

CHANGE YOUR LIFE. CHANGE YOUR WORLD.

# ACTIVATED

Vol 17 • Issue 1



## SLAYING THE GIANTS

Take courage

## Time for a Career Switch?

6 steps to your ideal job

## A World of Silence

Welcome the new year



## EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION BUILDING THE FUTURE

The end of a year is a good time to take stock of things, a chance for us to reflect on all that has happened over the last twelve months. It can be a bittersweet time, as there are experiences and people that have moved into our past.

But the end also brings a new beginning.

Typically, the New Year is a time for resolutions and fresh starts, for looking forward to the future, for reviewing what worked last year and aiming to build on that.

As we enter this new year, news of famine, strife, and disasters may seem to indicate that the world has never been in a worse shape or more divided. The future may seem bleak, and the challenges ahead daunting, but we don't have to be discouraged.

Gandhi wasn't deterred by obstacles and circumstances: "It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result."

With 2016 officially here, let's all resolve to make our lives, and the lives of those around us, better. Let's be a little more caring, a little more unselfish, a little more courteous. Let's work smarter instead of longer. Let's spend time with those we care about instead of with our latest app. Let's give a little more to those who aren't as fortunate as we are. Let's forget past slights and let's build bridges of friendship around us. Let's learn from past mistakes.

And of course, the best way to ensure success is to include God in the process, step by step. Let's ask Him to show us what changes will be most beneficial, and to give us the strength, patience, determination, and whatever else we need to succeed each day.

Here's to 2016!

Samuel Keating  
Executive Editor

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It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage. ... God keeps him busy with the joy of his heart.  
—Ecclesiastes 5:18,20

Gratitude to God makes even a temporal blessing a taste of heaven.  
—William Romaine (1714–1795)

# That First Bite

BY JOYCE SUTTIN

I TOOK A BITE OF OMELET AND SILENTLY THANKED GOD FOR IT. I was hungry and it tasted exceptionally delicious. I really appreciated the subtle flavors and melted cheese, and I stopped a moment to think about God’s wonderful care and supply.

I know that I often hurriedly grab something to eat and don’t even remember to thank God for it. At least I did give thanks this time, but I was convicted by my prayer, because there was something wrong with the timing of it. I could have thanked Him before the first bite, before I knew it was delicious.

Then I remembered the words of King David: “This is the day that the Lord hath made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.”<sup>1</sup> Whenever I want to learn about gratitude, I read David’s psalms. After listing his problems, he always gives glory to God. But the thing that seemed significant to me about this particular verse is that he tells us to wake

up to a new day, give God the glory for it and say—even before it begins—that we will rejoice and be glad.


Sometimes I go to bed at night and thank God: “This has been a really good day. Thank You for all the good things that happened, for all I got done, for good health and a happy family.” But that isn’t the kind of gratitude David was talking about.

He was talking about being thankful and happy for the day *before* it begins. He is telling us to determine at the break of dawn that we are going to be happy and have a really good day. I guess that’s like thanking God for the omelet before I taste it. We should thank Him in the morning, even if a storm blows in later in the day. We should determine to be happy, even if some difficulties roll in. Whether it’s an omelet, a new day, or even a new year, we can be thankful no matter what.

JOYCE SUTTIN IS A TEACHER AND WRITER AND LIVES IN SAN ANTONIO, USA. ■

1. Psalm 118:24 KJV





# Slaying the Giants

BY BETHANY KELLY

STARTING A NEW YEAR is a bit like starting a new project. For some time now, I have been working steadily toward a dream of mine: creating a business that gives me the opportunity to earn an income doing something I love, while making a difference in the world. It's been a step-by-step process that has included a lot of learning and several things that felt like stepping off the deep end—like investing in some training, making a big move with my daughter, starting my own business, and so on.

There are days when I'm excited and confidently looking forward to

the future and other days when the reality of all there is to do hits me, and I wonder what in the world I was thinking when I started. The process of stepping out and learning and doing something new has pushed and stretched me in ways I didn't know were possible and is presenting me with far more opportunities for personal growth than I expected.

