualified to do some specialized work on our motor home. We were traveling through little coastal towns, and we'd been told that we needed to have our engine checked, but that it had to be done by a mechanic certified in that particular model. In one village, I unexpectedly felt an impulse to drive down a certain street. Nothing caught

our attention along the way, so we followed the street to the end, when suddenly a man came out to meet us and said, "You came here because of the GPS pin, right?" Taken aback, we asked him what he meant.

He explained that he was a mechanic who specialized in motor homes. Recently a man who is traveling round the world had some work done there and ended up so satisfied that he dedicated a blog entry to the incident ... and included the GPS coordinates so that anyone traveling in a similar motor home would be able to find the place.

We don't use GPS, but we *had* been led to the exact location. "Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, 'This is the way, walk in it.'"⁴

CARLOS CAMPOS IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN CHILE. ■



THE BROAD-LEAFED CACTUS

BY IRIS RICHARD

WALKING ALONG A NARROW PATH IN THE TROPICAL FOREST WE OFTEN VISIT FOR A SUNDAY WALK, under the radiant early-morning African sun, I notice a magnificent cactus and stop to take a closer look. The dark-green rubbery leaves are fat and oval and interspersed with large pointed thorns. In contrast to the feisty exterior, tender blooms emerge from the tips of some leaves. Shades of yellow and an intricate design make these lovely flowers dazzle. How like Jesus' presence after a thorny stretch of life's journey. Just like a flower appearing in the most unexpected circumstances, He reassures me of His love and care.¹

1. See Psalm 46:1–2.

2. See Isaiah 43:1–2.

3. See Psalm 23.

4. See Isaiah 40:31.

5. See Psalm 18:2.

Rounding the bend, we saw a flame tree stretching its leafy arms high above. Each branch is crowned with a flaming orange-red flower, and the backdrop of the sky's cooling azure blue softens their flaming red. When the fierceness of danger, sickness, or strife shoots flaming arrows my way, God, like the eternal cool blue sky, calms each fear. Feelings of distress disappear as His presence shields me.²

Then my favorite stretch of the trail passes under the shadow of regal bamboo plants. Their broad stalks reach far above, forming a green arch over the trail, which provides shelter from sun and rain. Jesus is my protector and shield, and when I find myself in a tunnel, He is the light at the end of it.³

The winding path now leads down a slope toward a brook. Since there is no bridge, local farmers have placed two logs over the stream. As we balance along the trunks, I am reminded that Jesus has provided stepping stones in His Word.

A steep incline leads to the road. Breathless and sweaty, we reach the top. To help me over the last boulder, my friend reaches down, grabs hold of my hand, and pulls me up. Jesus is at the other end of each prayer and lends a helping hand through a friend, a spouse, or even a stranger.

At the top of the hill, a refreshing cool breeze fans our sweaty brows, which energizes us instantly. A breathtaking view unfolds in front of us, with a range of blue mountains in the distance. Jesus is a cool breeze that brings respite after each challenge, giving new hope and strength to carry on.⁴

Jesus is my rock—strong, dependable, unmovable, unchangeable, and eternal.⁵

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

FREE AGENTS

BY PETER AMSTERDAM, ADAPTED



HAVE YOU EVER BEEN FACED WITH IMPORTANT DECISIONS and needed explicit direction, only to feel as if God was in silent mode?—Right when you would most like Him to give a precise answer? I know I have, and during those times, it's been a spiritual struggle. Once, while struggling with a decision, I so much wanted God to make the path clear, but He, in His wisdom, chose not to give a direct answer. Instead, I needed to forge ahead to do the pick-and-shovel work of investigating options,

seeking godly counsel, weighing the open doors of opportunity before me, praying desperately, and most of all, committing my ways to Him. I had to trust that He would direct my path in the manner of His choosing.

As Christians who want to glorify God through our lives, we want to learn to make decisions and choices based on godly principles. Considering options, weighing advantages and disadvantages, using our God-given wisdom, and measuring situations by God's Word are all part of loving God with all our minds, hearts, and souls, in obedience to the first and greatest commandment.¹

Part of the stress and turmoil we often face in times of

decision-making is the fear of failure, the fear of missing God's will, or the fear of making a decision that will unforeseeably have a negative impact on ourselves or others. When it comes to those important decisions that will define the course of our future, or at least our immediate future, we learn through experience that sometimes, despite our best intentions and desires, our decisions lead to unexpected negative outcomes and consequences that we have to live with.

Because God has designed us as agents with free will, we have the capability of making independent choices, and by the same token, we are personally responsible for our decisions and their outcomes, and

1. See Matthew 22:37–40.
2. See Romans 8:28.
3. See 1 John 3:21–22.
4. Hebrews 13:20–21 NLT



we must take responsibility for how things play out, even if there are negative repercussions. We also have to trust that God has promised to work everything together for the good of those who love Him, no matter how things seem to turn out initially.² He can even take our mistakes and the times when we seem to have messed up our decision-making coordinates, and redirect our course in ways that will be beneficial and lead us to His ultimate destination.

Unexpected bends in the road and unintended outcomes are part of life, no matter how wise our decisions. We see throughout the Bible how often things turned out differently than people expected or planned. When Moses set out for the

Promised Land, he probably didn't foresee wandering in the desert for 40 years. And yet, he didn't waver or lose sight of the final destination; he kept pressing forward despite the obstacles.

Even when we make right decisions, there is no guarantee of smooth sailing for the duration of the journey. We will often continue to face pitfalls or setbacks along the way, and these are part of the human experience and often serve to strengthen our faith walk. As our heavenly Father, God knows that learning to make decisions and take responsibility for their outcome—and all the lessons we learn on that journey—are part of our spiritual growth and development.

As we commit our ways to Him and seek to please Him and do those things that are pleasing in His sight, we can have confidence in our relationship with Him; we can know that He will be present with us through all the decisions, small and great, that face us throughout our lives.³

“May the God of peace ... equip you with all you need for doing his will. May he produce in you, through the power of Jesus Christ, every good thing that is pleasing to him.”⁴

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

Time to Launch

Man cannot discover new oceans unless he has the courage to lose sight of the shore.—*André Gide (1869–1951)*

Decision is the spark that ignites action. Until a decision is made, nothing happens. Decision is the courageous facing of issues, knowing that if they are not faced, problems will remain forever unanswered.—*Wilferd Peterson (1900–1995)*

O Lord, may I be directed what to do and what to leave undone.—*Elizabeth Fry (1780–1845)*

God always gives his very best to those who leave the choice with him.—*James Hudson Taylor (1832–1905)*

Don't ask God to guide your footsteps unless you are willing to move your feet.—*Author unknown*

Men are free to decide their own moral choices, but they are also under the necessity to account to God for those choices.—*Aiden Tozer (1897–1963)*

We make our decisions, and then our decisions turn around and make us.—*Frank Boreham (1871–1959)*

“Sir, what is the secret of your success?” a reporter asked a bank president.

“Two words.”

“And, sir, what are they?”

“Good decisions.”

“And how do you make good decisions?”

“One word.”

“And sir, what is that?”

“Experience.”

“And how do you get experience?”

“Two words.”

“And, sir, what are they?”

“Bad decisions.”

—*Author unknown*

The deeper we go down into the valley of decision the higher we must rise . . . into the mount of prayer.—*Peter Taylor Forsyth (1848–1921)*

Never make a permanent decision based on a temporary storm. No matter how raging the billows are today, remind yourself, “This too shall pass.”—*T. D. Jakes (b. 1957)*

Men must be decided on what they will not do, and then they are able to act with vigor in what they ought to do.—*Mencius (c. 372–289 BC)*

Man is man because he is free to operate within the framework of his destiny. He is free to deliberate, to make decisions, and to choose between alternatives.—*Martin Luther King Jr. (1929–1968)*

Yesterday is gone. Tomorrow has not yet come. We only have today. Let us begin.—*Mother Teresa (1910–1997)*

Grant me, O Lord, to know what is worth knowing,
To love what is worth loving,
To praise what delights you most,
To value what is precious in your sight,
To hate what is offensive to you.
Do not let me judge by what I see,
Nor pass sentence according to what I hear,
But to judge rightly between things that differ,
And above all to search out and do what pleases you,
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
—*Thomas à Kempis (1380–1471)* ■



Set Sail!