The other day, I was reading a book that talked about the children of Israel and the stages they went through, first as slaves in Egypt, then as they wandered through the wilderness, and finally making it into the Promised Land. The parallels to the journey that I am on today struck me.

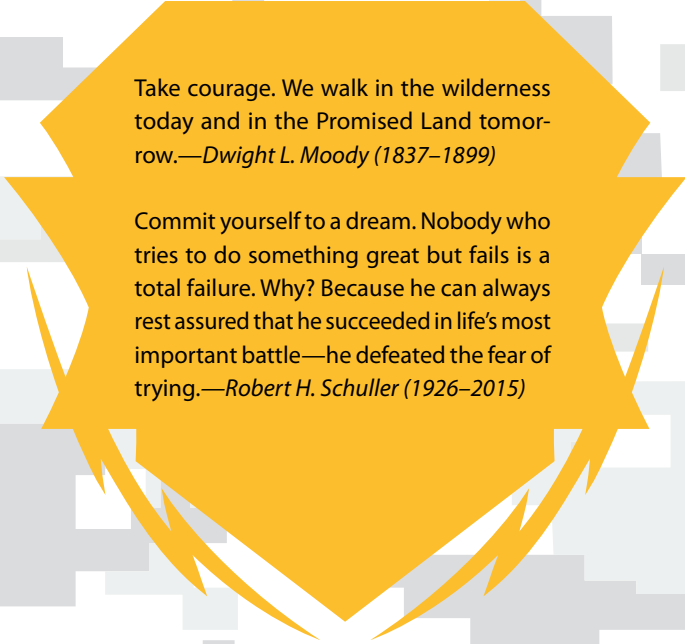
When the children of Israel were slaves in Egypt, Moses came on the

scene with the message that God wanted to deliver them and take them to a land flowing with milk and honey. God then proceeded to do miracles to get them out of Egypt and on their way, including parting the Red Sea for them.

On their journey, God gave them food by raining down manna from heaven.<sup>1</sup> He protected them from the heat with a cloud by day and gave them a pillar of fire for light and warmth at night.<sup>2</sup>

When they reached the Promised Land, they sent in scouts who reported back that the land was beautiful, prosperous, and flowing with milk and honey. It was their land. God had promised it to them. They were poised and ready to walk in. What stopped them? The

1. See Exodus 16.
2. See Exodus 13:21–22.
3. See Numbers 13.
4. Deuteronomy 31:6



Take courage. We walk in the wilderness today and in the Promised Land tomorrow.—*Dwight L. Moody (1837–1899)*

Commit yourself to a dream. Nobody who tries to do something great but fails is a total failure. Why? Because he can always rest assured that he succeeded in life's most important battle—he defeated the fear of trying.—*Robert H. Schuller (1926–2015)*

scouts also reported that the land was inhabited by giants!<sup>3</sup>

The children of Israel were afraid. Who wouldn't be when faced with giants, right? But instead of taking action in spite of their fear, they let their fears overwhelm them and destroy their faith in God's promises. So instead of getting through the wilderness quickly as God had intended, they had to wander there for another 40 years. Sure, God continued to care for them and supply their needs throughout that time, He didn't forsake or abandon them, but until the entire generation that had doubted died out, they were stuck in the wilderness.

How does this apply to me?

Well, I've left Egypt—my previous situation where I was comfortable but unfulfilled—and I've been in the

wilderness for a while now—making plans, clarifying my vision, getting prepared, and learning a lot. God has been taking care of me, but I don't want to stay here for long.

Right now, I feel like I'm on the border of the Promised Land. I can see it, and I'm ready to go in. And you know what's happening? I'm freaking out about the giants! Waltzing into the Promised Land—nope, not gonna happen like that! There are a heck of a lot of giants in there that will need fighting—the mindsets I have about myself that are keeping me small, the steps I need to take that scare me, the personal growth that is required in order for my vision to blossom.