BY CHRIS HUNT

MY FRIEND JACK LIVED IN A LARGE HOUSE IN A PLEASANT, leafy suburb. It was a great place to raise his family of five, but his children have long since married and moved on. Around 15 years ago, Jack's business failed, and although it would have made financial and practical sense for Jack and his wife to downsize, they loved their home and always put off the tough decision. They ended up keeping the home by default, probably hoping things would improve. Instead, as the years passed, their debts mounted until they absolutely had to sell.

1. See Genesis 12:1–4; Hebrews 11:8.
2. See Hebrews 11:27,29.
3. See Mark 1:16–20.
4. See Genesis 12:10.
5. See Genesis 13:7–8.
6. See Genesis 14:14–16.
7. See Exodus 16:3.

Unfortunately, by this time the housing market had collapsed, and the proceeds of the sale no longer even covered their debts.

Not making a decision *is* a decision. Like Jack, I have plenty of my own stories in this regard, finding it quite difficult to “sign on the dotted line.” I think there are a few reasons why we sometimes delay our decision-making as long as possible.

Perhaps we hesitate to face an unknown future. After all, as much as we try to anticipate the results of our choices, there are many factors beyond our insight and control. We cannot know for sure what will follow.

Future fears didn't hold back Abraham. He said “yes” to God and left his home in Haran, not knowing where he was going.¹ Moses showed similar faith, leading the Hebrew slaves out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, and onwards to the Promised

Land.² Jesus' disciples left their livelihoods to follow Him, which took another kind of faith.³

Who knows whether Abraham foresaw the difficulties he would face—famine,⁴ family troubles,⁵ and battles,⁶ amongst others. Could Moses possibly have anticipated the troubled wilderness journey ahead?⁷ Jesus' disciples didn't always have an easy time of things either. Yet events showed that all these people made the right decisions, helping create the foundation for our faith.

Few of us face such dramatic circumstances as these Bible heroes, but we all face choices, big and small. May God help us to make well-considered decisions.

CHRIS HUNT LIVES IN GREAT BRITAIN AND HAS BEEN READING ACTIVATED SINCE IT WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN 1999. ■

BY JOHN KELLY



KILOMETERS OF LIFE

*THEREFORE, SINCE WE ARE SURROUNDED BY SUCH A HUGE CROWD OF WITNESSES TO THE LIFE OF FAITH, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily trips us up. And let us run with endurance the race God has set before us. We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith.*¹

I started walking away from what I knew God was calling me to a few months ago. I think I just grew tired of striving. Come to think of it, I didn't walk away so much as *stop* walking. In any race, to stop is to fall behind. I asked myself subconsciously why I had ever chosen to run in the first place. I forgot the thrill

1. Hebrews 12:1,2 NLT

of the chase, and all I could think of was how hot the asphalt was.

All I did was stop to catch my breath, and now the pack is gone, far into the distance. It feels like I am so far behind. But I feel a force beside me. It is the voice of my Trainer, ever close, urging me on in spite of my weak character. Why does He still care? Can't He tell that I'm a loser and a quitter? Not only that, but I made empty promises to Him and others—the other runners, sponsors, fans, friends, family, as well as to myself.

He tells me that none of that matters; all He is asking me to do is to forget the past, the grueling last few kilometers, and get up and run again. I tell Him I can't do it; I can't finish this race. Here I am maybe 15 or 20 kilometers in, and I'm already

sitting down! What makes Him think I can do it?

He tells me that He will give me the strength. He gives me a cup of cool water to drink. It tastes wonderful, and I realize that I had stopped drinking this refreshing water. I had figured I didn't have time.

He tells me that He will set the pace to ensure I make it to the end. "But," I argue, "I won't *win* if I don't push harder."

He reminds me that I am running for more than a trophy. I'm not running to beat the other runners. I'm running for a cause—to carry my flag over the line. I didn't start this race to give up.

The cup is empty now, my thirst is quenched, and it's time to get back on the road. I'm aware of the time I've lost by sitting under the tree,



but a part of me is still screaming to sit back down. It's a full five degrees hotter on the road! But is that enough to keep me down? *I was born to run!* I tell myself. But I still can't bring myself to start. *I can't let Him down!* I try to convince myself, but still the shade holds me fast.

That's when I hear it, carried on the gentle wind that swirls all around me! From just around the next bend, they beckon me—those champions from races past. No, not the vacationers sipping cocktails just behind the fence; these voices are much higher up in the bleachers, in seats reserved for those who have gone before, who deserve the honor and recognition accorded to those who have paid the price and run the race to the finish line already.

They are calling me—no, they

are *yelling* my name. “Run with the wind!” they tell me.

Now's the time! My heart races but I hesitate yet again. *Will I make it?* “Yes,” my Trainer promises, “Because I am here with you, and I will guide you all the way. Don't focus on the effort; focus on the goal. And most of all, don't get down on yourself, because in the end, what matters is to not quit.”

The first step is the hardest, as always, but somehow I manage. I believe this is what He meant by “running with endurance.” Each step somehow feels lighter than the last, now that I've started running again. I think I can do this. No, I think *we* can do this together.

JOHN KELLY IS A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL IN JAPAN. ■

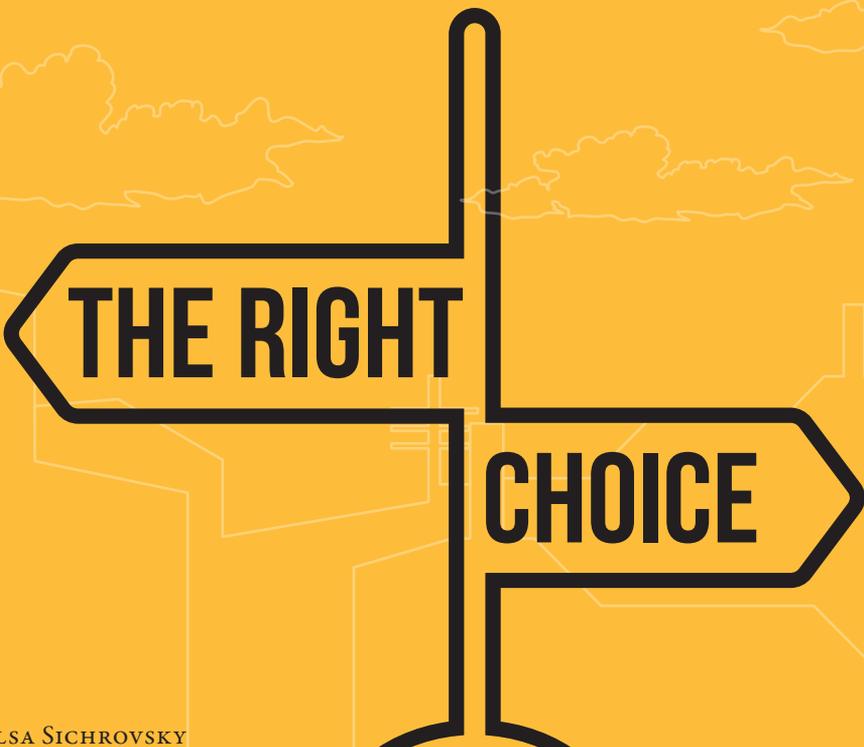
Someday you will look back on your life and realize that everything worthwhile you've ever accomplished initially challenged you. And that is as it should be, because big challenges often prepare ordinary people for extraordinary success.

Every struggle arises for a reason—either for experience or as a lesson. A great journey is never easy, and no dose of adversity along the way is ever a waste of time if you learn and grow from it.

—Angel Chernoff

PRAYER

Thank You, Jesus, for being my coach, friend, and biggest supporter. I accept Your invitation to come home with You and Your Father after the race is run. ■



THE RIGHT

CHOICE

BY ELSA SICHROVSKY

THE SUMMER WHEN I WAS TWELVE, my father surprised my younger sister and me by announcing that he had a different plan for our summer holiday. Instead of planning our vacation, he gave us the money that he had set aside and let *us* decide what to do with it. We could save it, spend it as we pleased, or use it for a five-day vacation at the lake. After some discussion and prayer, my sister and I told Dad that we wanted to go on the lakeside vacation.