Reading about how the children of Israel wandered in the desert for decades because they didn't have

faith to face those giants is a sobering reminder for me. Do I want to wait, potentially for a long time, or do I have the faith in God to march in and take possession of my own promised land?

Moses' final advice to the children of Israel is something I can apply to my situation as well: "Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you."<sup>4</sup> How wonderful to know that I'm not alone in my journey.

Let's slay those giants!

BETHANY KELLY ASSISTS PEOPLE IN GETTING THEIR MESSAGE IN FRONT OF MANY MORE PEOPLE AND IS THE FOUNDER OF COURAGEOUS CREATIVES. SHE LIVES IN THE U.S. ■



# FORWARD TO SUCCESS

**MANY OF GOD'S PROMISES ARE CONDITIONAL**, requiring some initial action on our part. Once we begin to obey, He will begin to bless us. Great things were promised to Abraham, but not one of them could have been obtained had he waited in Chaldea. He had to leave his home, friends, and country, travel unfamiliar paths, and press on in unwavering obedience in order to receive the promises. The ten lepers Jesus healed were told to show themselves to the priest, and “as they went, they were cleansed.” If they had waited to see the cleansing come to their bodies before leaving, they would never have seen it. God was waiting to heal them, and the moment their faith began to work, the blessing came.

When the Israelites were entrapped by Pharaoh's pursuing army at the Red Sea, they were

commanded to “go forward.” No longer was it their duty to wait, but to rise up from bended knees and “go forward” with heroic faith. Years later the Israelites were commanded to show their faith again by beginning their march over the Jordan while the river was at its highest point. They held the key to unlock the gate into the Land of Promise in their own hands, and the gate would not begin to turn on its hinges until they had approached and unlocked it. The key was faith.

We are destined to fight certain battles, and we think we can never be victorious and conquer our enemies. Yet as we enter the conflict, One comes who fights by our side. Through Him we are “more than conquerors.” If we had waited in fear and trembling for our helper to come before we would enter the battle, we

would have waited in vain. God is waiting to pour out His richest blessings on you. “Go forward” with bold confidence and take what is yours. “I have begun to deliver ... Now begin to conquer and possess.”

—*J. R. Miller (1840–1912)*

A little more persistence, a little more effort, and what seemed hopeless failure may turn into glorious success.—*Elbert Hubbard (1856–1915)*

Faith that goes forward triumphs.—*Author unknown*

Leave not the business of today to be done tomorrow; for who knows what may be your condition tomorrow? The rose-garden, which today is full of flowers, when tomorrow you would pluck a rose, may not afford you one.—*Firdausi (940–1020)* ■

A photograph of a man surfing on a wave. The man is shirtless, wearing dark shorts, and is crouching on his surfboard, riding the crest of a wave. The water is a vibrant blue-green color, and the background shows a bright, sunny sky. The overall mood is energetic and adventurous.

# FINDING YOUR WAY

BY DINA ELLENS

UNEXPECTED CHANGES HAVE NEVER BEEN EASY FOR ME, and last year was such a time. I was expecting to be able to move closer to my son and his family, but found out that the situation to which I was planning to move was no longer a possibility.

Disheartened, I paused to reflect on my options. Outside the window, it was a beautiful day, and I felt a gentle peace envelop me.

I knew God was there for me, just as He was there for His creation. The peace I felt had come from Him.

*Who moved?* I asked myself. I knew *God* and His love hadn't changed. It was my circumstances that had suddenly changed after the disappointing news, which left me feeling worried and insecure.

I'd been too focused on my circumstances, too preoccupied

with my upcoming move. Now that things had changed, I felt like my whole world was falling apart.

I should have kept my focus more on Jesus.—That simple truth came to me like a shaft of light piercing the darkness. With all the excitement and making plans for the move, I'd been neglecting my time with God and His Word.

I resolved to change. The next morning, I took my Bible along to the porch where I usually sit to enjoy my coffee. I turned to Matthew 14, where the disciples—although hardy seamen for the most part—were terrified by a storm that threatened to smash their boat and end their lives.

That is, until they saw Jesus walking on the water toward them.

That was my predicament exactly! I was letting the storms of this life throw me off course. What I needed to do was keep my eyes on Jesus and trust that He would see me through.

Gradually, I started putting my life back together. A friend asked me to help out at her bakery over Christmas. I volunteered at an orphanage where the kids were definitely needier than I was. Within months, I had new friends and lots to do. My earlier disappointment had vanished.

Through this experience, I learned that God is not always working toward a particular goal. Sometimes, it's the process that's important. Our faith gets tested in the midst of a storm, but that's where we find Jesus as our dearest Friend. He promises, "I will never leave you or forsake you."<sup>1</sup>

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

1. Hebrews 13:5





# TIME FOR A CAREER SWITCH?

BY CHRIS HUNT

JANUARY IS OFTEN WHEN PEOPLE LOOK FOR A NEW JOB—as many as two in five people are actively job hunting in the first month of the year. For some, this might be a sideways shift into a similar role; others might consider a radical career change.

If you have been working in a similar role for years, you may wonder if you could ever step out and do something completely different. Some people do, and

not only in January. Take Andrea Bocelli, the popular Italian tenor and singer-songwriter, who made the jump from being a lawyer to his musical career. Justin Welby left his executive position in the oil industry to become a vicar, and eventually the Archbishop of Canterbury and symbolic head of the worldwide Anglican Communion. Brian Cox, the popular physicist who presents science on English television, was a rock star, with a number 1 hit in the 1990s. Harrison Ford, the Hollywood actor, used to be a carpenter and cabinet-maker.

Such stand-out changes might not be within the realm of our own possibilities, but the New Year is as good a time as any to examine how satisfied we are with what we're doing, and how confident we feel about the direction we are heading.

Waking up on a Monday morning dreading the beginning of the working week, or feeling like our talents are not being used, or that our pay package doesn't reflect the value we bring, may be signs it's time to think about other options.

The Bible acknowledges the necessity of working for a living: "People go off to their work, where they labor until evening."<sup>1</sup> Being satisfied in our work is also mentioned: "You will definitely enjoy what you've worked hard for—you'll be happy; and things will go well for you."<sup>2</sup> "The earnings of the godly enhance their lives,"<sup>3</sup> The apostle Paul evidently felt fulfilled in his role: "That's what I'm working so hard at day after day, year after year, doing my best with the energy God so generously gives me."<sup>4</sup> If this isn't how you feel, then it could be time

1. Psalm 104:23 NLT
2. Psalm 128:2 CEB
3. Proverbs 10:16 NLT
4. Colossians 1:29 MSG
5. Proverbs 11:14 MSG
6. Proverbs 3:6 NLT
7. Psalm 25:4
8. Proverbs 10:22 MSG
9. See Psalm 119:105.





to consider looking for a better situation, or at least, for improvements where you are.

Life-changing decisions shouldn't be made in a hurry, of course, and you might like to consider the following:



**List five features of your ideal job that are most important to you**, such as your fulfillment and goals, the ethics of your employer, the size of your salary, the supplementary benefits (pension, gym membership, etc.), the workplace environment and camaraderie, the hours and workload, your role and level of responsibility, the use that's made of your unique talents, the opportunities for training and career progression, and so on.



**Now score your present job on those features.** If it doesn't match at least half of what is most important to you, chances are you are not in the best place and it's time to start looking elsewhere.



**Think about what you really want to do.** Read up about the role. Does it fit your skills and experience, training and qualifications? If not, is it something you can learn on the go, or is there another route into that type of job? Do some research.



**Get advice from other people.** According to Proverbs, "The more wise counsel you follow, the better your chances."<sup>5</sup> Try to get some advice from those already in the field where you'd like to be working. Talk to your friends and family, and perhaps a career advisor.