But immediately after making the decision, I felt a cloud of doubt descend. *Suppose I had not made the best choice? Perhaps the money would have been better spent on something else?* Then a series of severe typhoons and family emergencies forced us

to delay our vacation until the next summer, which added fuel to my worries. *Maybe this was all too much hassle?*

When I voiced my feelings to Dad, he assured me that while I was free to change my mind, fears and doubts were a natural part of making decisions. “Just because you feel uncertain doesn’t mean you’ve made the wrong choice,” he said. Encouraged by his words, I decided to wait and trust God to work everything out in His time. Sure enough, a year later we were enjoying the time of our lives at the lake!

But I brought home more than happy memories and mementos; the experience taught me important lessons that have since helped me many times when I faced bigger and more important decisions with

higher stakes.

I learned that hardly any decision can be made without taking a risk; yet being willing to take that risk is crucial to arriving at a wise choice. Having difficulty reaching a decision—and feeling worried or uncertain about it afterwards—is natural, and a wild storm of emotions is not an indication that I should not have made the voyage or that my boat will sink. God is both my anchor and my compass. I can trust Him to not only steady me but to also guide me to His perfect destination, as His Word promises: “In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.”¹

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

1. Proverbs 3:6

QUIET MOMENTS

LIGHTEN UP

BY ABI MAY

THE MINISTRY OF JOHN THE BAPTIST MOSTLY PRECEDED THAT OF JESUS. John's message was one of repentance; he proclaimed the coming of the Savior. Although some of his followers went on to become disciples of Jesus,¹ others evidently stayed at John's side.

John is traditionally recognized as having been a zealous teacher. Perhaps his strictness could be partly attributed to being a Nazarite from birth, which meant he was not permitted to drink alcohol or cut his hair, and also had to abide by other restrictions.² Evidently he also expected quite a bit from his followers, as on one occasion, some

of them asked Jesus: "Why is it that we and the Pharisees rigorously discipline body and spirit by fasting, but your followers don't?"³

Perhaps they were puzzled—and a little envious—of the more relaxed lifestyle of Jesus' disciples. Maybe there was even a bit of self-righteous chiding in this question, implying that it was high time for Jesus to make His followers shape up. In any case, Jesus replied: "Can the friends of the bridegroom mourn as long as the bridegroom is with them? But the days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away from them, and then they will fast."⁴ It sounds like He was saying, "Lighten up. Troubles will come soon enough, so enjoy these moments of peace while you have them."

We all sometimes make our lives harder than they need to be, by taking on more than God expects of us. We convolute what could be straightforward. After all, the main

thing He wants is love.⁵ The prophet Micah put it this way: "He's already made it plain how to live, what to do, what God is looking for in men and women. It's quite simple: Do what is fair and just to your neighbor, be compassionate and loyal in your love, and don't take yourself too seriously."⁶

Sure, there are occasions when our path is rough or there are life-changing decisions to be made. But when we're not in the midst of such critical times, maybe we should avoid getting tied up in knots trying to figure out minor details of life. Otherwise, we could end up missing out on the fullness of joy and peace that comes with God's presence.⁷

Life is not always complicated, and decisions are not always major. Let's remember that, and when appropriate, let's lighten up.

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FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

The Best Place

Following Me doesn't mean that you will never encounter problems, because problems are part of life on earth, and they're one of the ways in which I teach and strengthen you. But it means that regardless of life's obstacles, I can care for you and do what you can't do. I can work in the spiritual realm to bring about events that will help you to be successful.

When your heart is right with Me and you want to please Me and obey Me, I love to help you do just that. Then, in the process, I love to bless you. I know that you're human and that you will make mistakes, and maybe get a little off track sometimes or do something that isn't pleasing to Me. But that doesn't mean that I will withdraw My love from you and stop blessing you.

I'm always willing to help you get back on track, to bring you back to the path of My will. Don't let your faults or failings convince you that you can't follow Me. All you need is a willing spirit, a ready mind, a heart full of faith—faith that will not give up, but will persevere one day at a time.

My will is something personal between you and Me. As you ask Me about it, I can show you what to do and help you take whatever steps are needed.