**Go after your dreams, but be realistic.** The vast majority of us have jobs because we need them in order to pay the bills. So if your dream career isn't quite within striking distance and you need to stick with your regular job, consider a voluntary role in the sector where you are interested. If it's something you really are passionate about, you'll probably be able to fit in a few evenings or a day over the

weekend. An accountant won't become a social worker overnight, but he could help out at a youth club.



**Seek God's guidance.** "Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."<sup>6</sup> You may find Him speaking to you through your quiet time, devotional, or Bible reading, or you may want to specifically ask Him: "Show me Your ways, O Lord; teach me Your paths."<sup>7</sup> Whatever the case, try to include Him in the picture of your plans, remembering that "God's blessing makes life rich,"<sup>8</sup> not only materially, but also in terms of peace of mind.

January is just one month. Your own season for change might not come at this particular time of the year, yet whenever it comes, God will be at hand to help, shining His light on your path.<sup>9</sup>

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

BY JEWEL ROQUE

# All Things Beautiful

ON A RARE DAY THAT I ACTUALLY HAD A BIT OF TIME TO DO SOME ORGANIZING, I came to a realization about myself (not the most impressive one): I have a lot of “unfinished business,” at least to do with personal projects. When I receive work with a deadline, I strive to accomplish that in a timely fashion. Because someone is counting on me, I don’t want to disappoint them by being tardy.

On the other hand, many other things remain incomplete. Cross-stitches I started years ago rest half done in my drawer. Blog entries I have begun—nearly 200 to date—remain in my draft folder. Photo albums—lots of them—line an entire shelf with packets of photographs sitting on top of them, rather than placed inside where they should be.

Then there are the books or novels I plan or hope to write. I created a Microsoft Excel file with working titles. There are more than 90 fiction and non-fiction ideas listed. One column gives the number of words written for each book so far. I have nearly 200,000 words altogether, but no more than 20,000 for any one of them.

I often wonder why so many of my personal projects are left undone. Why does it seem difficult to complete

even one? And why do I operate this way?

One reason could be that ideas are always popping into my head. I’ll wake up from a vivid dream and before the morning is over will write yet another outline for a book. Poetry starts forming in my mind while I’m sitting on a bus or reading or doing other work.

And blog posts? Any time my random thoughts come together into a cohesive pattern, I begin to write. This could be anything from an experience of the day to a memory from the past, or even a realization of some sort.

That’s the problem. I *start*. Then I get a phone call, or reach my destination, or get a request from one of my kids, or realize I need to get back to completing my other work or preparing dinner. And what I have started doesn’t get finished.

Is it procrastination? Busyness? Lack of organization? Too many pies up there in the sky? All of the above? What’s the solution to getting these writing projects or other to-dos from “pending” in my brain to the complete version where they can actually make a difference?

In his book, *The Weathering Grace of God*, Ken Gire writes of the importance of “stillness.”

1. Ecclesiastes 3:11 (paraphrased)
2. [www.just1thing.com](http://www.just1thing.com)





“Poets know the importance of ... stillness. They know that if they are still enough, long enough, the art they are working on will speak to them, tell them what it wants to be and what it needs from them to become it. All artists know this, whether they work with paint or clay, words or musical notes.

“Michelangelo knew how to be still before the stone and listen to the David within it. Strauss knew how to be still before the Danube and listen to the waltz that was eddying about in its waters. Monet knew how to be still before the pond and listen to the lilies sunning on its surface. ... Our culture knows little of this kind of listening.”

The best ideas, and the completion of them, require not only time to do them, but also stillness and quietness of body, mind, and spirit. To listen to how they wish to be said and completed. If I am still and listen, I will know what I need to do with these ideas and how best to go about finishing up any of the projects that are still unfinished.

It's easy to start something. It's *good* to start something. Well begun is half done, they say. But to finish

something—to see it through to the end—that's not always easy.

It takes time. Patience. Faith. And those aren't always easy to come by. We don't always find them by looking within or looking around. But when we look up, and listen to the still, small voice of God that whispers to us when we take time to listen, we will know the path to take. We will know how to complete what we have begun ... and what He has begun in our lives.

In a way, we all are God's unfinished business. He has started a lot of “projects” that are well begun, even perfect in their own right, but they are not complete. The work of the Master on His creation continues: the molding, the shaping, the cutting, the polishing. It all comes with the promise: “He makes all things beautiful in His time.”<sup>1</sup>

And look at that, an article that is actually complete!

JEWEL ROQUE IS A FREELANCE WRITER AND EDITOR IN THE U.S. THIS ARTICLE WAS ADAPTED FROM A PODCAST ON JUST I THING,<sup>2</sup> A CHRISTIAN CHARACTER-BUILDING WEBSITE FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. ■





# ENJOYING THE JOURNEY

BY ALDINA BOLICK

**I'M LEARNING HOW IMPORTANT IT IS TO ENJOY THE JOURNEY** and not just be enthused with the final destination. The destination does define the journey, and of course, is very important. But we often spend much more time traveling than we do enjoying the final goal, so it's wise to learn to appreciate the day-by-day things more.

Being of an impatient nature, it's been my habit to focus on the goal and not pay a lot of attention to the details during the days leading up to it. Many times when I've been frustrated over having to wait days, months, or in some cases even years to reach a certain goal, I wasted a lot of time clock-watching, anxiously looking forward to what was coming, instead of enjoying each minute and the little blessings our Creator so lovingly gives me as each day unfolds.

For example, last January we made plans to visit my family in Portugal in August—and so I began

my countdown. From that moment on, the most important thing each day was to get to the end of it, as that meant August would get here more quickly. This attitude resulted in me being bored with my daily activities instead of being thankful for the gift each moment of life truly is.

During these past months, I have listened to various talks that have helped to illustrate this lesson, and I think it's getting through. Yesterday afternoon, my husband, David, and I went for a walk in a nearby park. We took along a picnic supper and ate there after our walk. We thoroughly enjoyed it, and our conversation was sprinkled with thanksgiving and positive comments about the blessing of being able to eat dinner in such beautiful surroundings, the health we enjoy, the peace that floods our souls, and most of all for a life that's worth living.

ALDINA BOLICK IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND MEMBER OF TFI IN MEXICO. ■



## STEPS OF THE YEAR

Dear Lord, as I set out on the path of the coming year, I don't know exactly where it leads, but no matter what happens, I pray for the strength to acknowledge You on each step of my journey. Whatever joys or difficulties I encounter, may Your presence give me peace.<sup>1</sup>

Does he not see my ways and count my every step?—*Job 31:4 NIV*

Uphold my steps in Your paths, that my footsteps may not slip.—*Psalms 17:5*

The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way.—*Psalms 37:23* ■

1. See Exodus 33:14.





BY ROSANE PEREIRA

# DAY BY DAY

AS I BEGIN THIS NEW YEAR, I am reminded of that popular song of the 1970s: “Day by day, day by day, oh, dear Lord, three things I pray: To see thee more clearly, love thee more dearly, follow thee more nearly, day by day.”<sup>1</sup>

*To see You more clearly...* The Bible tells us that God is a Spirit,<sup>2</sup> invisible,<sup>3</sup> and yet we *can* see Him—in Jesus,<sup>4</sup> in the love shared amongst believers,<sup>5</sup> in the beauties of His world.<sup>6</sup>

1. Stephen Schwartz in *Godspell*, 1971
2. See John 4:24.
3. See 1 Timothy 1:17.
4. See Colossians 1:15.
5. See 1 John 4:16.
6. See Romans 1:20.
7. Psalm 95:2
8. See Hebrews 12:2.
9. Sidney E. Cox (1887–1975)
10. John 14:27
11. Philipians 4:6–7 NLT

*Love You more dearly...* “Let us come before His presence with thanksgiving.”<sup>7</sup> I can show God my love by thanking Him for His blessings. Psalm 118:24 says: “This is the day the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it.” I will try to maintain an attitude of gratitude each day in this coming year.

*Follow You more nearly...* This can be the hardest part, but if I look to Him,<sup>8</sup> and love Him, I will feel His caring presence gently guiding where He wants me to go. And I can sing with the old refrain: “My Lord knows the way through the wilderness, all I’ve got to do is follow. Strength for the day is mine always, and all that I need for tomorrow. My Lord knows the way through the wilderness, all I have to do is follow!”<sup>9</sup>

I will also ask for happiness, which comes as we live one day at a time. Those who always wait for

grand occasions in their lives to make them happy seldom are. I think that happiness is better found by treasuring all the little happenings of life.

And last, but not least, I will ask for peace of mind. Jesus said, “Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you.”<sup>10</sup> And Paul gives us the recipe in detail: “Don’t worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God’s peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus.”<sup>11</sup>

So that’s my plan for the year—or rather, my heartfelt prayer.

ROSANE PEREIRA IS AN ENGLISH TEACHER AND WRITER IN RIO DE JANEIRO, BRAZIL, AND A MEMBER OF THE FAMILY INTERNATIONAL. ■



# A WORLD OF SILENCE

BY KOOS STENGER



WHEN I OPEN THE FRONT DOOR, I am overwhelmed by the silence outside. How absolutely quiet the world has become! Usually there is at least some noise and movement at this hour. But not today. Today everything is still.

A few snowflakes fall out of a gray, overcast sky, adding to the sense of mystery. I zip up my coat and step into this gentle world of silence.

It's the very first morning of the new year. Silent and wide and full of hope and expectation. The celebrations lasted till early morning, but now it seems as if I'm the only one awake.

The changeover was anything but peaceful. It was loud, even deafeningly so at times. But now, as the early morning light pierces through the darkness, everything is still.

I like to think it was silent as well when God was halfway through creating the world. Imagine how quiet it must have been right before He populated it with animals and birds and finally with the first humans. There might have only been the soft sound of a gentle breeze through the leaves and maybe the rippling of a brook.

I believe it is easier to connect with God in the silence. It's almost as if you could touch Him. You can hear Him whisper words of love and wisdom: "Don't you worry. I'll take care of you too."

How wonderful to walk with Him through these empty lanes!

Suddenly a man comes around a corner. Just like me, he is walking without a particular goal. He's just enjoying the view, just listening to the same silence.

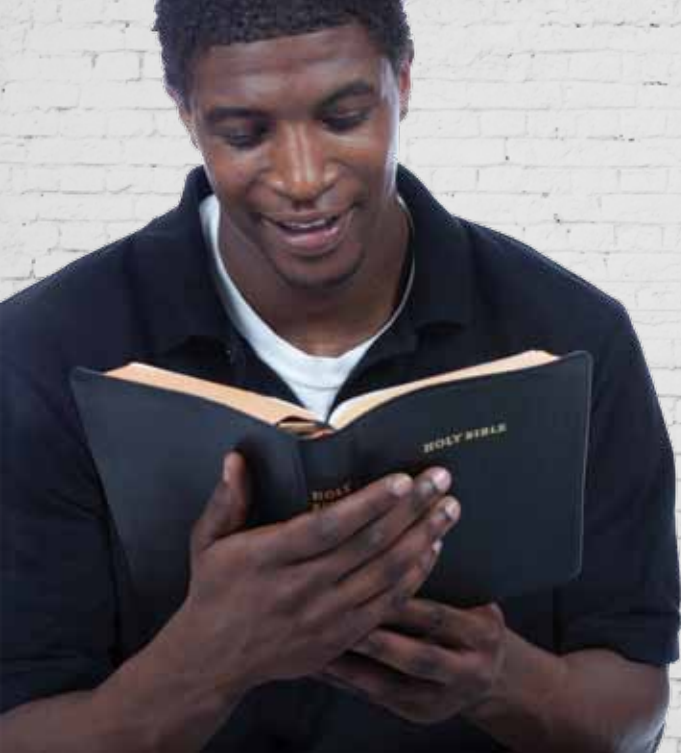
When he passes, we smile at each other. "Gelukkig Nieuwjaar!"<sup>1</sup> he says while his eyes light up.

I nod and smile back, then he's gone and I'm again alone with my thoughts, but now my heart is rejoicing. How beautiful the world is when it's filled with stillness and smiles, friendship, and gentleness! How beautiful when we can touch God in the stillness and His Spirit breaks through the hard shell of our self-centered hearts!

The world is waking up. A car drives by and a TV in one of the houses I pass is blaring something unintelligible. The stillness is broken, but my heart is still full of the stillness of God.

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1. "Happy New Year!" (Dutch)



# ONE of the LISTENING CROWD

Quiet Moments

BY ABI MAY

Again [Jesus] began to teach by the sea. And a great multitude was gathered to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat in it on the sea; and the whole multitude was on the land facing the sea. Then He taught them many things by parables.—*Mark 4:1–2*

**IMAGINE FOR A MOMENT** that you are one of that multitude, and fill in the details.

Did you plan to be there, or did you stumble upon this outdoor event? Are you with your friends or family, or are you alone?

Is it summer or winter? Are you feeling a bit chilly standing so close to the seafront, or are you looking for some shade from the burning sun? Are you taking a deep breath of the bracing sea air, or is a gentle sea breeze bringing relief in the heat of the day?

Can you see clearly what’s happening? How close are you to the water’s edge? Have you found yourself a vantage point, or is your view obscured by the crowd? What kind of boat is He sitting in? Is the sea calm, clear as glass, or does it look a bit choppy?

Do you have any troublesome thoughts that maybe you should be somewhere else? Are you wondering whether you can spare the time to stand around? Are you thinking perhaps you should be taking care of some crops, managing your animals, getting provisions from the market, visiting a sick relative?

You’ve probably heard all kinds of things about this Teacher. Have you heard Him speak before? Do you wonder how much is true? Do you question whether He really has the power to heal people by His voice and the touch of His hand? Could He heal you?

“Listen,” He begins.<sup>1</sup> Can you

hear what He’s saying? Do you understand what He’s talking about?

His talk is over now. The crowd is dispersing, and you’re on your way. Perhaps you don’t really feel like chatting; you want to be quiet and alone with your thoughts, to try to absorb what He said. What does it have to do with you? Has it changed your outlook?

That day, Jesus finished His talk by declaring, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”<sup>2</sup> Those who got the most from what Jesus said that day were the ones who listened.

Listening is not merely opening a Bible, skimming over paragraphs and speeding through lines. It’s meditating on what we read, applying it, even reliving it in our imagination. And when we do, we might just discover something new and wonderful.

ABI MAY IS A FREELANCE WRITER, EDUCATOR, AND HEALTHCARE ADVOCATE IN GREAT BRITAIN. ■

1. Mark 4:3

2. Mark 4:9 NIV





FROM JESUS WITH LOVE

# NEW YEAR, FRESH START

Each new year brings with it many things. It's full of freshness, growth, and new experiences. It's full of second chances, forgiveness, and opportunities to try again. It's also full of tests, challenges, and its share of difficulties and problems.

The most important thing in your new year is your relationship with Me. Because with Me at your side, you're guaranteed to make it through whatever this new year may hold.

It's been said that life on earth is a testing ground and a learning experience, and with Me as your guide and coach, you're sure to be successful. Your success may not look like success as it is popularly perceived, but you will be successful in the things that last beyond this life and into eternity.

Enter this new year with Me, hold My hand, and let Me lead and guide you. Although I can't promise that the paths you will walk this year will be easy or problem free, I can promise you that My strength will always be sufficient for you, and that you will not face a challenge too big or too difficult for you and Me to handle together. If you can believe this and commit to trusting Me no matter what comes your way, you'll find that nothing will surprise you so greatly as to undermine your confidence and trust in Me.

When difficulties and challenges arise, remember My promise to help you through. Remember that when you are weak, I am strong. This will fill you with peace and confidence for your year ahead—the confidence of knowing that I, the maker of heaven and earth, am with you. Look forward with positive anticipation to another year with Me.